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Systems Integration: Pursuing the “Holy Grail” of Public Policy

Presented at
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Courses at the College Level”
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Tom Corbett & Jennifer Noyes

Discussion Topics

- Background Information
 - A brief review of our work on service integration
 - A few key observations
- Service Integration 101
 - What are we talking about?
- Challenges
 - An overview of selected core challenges
 - A set of ideas for overcoming these challenges



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Background Information

Selected Project Highlights

- Welfare Peer Assistance Network (WELPAN)
- Intensive on-site work in Midwest states
- NGA Policy Academy on Cross-Systems Innovation
- Intensive work in Wisconsin
- National “lighthouse” site visits and meetings
- Brainstorming meetings with policy analysts, evaluation researchers, and state and local practitioners
- Collaborative work with others at the local, state, national, and international levels

A Few Key Observations

- Overall belief that service (or systems) integration has the potential for improving outcomes for target populations.
- Bottom-up, locally-driven strategies are germinating all over the country.
- Future innovation will benefit from technical assistance and information about “lessons learned” from other sites.
- Those actually doing the work are often the real experts.
- The core elements (and challenges) of doing integration are generic across purposes and populations.
- More evidence is needed to test the hypothesis that systems integration leads to improved participant outcomes.
- Systems integration is easier said than done.

It is easier said than done.

- Service integration is:
 - not extensive. Even in “successful projects,” none had fully developed intended service linkages.
 - an evolutionary process. It takes time to organize and implement, to attain legitimacy in the eyes of service providers, and to develop working relationships among participating agencies.
 - facilitated and inhibited by numerous factors, but no single factor is instrumental in benefiting or impeding a majority of projects.
- There is no one best services integration method for providing client services.

Who said that?

- From “An Evaluation of Services Integration Projects” completed for...
- U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social and Rehabilitation Services in...
- 1972.



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Systems Integration 101

What is systems integration?

- Labels vary and can include “service integration” and “cross-systems innovation.”
- Common goal: to simplify and streamline access to and coordination of a broad, often complex array of services in order to improve outcomes for a specific population (e.g., children and families, children aging out of foster care, ex-offenders).
- Requires a shift in program management focus from delivering discrete services to a more holistic approach.

“Typical” Shortcomings of Service Delivery Systems

- The system is too fragmented, leaving those clients with multiple issues vulnerable.
- The goals of individual programs are too limited.
- The services are often provided “in an inefficient, duplicative, and bureaucratically confusing manner to those who have the need.”
- The services tend to be lacking in accountability and to be self-perpetuating regardless of effectiveness.
- The service system is not sufficiently attentive to the long-term needs of clients.

Positive Attributes of Interest

- Families have:
 - Access to a broad range of services and supports.
 - Ability to engage the system at different levels of intensity.
- Families have access to individualized service plans that:
 - Accommodate multiple issues simultaneously.
 - Respond to changing circumstances.

Positive Attributes of Interest (continued)

- The focus is on achieving overall (holistic) goals for individuals and families rather than those of a particular program.
- Public programs are viewed as one part of an overall system designed to support achievement of individual, family, and community goals.

Current interest is driven by opportunity...

- Natural progression in the reform dialogue from the mid 1990s into the 21st century.
- There has been a fundamental shift in how policy challenges are framed at the state and local level.
- This shift is reflected in evolving program purposes and emerging themes.

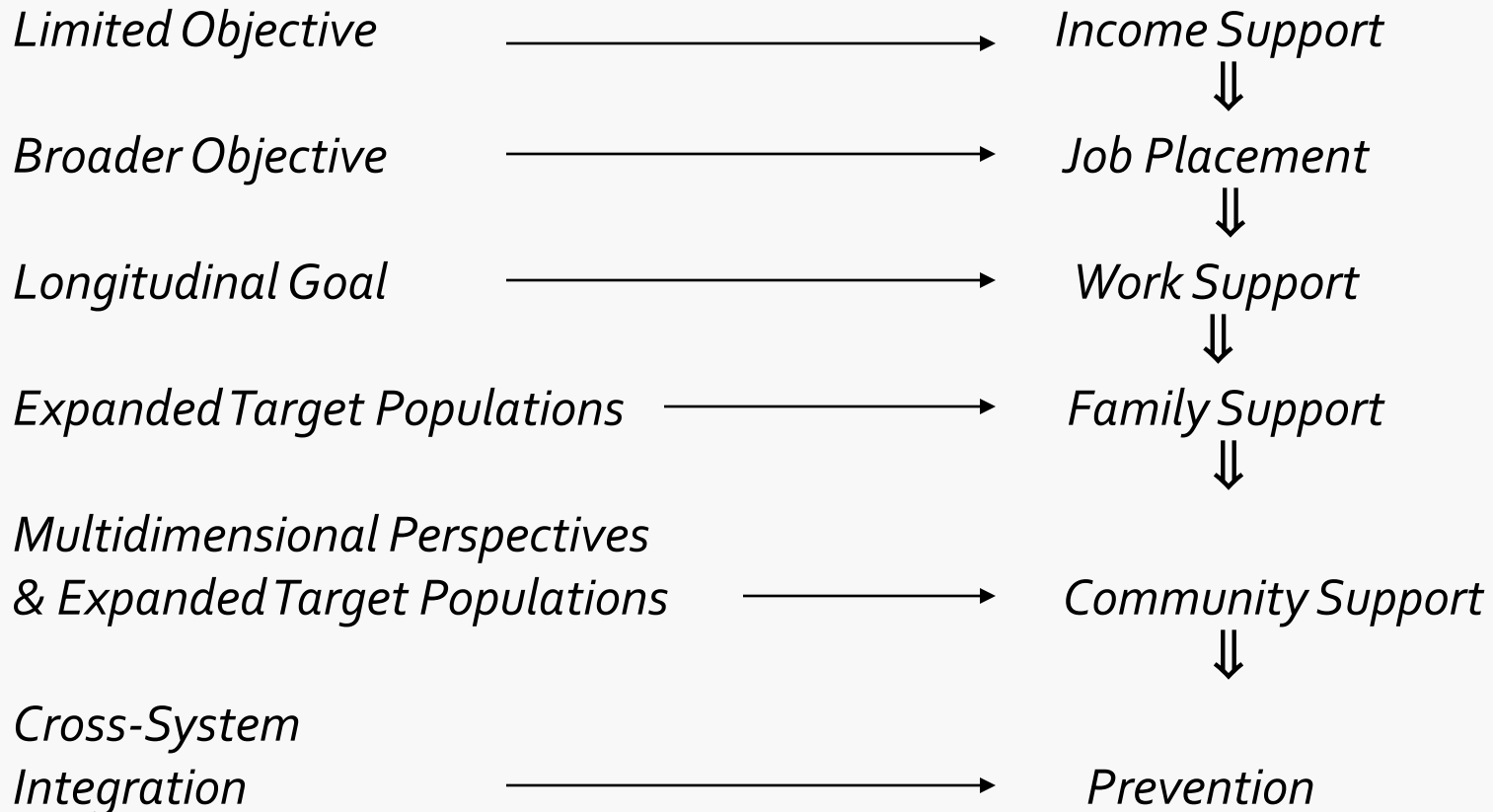
Emerging Themes

- Prevention over remediation.
- Holistic program purposes.
- Inputs to outcomes.
- From silos to systems.
- Evolving institutional cultures.

Prevention over Remediation

- Heckman Equation: return on investments (ROI)
- Rank
 - Prenatal = Highest ROI
 - 0-3 years
 - Pre-school
 - Schooling
 - Job training = Lowest ROI

Evolving Program Purposes: A Example from Welfare Reform



Emerging Institutional Cultures

Traditional Attributes	Emerging Attributes
Focus on benefits	Focus on behavior
Limited purpose	Multiple goals
Autonomous agency	Collaborative agency
Autonomous staff	Teams/collaborative staff
Rule oriented	Flexible
Limited target populations	Broader target populations
Short-term focus	Long-term focus
Process oriented	Outcome oriented
Static operations	Dynamic operations



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Challenges

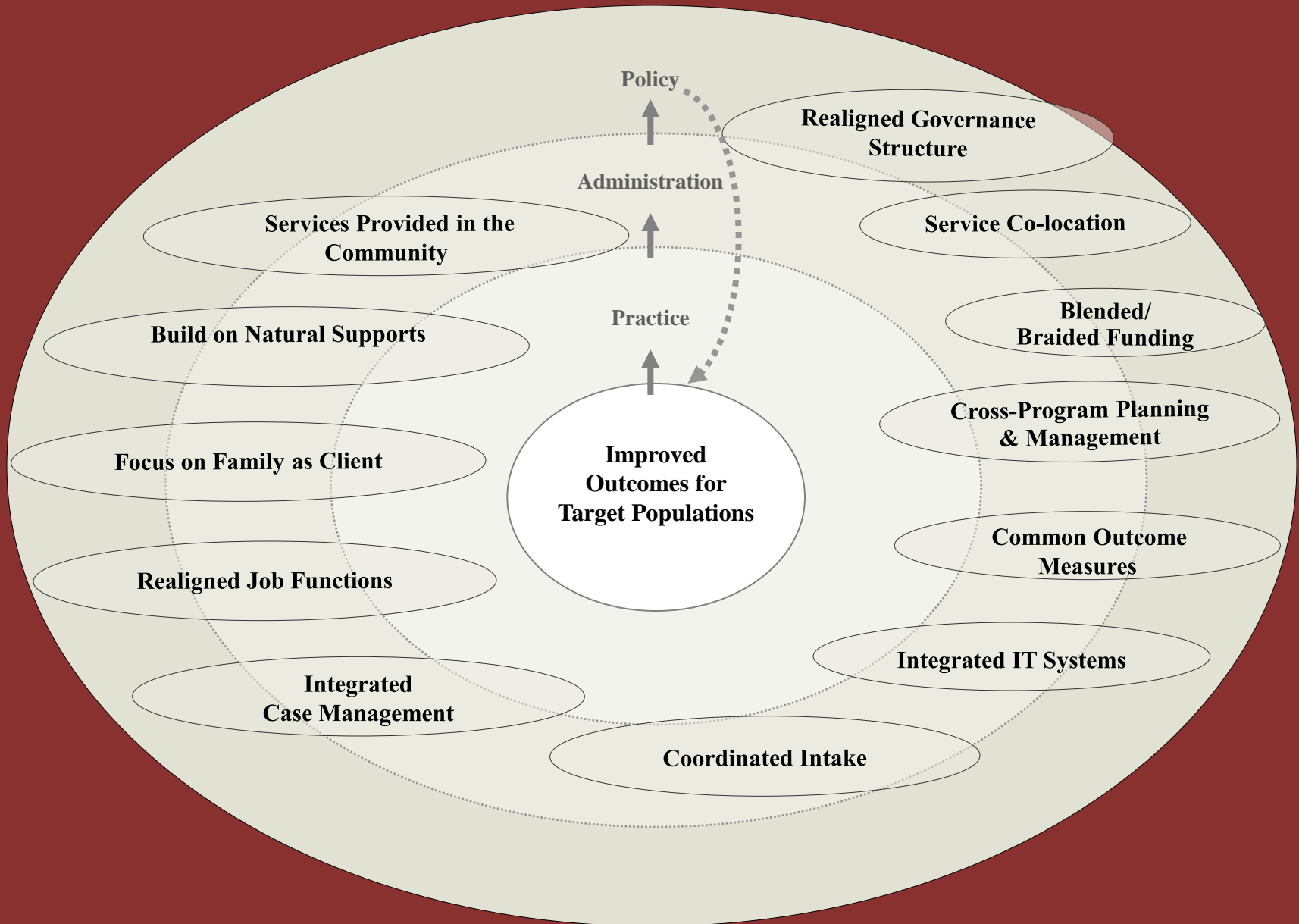
A Few Minor Challenges!

- 1) Not starting in the “right place.”
- 2) Confusing the means with the end.
- 3) Not having a alternative framework for thinking about integration.
- 4) Failing to appreciate the institutional implications of proposed changes.
- 5) Thinking about service integration as an event and not a process.

1) Not Starting in the Right Place

- Focusing on implementation of tactics rather than on more strategic thinking, e.g.,:
 - A specific population
 - A set of goals related to that population tied to measurable outcomes
 - The process for conceptualizing how you will get where you need to be going

A Conceptual Framework for Service Integration



2) Confusing the Means with the End

- “Importing a solution” by picking from a list of tactics such as:
 - Co-location
 - Realigning governance structures
 - Consolidating intake
 - Consolidating job functions
 - Blending or braiding funding
 - Hiring a service liaison or “broker”

3) Not Having a Framework for Thinking About Systems Integration

- Two basic conceptual dimensions:
 - Institutional Similarity
 - Not all proposed institutional marriages are alike...
 - Relationship Intensity
 - Not all proposed institutional interactions are alike...

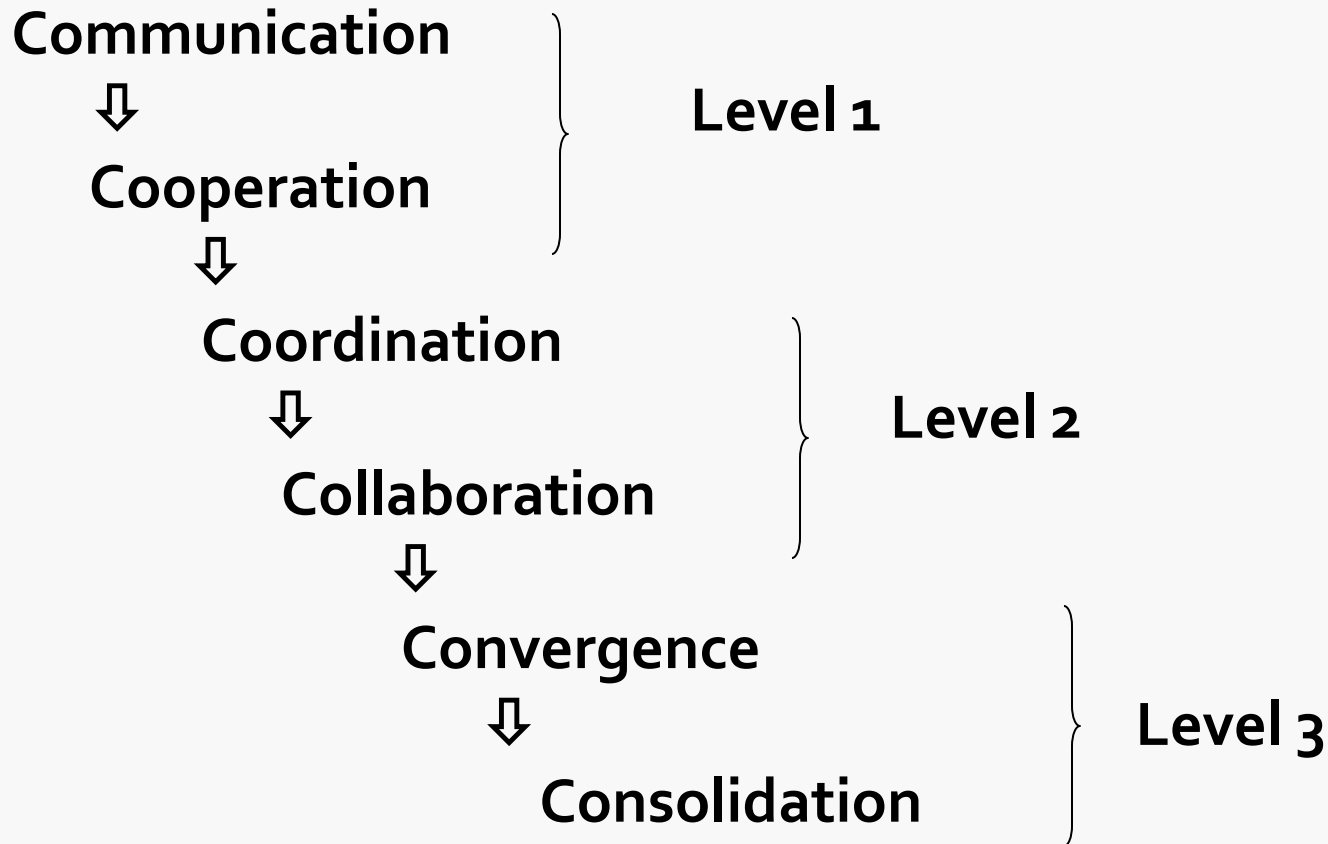
Institutional Similarity Continuum

- Routinized – benefits-issuing, rule-driven, bureaucratic
- Mixed – contained elements of both routinized and non-routinized
- Nonroutinized – people changing, discretion-focused, professional models

Institutional Similarity Matrix

FIRST CULTURAL TYPE	SECOND CULTURAL TYPE		
	Routinized	Mixed	Nonroutinized
Routinized	A	B	C
Mixed	B	A	B
Nonroutinized	C	B	A

Relationship Intensity Continuum



Institutional Similarity- Relationship Intensity Matrix

SIMILARITY INDEX	CULTURAL TYPES		RELATIONSHIP INTENSITY		
			1	2	3
	First	Second	Communication	Collaboration	Consolidation
A Similar	Routinized Mixed Nonroutinized	Routinized Mixed Nonroutinized	A1 [Easiest]	A2	A3
B Some Similarities	Routinized Nonroutinized	Mixed Mixed	B1	B2	B3
C Dissimilar	Routinized	Nonroutinized	C1	C2	C3 [Hardest]

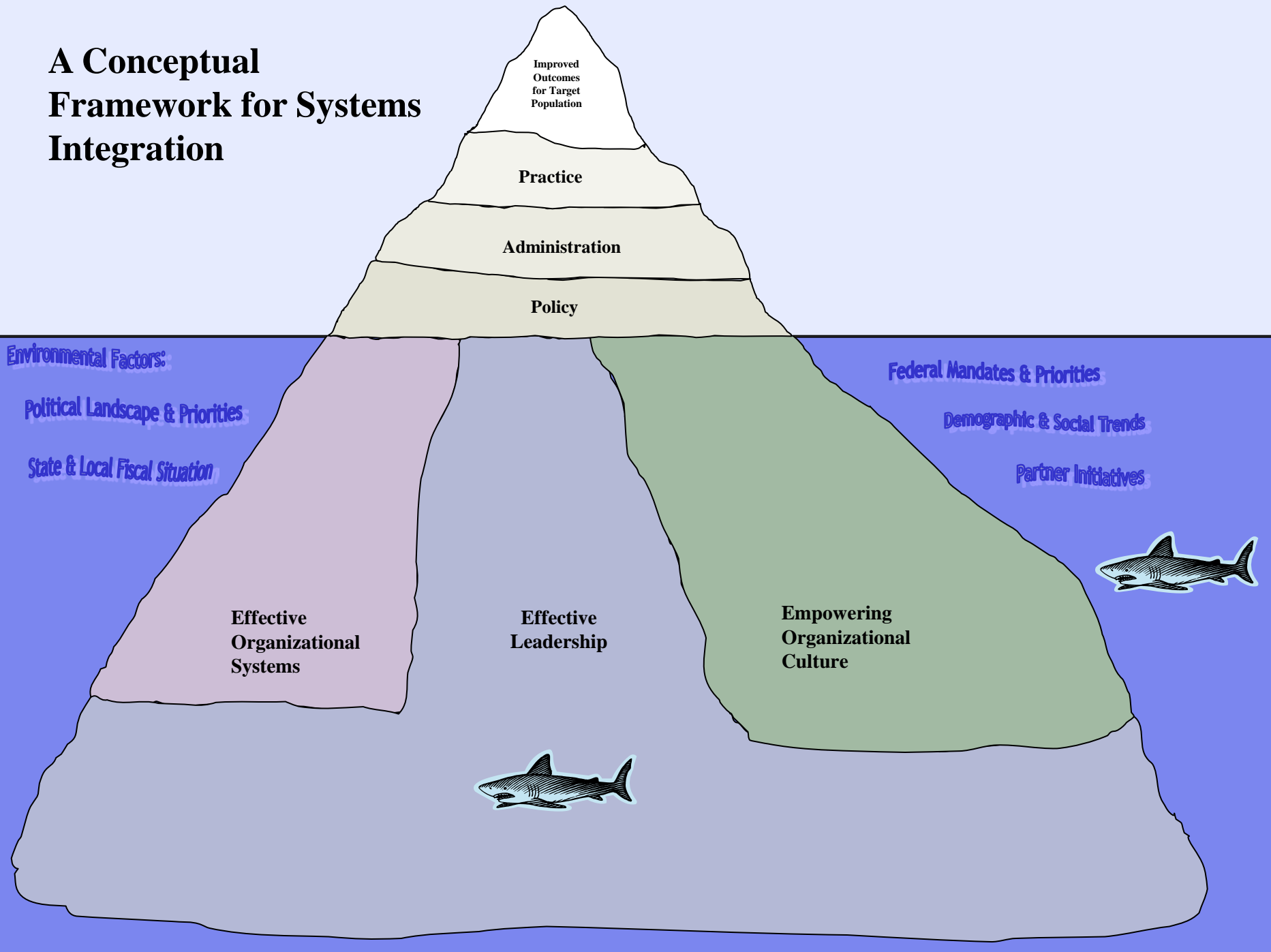
4) Failing to Appreciate Institutional Implications

- Concentrating efforts on modifications to practice protocols, administrative systems and policies.
- Neglecting differences in leadership style, organizational culture, and institutional systems.

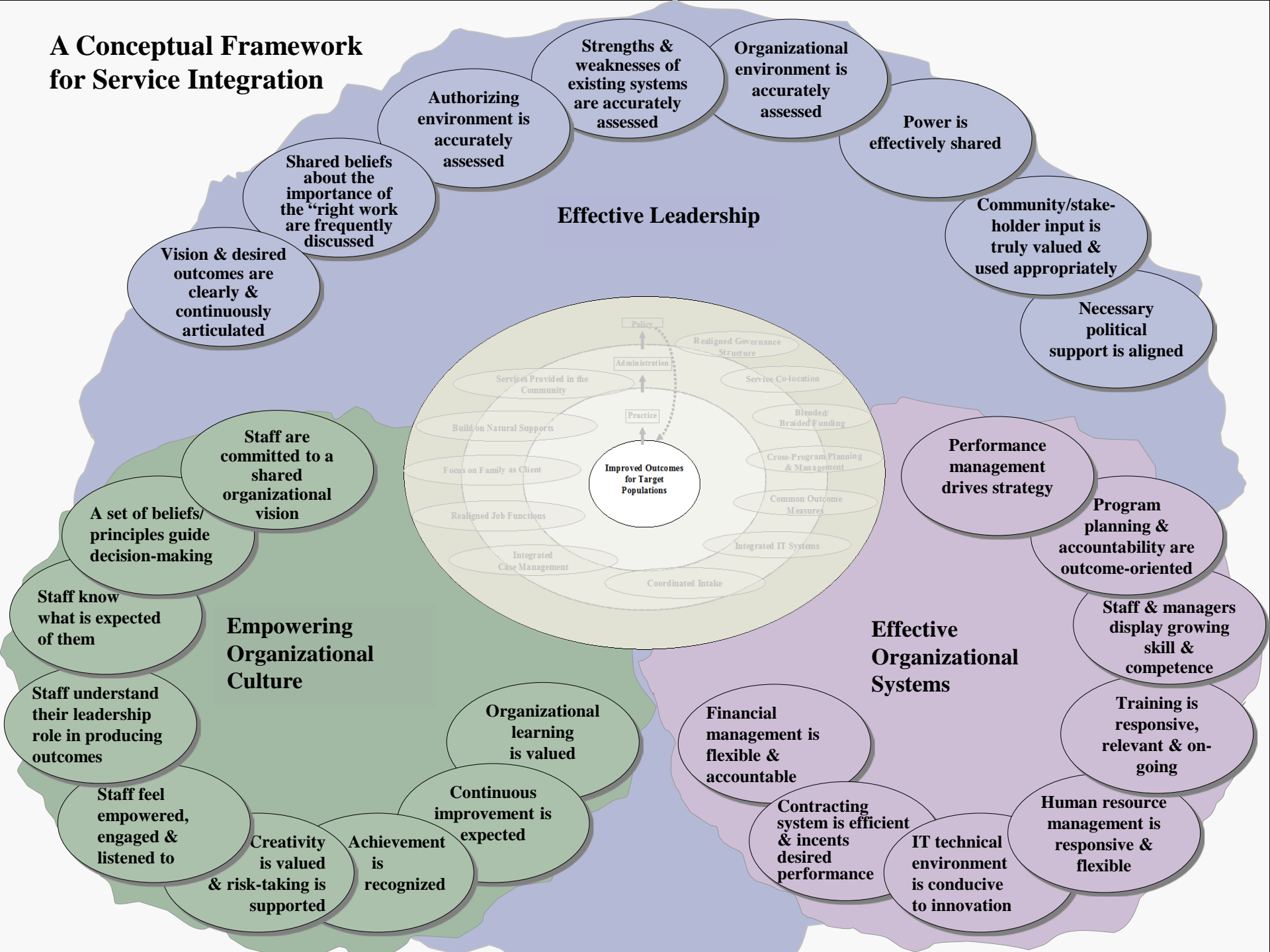
Visualizing the Implementation Challenge

- Think of an iceberg.
- Above the waterline are things we can easily see: practice, administration, policy.
- However, there are other important factors below the waterline: leadership, organizational systems, and organizational culture.
- “Below the waterline” factors are often overlooked when designing and carrying out these innovations.

A Conceptual Framework for Systems Integration



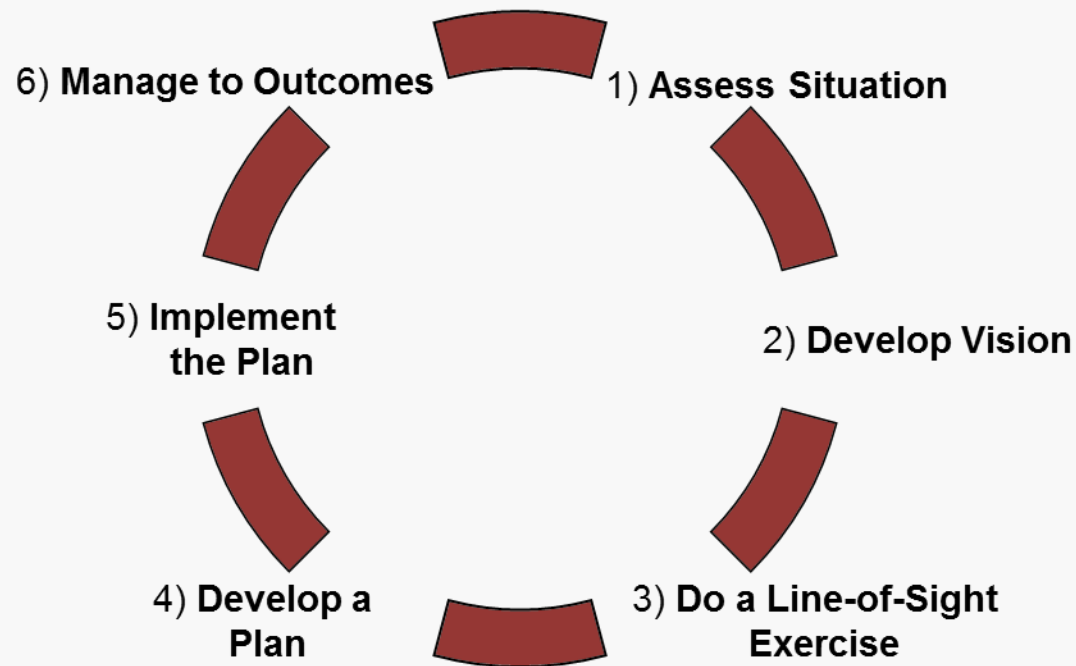
A Conceptual Framework for Service Integration



5) Thinking About Service Integration as an Event/Project and Not a Process

- Limiting flexibility in the planning process.
- Failing to adjust to changing circumstances.
- Employing a “once and done” mind-set.
- Accepting the “project” perspective

Systems Integration Life Cycle



Responding to the Challenges

- What is to be accomplished and for whom?
- What tactics and strategies will lead you to the desired outcomes?
- Is there a good fit between the tactics and strategies chosen “above the water line” and the institutional milieu “below the water line”?
- What strategy is needed to bring these two into correspondence?

Critical Steps

- 1) Start with the ends rather than the means.
- 2) Replace tactical solutions with strategic thinking.
- 3) Determine feasibility (understand the systems you are blending together).
- 4) Assess and adjust as you go.
- 5) Develop and sustain leadership.

Institutional Ethnography

- There are not enough students and scholars who really understand how important institutions are to addressing poverty.
- We prepare some scholars-in-training to use ethnographic tools with individuals, families, and small groups, maybe even communities.
- We now need to prepare them to really understand how institutions work and how vital they are to program development.

Other issues in manuscript.

- The degree of difficulty concept.
- Facilitative overarching environments [the 7 Ms]
- Governance issues.
- Unfinished business...restarting the dialogue on human services reform.
- Marking progress, estimating impacts.

Contact Information

Jennifer Noyes

jnoyes@ssc.wisc.edu

608-262-7990

Tom Corbett

corbettirp@aol.com

608-852-3556