

Leadership development: A pathway to transforming the public child welfare system

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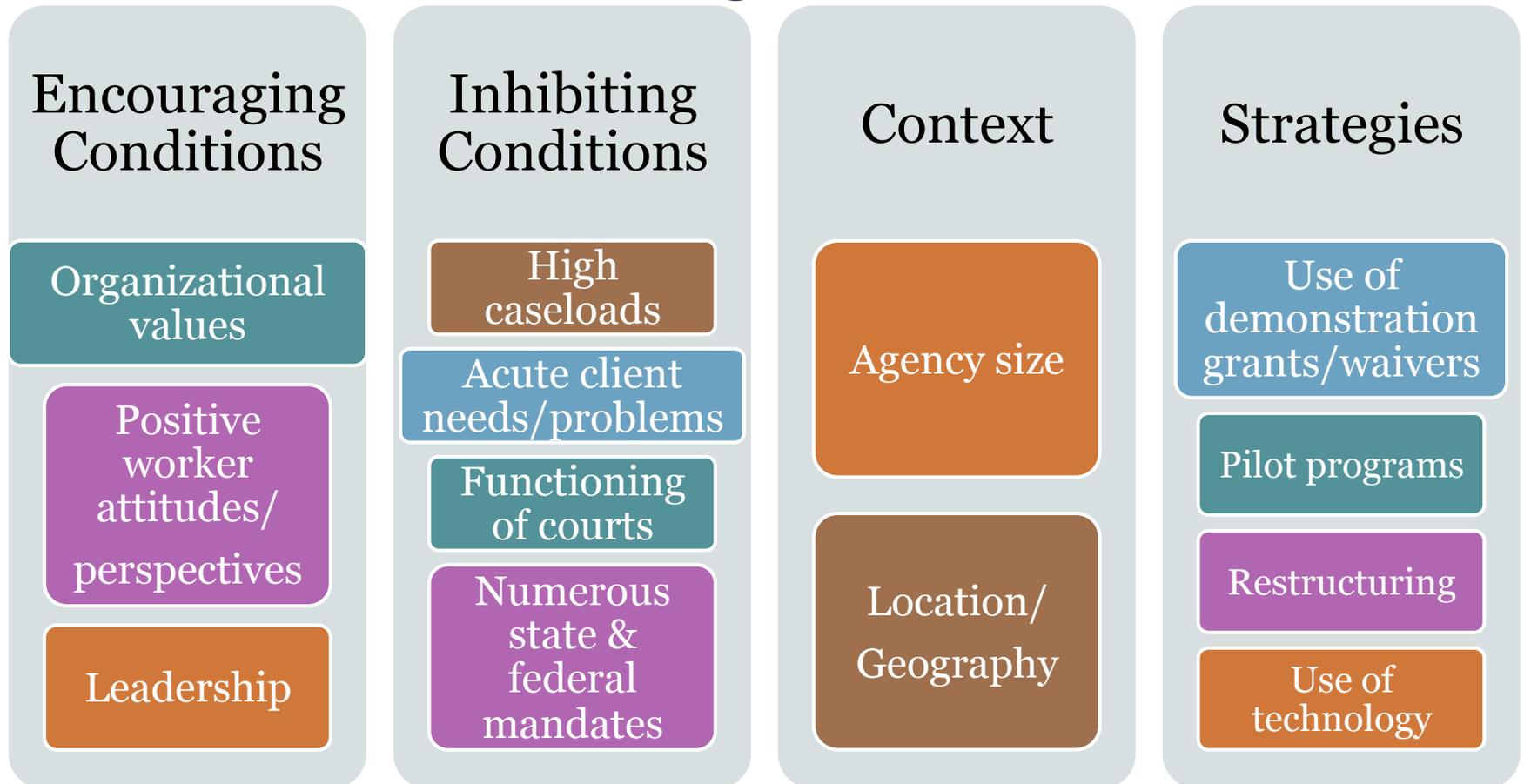
Introduction

- Based on a doctoral dissertation research study: “Family Empowerment in Public Child Welfare: An Exploratory Study of Organizational Culture as a Barrier to Implementation”
- Proposes that adoption of a family preservation and empowerment approach (philosophy and values) has potential to transform child welfare
- Today’s focus: transforming child welfare through leadership development

Brief overview of research study

- Qualitative study with 30 public child welfare workers (23 case workers; 7 supervisors) and 10 caregivers (8 grandmothers; 2 bio moms) from 4 counties in a mid-West state
- Semi-structured interviews focused on perspectives of organizational culture, family empowerment, readiness for change and experiences with empowering interventions
- Data collection between December 2013 & July 2014
- Counties were at various stages of implementation of Alternative Response using varying approaches

Factors impacting organizational readiness for change*



Leadership - Core influential condition

- Has potential to explain other conditions
- Determines agency climate: organizational values, priorities, direction & reputation
- Influences worker morale, empowerment and socialization into shared vision
- Does not determine organizational mission but influences how mission is interpreted and pursued

Implications for child welfare leadership and leadership development

- Must possess ability to establish pervasive, shared, constructive organizational culture
- Should be trained in organizational change management
- Efforts at worker empowerment must be deliberate
- Should see worker empowerment as integral to family empowerment and organizational transformation
- Should help workers understand and prepare for natural 'ebbs and flows' in feelings about role
- Must be responsive to the community and proactively respond to pressures for change

Policy Implications: State & Federal responsibilities

- Clarify competing agendas for change/reform
- Provide clear guidance on EBP models that support child welfare reform
- Ensure provision of training on select EBP models for workers, supervisors etc.
- Increase opportunities for waivers/demonstration grants (& post-funding technical support)
- Support establishment of pervasive constructive org. culture through common definitions & standardized decision making tools
- Increased & more targeted investment in leadership

Understanding change within child welfare

- Tends to be evolutionary, not revolutionary
- Worker attitudes and perceptions of ORC will be mixed: skepticism and resistance related to tendency to switch to new practice models/ approaches every few years
- Families are important stakeholders
- Consider constituents, cause, content, control, context (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008) & consequences
- Leadership development is extremely important in organizational transformation and subsequently for better outcomes and sustainable change for families

Conclusion: Quick take-aways

- Child welfare reform continues to be necessary
- There are many competing agendas for reform
- Regardless of route for change, child welfare leadership is an extremely important element to successful reform
- Leadership development should target change management training, constructive organizational culture & worker empowerment
- Policy environment must be supportive