MOVING TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION OF HUMAN SERVICES INTEGRATION

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It is generally believed that the existing human services structure is most accurately described as an array of potentially related programs that deliver distinct benefits or services to narrowly defined target populations. Each program can be thought of as representing a service silo: a separate and distinct funnel through which money, regulations, and professional norms and expectations flow. While some overlap across silos has always historically existed, each usually operates in a relatively self-contained manner. As a whole, the configuration of services available to support and assist families in their efforts to become functioning and self-sufficient members of society can be complex, confusing, redundant, and incoherent.

The opposite of this silo-based approach to organizing and delivering human services is often coined 'service integration.' But, what exactly, is 'service integration'? Mark Ragan, drawing on extensive field-work completed on behalf of the Rockefeller Institute for Government, concluded that:

> *There is no single answer. Based on observations at the sites visited for this study, service integration is a combination of strategies that simplifies and facilitates clients' access to benefits and services. Each site has implemented a distinctive mix of strategies, processes, and partner agencies.[2]*

Our observations support this conclusion. Currently, all kinds of initiatives around the country are being pursued under the rubric of service integration.   These initiatives vary in several different ways, including, for example:

- tactics, as some involve large one-stop centers, others virtual networks or agreements to work together while maintaining physical separation and distinct managements structures (e.g., no wrong door strategies), and still others hire someone to 'broker' services for program participants;

- scope, as some are organized around bringing together programs and services that are directed on common purposes (providing income support) while others blend systems

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[2] Ragan, *Building Comprehensive Human Service Systems,* p. 3.   Mark Ragan and the authors independently spent time in several sites, including Kenosha and Racine, Wisconsin; El Paso County, Colorado; Montgomery County, Ohio; Anoka County, Minnesota; and San Mateo County, California.

with quite distinct purposes and cultures (programs that issue benefits with programs that change people's behaviors); and

- purposes, as some are focused on doing more for particular populations with special needs or which evidence multiple, complex needs while others purport to serve all in a community in an effort to be more comprehensive and less stigmatizing.

Given this diversity, the challenge of defining just exactly what 'service integration' is appears daunting. How, in the end, would we ever know it when we see it? Further, how would we know what qualities of any particular effort would make it a model of interest to others and thus, compel an investment of our time, energy, and resources to understand it? Ultimately, if we cannot clearly define 'service integration' if it is totally defined by individual preferences and circumstances, is it reasonable to believe a policy agenda in support of the integration of human services can be advanced?

We believe it is possible to bring some order to this chaos, not by seeking a formal definition of what is occurring, but by developing an overarching framework for understanding and analyzing the efforts that are underway. From our observations of many sites, we have a sense that heterogeneity does exist in these efforts and that, by seeking to understand this heterogeneity, we will be better positioned to support a policy agenda in support of integration.

Addressing the Labeling Issue

Before we begin, however, let us start by considering the labeling issue: what should we call these initiatives? While the label 'service integration' has a long history and most observers appear to understand the term, it strikes us as an incomplete, if not inaccurate, label.

Consider, for example, the following concrete examples of state-initiated integration efforts that serve to illustrate the diversity encompassed by the service integration agenda:

Michigan has initiated a set of local pilot programs called JET (Jobs, Education, and Training). The population of interest is TANF families. The agencies/programs being brought to the table include local workforce boards, Michigan Works! agencies, and local human services offices. The vision is to create a comprehensive approach to connecting families with the kinds of jobs, education, and training they need to achieve self-sufficiency. Components include a comprehensive intake process; a single plan for participating families; coordination of all family, employment, and training services; and joint and coordinated local program plans.

Minnesota is working toward a state strategy for addressing the needs of long-term welfare recipients, starting with a few pilot initiatives. The driving vision is to improve the economic and family stability of Minnesota Family Independence Program (MFIP) families with serious and multiple challenges by addressing their situation in a coordinated, intensive fashion. Each local program varies somewhat but most bring together employment, health, and a host of social service providers to focus on these families holistically.

Utah has focused on improving outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. The departments involved in the effort include Workforce Services, Human Services, and Health as well as the Office of Education and the Courts. Specifically, they are developing a statewide capacity, including coordinated case planning, streamlined referral processes, establishment of service priorities, and leveraging of existing resources, to achieve the goals of a positive sense of self, supportive and enduring relationships, health care access, educational attainment and stable employment, and safe and stable housing.

Wisconsin has initiated a set of pilots under its project: Wisconsin Families Forward. The target population of interest is families either engaged, or at-risk of engagement, in the TANF and child welfare systems. The premise is that healthy families and self-sufficient families go hand in hand but that local sites know best how to promote this connection. Organizations involved include Wisconsin Works agencies, child welfare service providers,

schools, mental health providers, and substance abuse providers. Components vary by pilot site but often include coordinated intake, assessment and referral processes; single case plans; and integrated case management.

In light of these, as well as other examples of current initiatives, we believe the label 'service integration' is too limiting. In particular, consider the word '*service.*' Given that the so-called integration agenda, broadly speaking, encompasses benefit-issuing programs, programs that deliver defined services, as well as programs that are organized around changing the behavior of individuals, families, and communities, the word *'service'* appears overly narrow. It captures only some of the programs and agencies that might be involved, perhaps suggesting to some that only programs or agencies that deliver specific social services are involved. We think this discounts the broad and ambitious scope of many efforts. We therefore believe a more appropriate term is 'system,' which conveys a broader sense of the range of programs and agencies that are involved in various collaborative striving to form a more unified whole.

We do not have the same type of concerns about the word '*integration,*' although we sense that an underlying connotation of it goes unexamined. In particular, the word '*integration*' goes beyond the level of modest communication and cooperation involved in most initiatives that purport to deliver coherent services to families with multiple issues. Rather, it suggests a level of institutional intimacy that would break down the boundaries and distinct programmatic cultures that sustain the individual identities of separate programs.

Ultimately, with the caveat that not all successful initiatives demand the kind of full integration implied above, we prefer to use the label *'systems integration'* from this point forward.

Developing a More Comprehensive Understanding

How, then, should we start thinking about systems integration? Our work to date suggests that there are two dimensions to the pursuit of systems integration that are critical to understanding the character of any particular effort as well as identifying what it will take to really make that undertaking work. One dimension is the intensity of the interaction (or degree of blending) sought between participating programs and agencies. We call this the *relationship intensity* dimension. The second is the extent to which the participating programs or agencies are drawn from similar or dissimilar institutional cultures. We call this the *institutional similarity* dimension.

Relationship Intensity. Figure 1 below is at an adaptation of a scale or continuum developed in El Paso County, Colorado, which has implemented a much-discussed and admired model of human services reform.[3] This scale, in part at least, begins to tap the relationship intensity dimension, which is the extent to which participating programs and agencies forfeit some of their identity and defining attributes in an effort to develop a truly blended system. In doing this, the continuum focuses on the character and quality of the relationships among participating programs and agencies; specifically, how closely are participating systems to be blended together.

Figure 1 takes these relationships and orders them into a scale that moves from relationships where officials from individual programs talk more amongst themselves to relationships where distinct program and agency identities are lost. This scale, then, starts with efforts to improve communication across participating systems and steadily moves toward more intensive forms of integration. Movement toward greater integration makes blended funding increasingly important

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[3] Rutledge Q. Hudson. "A Vision for Eliminating Poverty and Family Violence, Transforming Child Welfare and TANF in El Paso County, Colorado." Center for Law and Social Policy. January 2003.

and also places greater demands on policymakers and program managers. To achieve full consolidation, all aspects of program design and management must be addressed, creating demands far exceeding the requirements for merely, as an example, collocating related services.

Figure 1

RELATIONSHIP INTENSITY CONTINUUM[4]

Communication—*Clear, consistent and nonjudgmental discussions; giving or exchanging information in order to maintain meaningful relationships. Individual programs or causes are totally separate.*

Cooperation—*Assisting each other with respective activities, giving general support, information, and/or endorsement for each other's programs, services, or objectives.*

Coordination—*Joint activities and communications are more intensive and far-reaching. Agencies or individuals engage in joint planning and synchronization of schedules, activities, goals, objectives, and events.*

Collaboration—*Agencies, individuals, or groups willingly relinquish some of their autonomy in the interest of mutual gains or outcomes. True collaboration involves actual changes in agency, group, or individual behavior to support collective goals or ideals.*

Convergence—*Relationships evolve from collaboration to actual restructuring of services, programs, memberships, budgets, missions, objectives, and staff.*

Consolidation—*Agency, group, or individual behavior, operations, policies, budgets, staff, and power are united and harmonized. Individual autonomy or gains have been fully relinquished, common outcomes and identity adopted.*

This scale is useful, but it does not take us very far in our understanding of specific initiatives. Therefore, in Figure 2, we provide more information about each dimension (or rung) on the intensity continuum scale in terms of the specific actions, relationships, and/or agreements that more specifically define what each rung might actually represent. For example, agencies and programs are positioned on the *communication* rung when they regularly meet, exchange information, and maybe even have some 'informal' agreements about how to handle certain common challenges or clients. The level of communication must intensify, however, before we might call it *cooperation*.

The quality of interactions, as suggested by the associated tasks and tactics, become even more formal, regularized, and detailed as one moves further along the continuum. One cannot legitimately talk about *coordination* or *collaboration* until participating agencies are working together in a meaningful way as evidenced by such actions as developing cross-training programs or integrating application protocols and eligibility standards. Likewise, one probably cannot label a local effort as achieving *convergence* or *consolidation* until there is evidence of shared resources and the loss of distinct program identities.

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[4] This is a modified version of the service delivery continuum developed in El Paso County, Colorado, and reported out in Ragan (cited above).

Certainly, one can argue about the ordering or whether the appropriate indicators are positioned under the correct rung. Still, one can trace a path from merely talking to one another to actions designed to work together to contractual arrangements designed to blend operations to more aggressive steps that obscure the distinct identity of the participating programs and systems

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Figure 2

ENHANCED RELATIONSHIP INTENSITY SCALE

Level 1*:* *Communication* ■ *procedures for information sharing*
■ *regular interagency meetings on common problems and opportunities*
■ *informal service 'brokering' arrangements.*

       Cooperation ■ *task forces, advisory groups, committees that review/approve plans*
■ *consensus concerning best practices*
■ *cross system's dialogue and/or training*
■ *cooperative monitoring / case reviews*

Level 2: *Coordination* ■ *formal interagency agreements to "coordinate"*
■ *joint mission statement / principles*
■ *joint training/retraining/cross training*
■ *contractual procedures for resolving inter-agency disputes*
■ *temporary personnel reassignments*
■ *coordinated eligibility standards*

       Collaboration ■ *coordinated personnel qualification standards*
■ *single application form / process*
■ *common case management protocols*
■ *centralized functional administration*
■ *coordinated IT / (re) programming authority*

Level 3: *Convergence* ■ *contractual provisions for fund transfers / reallocations*
■ *contractual "lead agency" agreements*
■ *pooled resources / budget contributions*

       Consolidation ■ *multi-agency/multi-task/multi-discipline service plans & budgets*
■ *seamless interagency service delivery teams*
■ *fully blended interagency planning / division of labor / responsibility*
■ *shared human capital / physical capital assets*

Figure 2 also introduces the notion of *levels*. We think of levels as transition points that mark qualitatively different thresholds in the intensity level of any integration effort. That is, as one moves from a Level 1 to Level 2, the degree of difficulty increases significantly as does the risk of failure.

The three levels can be thought of as follows:

- Level 1—Integration efforts at L*evel 1* are thought to rely heavily on better communications across existing programs and systems. Steps are taken to better acquaint participating programs with each others rules and services; cross-training may take place; new people may be hired to help families take advantage of existing programs; new technologies may expand what staff and customers know about each others domains. In some instances, this expanded cross-program awareness may effect changes in the way individual programs operate both individually and in concert. That is, evidence of cooperation across participating programs may be apparent. But such changes seldom result in formal or widespread or substantive transformations in existing protocols or service technologies.

- Level 2—At *Level 2,* reform efforts move into more formal, sometimes contractual, agreements across participating programs. Sites at this level begin to develop missions and outcomes that cut across traditional program lines. They begin to formally develop service and management protocols that blend important functions such as diagnosing customer needs at the front end, tracking families along appropriate service paths, or monitoring progress and resolving disputes over how best to deal with inter-systems conflict regarding how best to deal with families. Still, participating programs retain much of their individual identities and core management functions (e.g., distinct budgets and program identities).

- Level 3—At *Level 3,* the separate programs and systems begin to lose their distinct identities. Core functions such as budgeting, personnel decisions, and determining and monitoring success become increasingly blended. Most importantly, customers and the public are less able to identify with which agency or specific program they are interacting. Program boundaries dissolve and agency identity becomes increasingly seamless to consumers. Customer needs, and not the way programs are organized, become the driving force that shapes what the service system looks like and how it functions.

As one moves from one level to the next, the necessary investment in time, energy, and resources increase disproportionately. Thus, the decision to move along this continuum, and especially to move from one level to the next, should not be taken lightly. One guiding principle identified in our work to date is to not try to implement more change than is needed to accomplish the goal. That is, if enhancing communication and cooperation is sufficient to achieve your purposes, think carefully before moving from Level 1 to Level 2 types of institutional relationships. Concurrently, however, if the change desired really does require Level 3 relationships, do not be satisfied with Level 1 tactics and strategies.

Institutional Similarity. The second key dimension of interest involves the extent to which local efforts draw together programs and agencies that represent similar or dissimilar institutional cultures. As noted above, we call this the *institutional similarity* dimension.

We have written about institutional 'culture' or 'milieu' elsewhere and thus will only briefly recapture the underlying concepts here.[5] We have defined an organization's culture as a

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[5] See "The challenge of institutional 'milieu' to cross-systems integration," Thomas Corbett, James Dimas, James Fong, and Jennifer L. Noyes, in FOCUS, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Fall 2005), pp. 28-35.

"shorthand term for the underlying norms, values, and behavioral patterns that shape the way an agency functions and makes decisions."[6] What often best dictates this system's culture is its fundamental purpose. Does a program essentially distribute a benefit, deliver a rather defined service, or intervene with families to remedy difficult problems or transform behaviors and attitudes?

To simplify matters, one can think about a program that distributes food stamp benefits. The required protocols can be complicated but are quite repetitive. These kinds of programs fit well in a bureaucratic, rule-driven, top-down institutional culture. At the other extreme, there are programs and agencies that are transformative in character. They tend to work with whole families or communities and are designed to change the way individuals relate to one another and to society in general. Not surprisingly, these program types function less well in bureaucratic environments. They flower in institutional cultures that facilitate professional norms, risk-taking, flexibility, and innovation. There are, of course, many programs that contain elements of both extremes.

Given this, we have denoted three basic types of human services programs or agencies or agencies: a) routinized, b) mixed, and c) non-routinized where:

- *routinized* programs or agencies are those that engage in core tasks or activities that are rule driven and repeated without significant variation. Most benefits-issuing programs fall into this category.

- m*ixed* programs or agencies have some routinized elements such as a focus on determining eligibility for scarce benefits but also encompass tasks that seek to alter individual or family functioning. Many work-oriented welfare systems are like this, such as those that offer routine job search or basic education help. They may also, however, offer more advanced forms of assistance designed to remedy problematic barriers to sustained success in the labor market such as depression, domestic violence, substance abuse, and a lack of soft skills.

- *non-routinized* programs or agencies typically are characterized by a reliance on professional norms, collegial rule making environments, flatter institutional hierarchies, and significant discretion at the front lines. Many, though not all, social service agencies that deal with very problematic family issues often fall into this category.

As discussed in other publications, putting together programs with similar organizational cultures, although difficult, is less daunting than blending programs or agencies drawn from different cultures.[7] For example, integrating two benefit programs might demand changes in eligibility criteria and supportive information technologies, but the workers and supervisors in the two systems might feel relatively comfortable working together. This is often not the case in pursuing systems integration across cultures.

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[6] Ibid, p. 28.

[7] Ibid, p. 29

Defining System Integration Efforts

We believe every system integration effort can be viewed in light of the two dimensions of *relationship intensity* and *institutional similarity.* Figure 3, which is a simple 3 X 3 matrix, is designed to illustrate this important point. Along the vertical axis, we position the three types of institutional cultures as discussed. Along the horizontal axis, we position the levels drawn from Figure 2. This gives us a simplified array of possibilities for thinking about systems integration.

There are nine cells in the matrix. Although no system integration effort can be thought of as 'simple,' the upper left cell (A1) represents the most direct integration challenge. In this cell, which brings together institution cultures with similar routinized cultures, reform can often be achieved by increasing the level of communication across programs. It is possible that mere communication is not enough and the intensity of the integration effort needs to increase. In this scenario, the integration effort moves across the matrix from cell A1 to A2 to A3. This movement will add to the cost and difficulty of the undertaking.

However, other efforts might require the integration of dissimilar programs and agencies that do very different things and thus, have quite distinct institutional cultures. Such an effort might be necessary if desired program outcomes were driven by the premise that economic well-being and family functioning are inextricably linked. In this case, we could envision the need to increase the level of communication among workers who issue benefits with workers who are trying to improve the labor market attachment of adults, strengthen families, and protect children. A modest proposal might be to simply improve communications without seriously altering operations. In this case, the integration effort would involve movement down the matrix from cell A1 to B1 to C1.

Figure 3

INTEGRATION INTENSITY-INSTITUTIONAL SIMILARITY MATRIX

PROGRAM/AGENCY TYPE		RELATIONSHIP INTENSITY		
		1 Communication	2 Collaboration	3 Consolidation
A	Routinized	A1	A2	A3
B	Mixed	B1	B2	B3
C	Non-routinized	C1	C2	C3

On the other hand, we might just conclude that marginal changes are not sufficient. Simply improving the level of communication across culturally dissimilar systems, or working toward fuller consolidation across programs with similar cultures, might not be adequate. Conceptually, the frontier of systems integration is to push the envelope to cell C3. This cell reflects full consolidation of programs and agencies with very different cultures.

This is the integration agenda that evokes the most problematic challenges tapping the 'below the waterline' phenomena discussed in detail elsewhere.[8] This is where the frontier of systems integration work is positioned and where real progress probably cannot occur absent sustained support and investment.

Implications for Pursuing Systems Integration

What does this conceptual perspective contribute to the pursuit of systems integration? Ultimately, it means that there is no and can be no singular standard based on process for determining what does or does not constitute a successful service integration effort. In our view, success should be based on pursuing the level of integration necessary to transform the service experience of target families in ways that are consistent with the outcomes envisioned and not on some sort of standard for integration.

This can only be accomplished by starting with a set of questions rather than answers. It is a matter of adopting a perspective or attitude premised largely on placing the client or customer at the center of the planning process. Typical start-up planning questions include the following:

- What target populations are served, or ought to be served, by the various programs in our service network and for what reasons do they seek help?

- How can we best address the needs of these families regardless of how they enter our system?

- What are the least intrusive services we can provide to assist the family?

- Which model will assist us in serving families in the best possible manner?

- Which model represents the best fit with our current service delivery system and environment?

- Which model would be most compatible with the purposes we wish to achieve and for the target population on which we are focusing?

This leads to a more elaborate process called which we call the *line of sight* exercise, which is described in greater detail elsewhere and thus is not elaborated upon here.[9] At the core of any line-of-sight exercise is a central perspective: what will it take to alter the customer's experience in ways that plausibly might lead to desired outcomes? Thinking about service integration in this way shifts the perspective from a focus on process and structure. This subtly shifts our view from what we do to bureaucracies to what we do for people; a nuanced, yet critical, shift.

Nevertheless, grounding success in consumer-focused outcomes does not necessarily mean that we ignore systems attributes all together. On the contrary, local officials often identify changes in how systems function as excellent markers for assessing progress in transforming the customer's experience. Figure 4 lists the benefits associated with a variety of system attributes that have been identified as important to various innovative sites around the country.

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[8] Ibid.

[9] See *Cross-systems innovations: The line-pf-sight exercise, or getting from where you are to where you want to be,* in <u>Focus,</u> Vol. 24, No. 1, Fall, 2005, pp. 36- 41.

Figure 4

Potential Systems Attributes of Interest

Convenience -- Consumers seeking help can access services more easily and at less cost.

Process Efficiency -- There is less duplication of effort, some activities and processes can be streamlined or redundancies can be eliminated.

Cost efficiency -- Some argue that integration saves money though this is not a widely accepted position. More plausible is the assertion that available dollars are used more effectively, resulting in more bang for the buck.

Flexible use of funds -- Diverse funding streams can be blended or braided in creative and more effective ways.

Comprehensiveness -- Consumers have access to a greater variety of services.

Simultaneity -- Consumers can access multiple services at the same time, a desired attribute when dealing with hard-to-serve and deeply troubled individuals or families.

Individualization of services -- Greater systems responsiveness to differentiated presenting problems can be achieved and the system can be more adaptive to changing circumstances.

Differential systems engagement -- In some integrated systems, consumers can engage the system at different levels of intensity (from self service to the use comprehensive teams tapping multiple programs and service technologies).

Broader population coverage -- Broader segments of the community can be reached, at least relative to categorical programs that deal with specific problems.

Mainstreaming/stigma reduction -- Often, the stigma associated with less popular subgroups or programs is diminished when larger segments of the community are served by blended systems.

Focus on outcomes, not process -- Managers increasingly focus on outcomes and not whether specific rules are followed which helps everyone focus on the right thing—what is accomplished rather than what is done.

Transformed community/political perceptions -- Communities view social service systems differently, more as community assets and problem solvers and less as mere deliverers of program services or welfare benefits.

These systems attributes are not the end product of any integration effort. Rather, they serve as indicators that customers are being treated differently and that the institutional culture of the system is being pushed in the right direction. Change that does not mean anything is not likely to result in a substantive transformation in what clients experience. Note, however, that the weight given to each of these attributes probably varies significantly across sites. That is, each site must

determine what is important to them, given their local situation and the purposes for engaging in reform.

Obviously, whether or not these alleged benefits actually materialize depends on the quality of the design and implementation of any given model. Simply bringing programs and policies together may not be enough. How well diverse institutional cultures are bridged and professional perspectives blended in practice may say a lot about whether consumer experiences are transformed and positive outcomes actually realized.[10]

Moreover, whether or not certain attributes are important in any given reform effort depends upon our central concerns: in what ways do we want to transform the customer's experience? All change is not equal. Too often, that is, we tend to approach the integration challenge as if it were a bloodless bureaucratic exercise. We worry about budgets and staff allocations and turf. We talk about increasing efficiency and reducing redundancy. Most existing frameworks for thinking about service integration remain one step removed from what is really critical: how the experiences of the intended target population are transformed. This is a theme to which we repeatedly return.

A Way of Thinking, Not an Event

We touch upon one final principle in our thinking about the definition of systems integration. 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 doing 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 that involves several steps:

Assess the Situation - Service integration initiatives typically start with some form of assessment of the current situation. Such an assessment may focus on one or two existing programs or agencies, or a set of service needs, or an overall assessment of community needs. Community is an elastic concept, stretching from neighborhood to service catchment area, to a whole state. Whatever the differences, a common element remains: the desire for some rigorous information on what is needed, how well the current configuration of services meets those, and what kinds of changes may be warranted.

Develop Purpose and Goals - Perhaps the most critical step in the life cycle of a cross-systems development exercise is creating a consensus sense of mission. What is the vision driving the exercise, why are you doing this? Not only must an overarching purpose be articulated, but appropriate buy-in must be secured. In addition, general goals eventually must be translated into measurable objectives, and investments in both data infrastructure and management supports to use performance measures and population indicators must be forthcoming.

Complete an Outcome-Sequence Chart – Completing an outcome-sequence chart essentially involves several key steps in any planning process. First, you must adopt a visioning process

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[10] For a fuller discussion of some of these complexities, see *The Challenge of institutional "milieu" to cross-systems integration,* in <u>Focus,</u> Vol. 24, No.1, Fall, 2005, pp. 28-35.

where you put yourself in the shoes of your intended target population in order to see things from their perspective. Second, you must understand what they experience in the existing system. Third, you must go through each sequential step in the customer's tenure with the system: outreach, entry, diagnostics and referral, service delivery, monitoring and accountability, and exit. At each step, think through what must be changed to realistically achieve the purposes of reform. Finally, defend to yourself and your partners each proposed change being contemplated—why do you believe it is warranted.

Develop a Strategic Plan - Integrated service models are, by their nature, collaborative undertakings. Likely and potential partners or collaborators must be identified early in the process. Strategies must be developed to bring them to the table, and to sustain their interest and participation over time. One must think through the incentive structure essential to developing longer-term institutional relationships as well as the institutional, language, technological, resource-based, and personal barriers that may inhibit full communication and cooperation.

Re-engineer Systems - This is a catch-all step that encompasses a host of practical issues and challenges. How do you ensure that actual and potential customers really experience something different in the new system? All the paper changes in the world do not mean anything if the customer experience is not transformed. All the essential pieces of any system—outreach and marketing, the front end steps of enrollment and eligibility and diagnostics, the processes of engagement and service/benefits delivery, ongoing assessment including trouble shooting and adaptation, and the end game involving exit and any post-involvement follow-up—must be considered and transformed to accommodate the new vision of an integrated system.
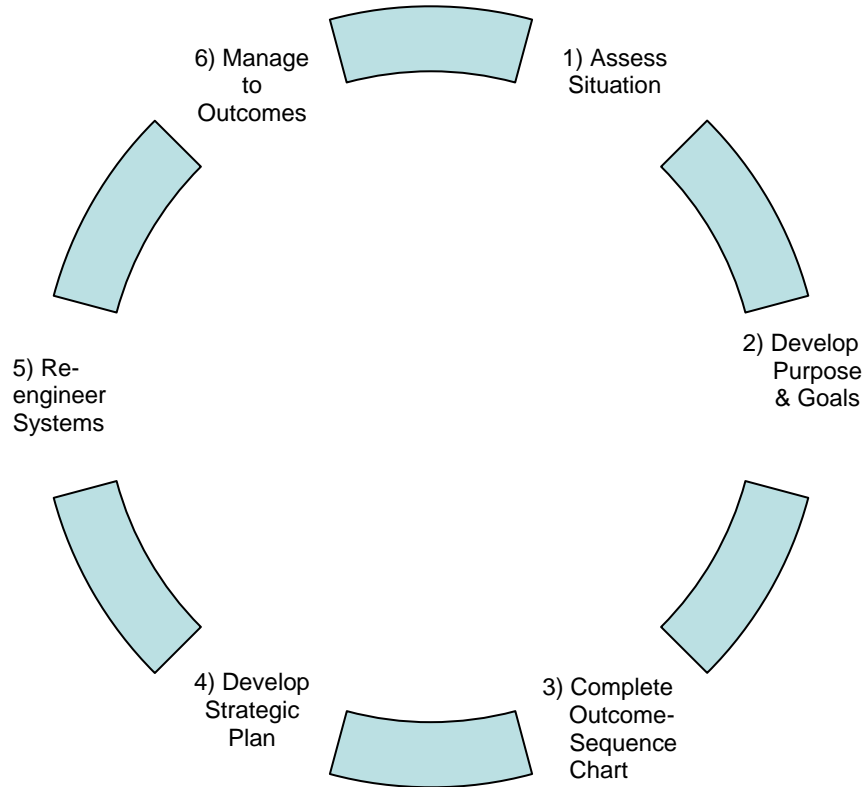
Manage to Outcomes - Finally, the new system must be rigorously assessed in an ongoing fashion. These are issues more exhaustively discussed in the companion paper on accountability and effectiveness. At a minimum, we must consider the following evaluative challenges: a process analysis to determine if our operational objectives are actually being met in reality; performance or outcome assessments to determine if specific program objectives are being approached; population monitoring to assess whether we can detect any positive movement in the population attributes that we had hoped to influence; and impact evaluations or whether we can attribute any success specifically to our new interventions.

Figure 6 illustrates this ongoing process. One pass around the circle should suggest possibilities and opportunities for further change. Monitoring and evaluation ought to be taken seriously, not necessarily as a way of judging success and failure, but for providing input for what comes next. Finally, the life cycle concept suggests that we can start at any place in the scales introduced earlier in this paper and work our way progressively toward the other end. To employ a somewhat overused sports analogy, doing integration is a marathon, not a sprint.

Figure 6

Service Integration Life Cycle

Service Integration Life Cycle:
1) Assess Situation
2) Develop Purpose & Goals
3) Complete Outcome-Sequence Chart
4) Develop Strategic Plan
5) Re-engineer Systems
6) Manage to Outcomes

A Concluding Thought

Our work with sites around the country suggests that Mark Ragan is essentially correct—there is no single, unambiguous definition of what we prefer to call 'systems integration.' At the same time, we believe it is possible to apply a framework to system integration initiatives, allowing for some structure to be used in analyzing their implementation while understanding there is no one process standard by which to judge them.

The bottom line of that framework is the purposes driving a given initiative. What do you want to alter about how customers are treated? What kinds of outcomes in customer behaviors and community circumstances do you want to achieve? It is this understanding that informs what success might look like. In some situations changes, rather minimal changes might suffice. In others, perhaps full consolidation involving programs tapping dissimilar cultures is required. In all cases, however, there must be a plausible link between what is to be achieved and the strategy for getting there.

Moreover, where a reform effort is at any point in time is not necessarily where it will end up. Systems integration is a process, not an event. The very act of introducing changes at Level 1 may raise issues or suggest possibilities at Levels 2 or 3. Or, the challenges encountered in pushing for more intensive levels of integration may lead policy entrepreneurs to conclude that the same ends can be attained without the trauma attached to more ambitious strategies. Ultimately, pursuing systems integration is more a mind set than a set of activities.

There is one inescapable conclusion to all this. As local policy entrepreneurs push the envelope of change and innovation, the level of difficulty—and thus the challenge—of the effort increases. One analogy is to a diver, standing at the end of the diving platform 10 meters above the water. The choice he or she faces is clear: either a safer dive that is easier but which carries less reward or the more difficult alternative that carries a higher reward but also a greater risk of failure.

In sites around the country, policy entrepreneurs are choosing to pursue the more difficult alternative in search of the higher reward of improved outcomes for children and families. Yet, working alone, and without support and guidance, the waters below will look far away and dangerous, indeed. We must find concrete ways of supporting those who are pushing at these frontiers.