A Systems Approach

Approach
to Substance Use Services in Canada

CCSA · CCLAT
Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse
Centre canadien de lutte contre l'alcoolisme et les toxicomanies

Systems Approach Workbook

Change Management Module: **Background**

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Who should use the change management modules?

- Leaders and decision makers in the substance abuse and mental health services field, such as regional directors and program managers

- Anyone interested in learning more about a system-change approach to improving substance use and mental health services and supports

Why use the change management modules?

- Many people have difficulty accessing and navigating the current system

- The system is constantly evolving and is influenced by many factors

- The Tiered Model presented in *A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada: Recommendations for a National Treatment Strategy* provides an evidence-based framework to guide system change

- Taking a change management approach increases the efficiency and sustainability of system development

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Taking a Systems Approach: Background

Scenario:

The following example is provided to illustrate the context in which the Systems Approach Workbook might be helpful. The example develops throughout the change modules to help readers situate themselves in the process.

Staff, management and the media have recognized that there are gaps in substance use services and supports. Clients often have difficulty accessing services because they are not sure where to go for help. Inconsistent assessment and referral practices result in lost opportunities for earlier intervention. Both clients and service providers express frustration that they are unable to meet complex needs that often include housing, mental health and primary care.

Seeking out ways of improving the system, a regional director recalls hearing about a strategy developed for implementing a comprehensive continuum of care. However, the thought of embarking on a system-level change is daunting. What are the first steps?

The following section outlines the key considerations to be taken into account when taking the first steps toward implementing the recommendations found in *A Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada.* In the interest of consistency, the Systems Approach Workbook refers to change at the organizational level; however, the materials can also apply at the broader system level or even to a more specific practice change within an organization.

Regardless of the scope of change, the first stage of the process focuses on gathering information, developing a *rationale for change*,[1] and building awareness and support.

The Systems Approach involves building on what's already in place. The extent of change will vary depending on a range of factors and may be limited to building new partnerships between existing programs or developing new community outreach capacity. The tools in this workbook are designed to help regardless of the size and scope of the change or the system.

The change modules provide guidance according to five *change management* categories that leaders should consider throughout any change process: Context, Leadership, Communication, Outcomes and Benefits, and Individual Considerations.

Context

Understanding the current context is an important step before embarking on any change process. We work in a dynamic field; therefore, change does not mean moving from one static state to another, but adding new components or processes to ongoing development. At this point, a

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[1] See the Glossary for an explanation of italicized terms.

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context analysis should look at current processes and identify the areas of the organization that need improvement or that are working well.

A comprehensive *system map* is a useful tool to illustrate how existing services and partners align with the Systems Approach and to indicate where gaps need to be filled. The analysis should also look at whether or not there is a supportive environment in which to propose and undertake change. The rationale for change should help create that environment by explaining why improvements are needed and how to build on areas that are working well.

The analysis should consider both external and internal contextual issues, including:

- Organizational, local and jurisdictional politics;

- Resources, both financial and human;

- Parallel change processes (existing, planned or recently concluded);

- Organizational culture (i.e., the level of trust and support for innovation); and

- Existing and potential partnerships, both internal and external, at the organizational, system, community and client service levels.

Systems theory states that the degree of *complexity* should inform the approach to change. Identification and careful consideration of these issues will help with the development and success of a strategic implementation plan in later stages.

> **Workbook Toolbox**
> - Context Analysis Template
> - Mapping Substance Use Systems and Client Journeys
> - System Thinking and Complexity in Substance Use Systems

Leadership

Leadership at this stage in the process is about developing and promoting a rationale for change. Although a detailed plan is not yet necessary, organizational leadership should understand the Systems Approach's *guiding concepts* and the importance of taking an evidence-informed *change management* approach. Organizational documents such as strategic plans or mandates should be reviewed for consistency with the Systems Approach. Highlighting areas of consistency with these documents will highlight the fact that change is building on existing strengths.

Leadership is also responsible for ensuring that context, communication, outcomes, benefits and individual considerations are taken into account.

To promote engagement, the full team involved in coordination, management or supervision (as appropriate depending on level of implementation), as well as staff representation, should be involved with the development and approval of the rationale for change before it is presented to staff or brought forward for ministerial, board,

Workbook Toolbox

- Background: Developing a Systems Approach to Substance Use in Canada
- Developing a Continuum of Services and Supports
- Introducing a Resource for Improving Substance Use Systems and Services
- Effective Leadership

community or other appropriate approval. Engaging the support of the full team is important, as concerns that are not addressed now will threaten successful implementation later. Creating a safe environment for discussion at all levels and throughout the change process is an important leadership challenge.

> *Most definitions of* knowledge exchange *(KE) focus on its role in promoting multidirectional information sharing and collaboration between researchers, decision makers and practitioners. Adopting a KE approach is itself an example of an organizational change that aligns with the Systems Approach. KE is also a way to support change management, ensuring information is being exchanged in a meaningful way throughout the change process. For example, a KE strategy can facilitate the identification and application of lessons learned. The references at the end of this module provide a number of links to tools and information on KE.*

Communication

The focus at this stage is on establishing communication mechanisms that ensure information moves in all directions. Using these mechanisms will promote dialogue and ensure consistent information flow. Communication is an important tool in developing an atmosphere of trust and transparency. The first step in effective communication is ensuring leadership shares a common understanding of the Systems Approach and its guiding concepts, and of the reasons for the proposed change. Developing a *communications plan* will promote this common understanding.

Common messages will help to ensure consistent information is provided to staff, partners and senior decision makers. Mixed or inconsistent messages can result in confusion and a loss of confidence. Effective communication is also important in building engagement. Identifying benefits and goals, even at a preliminary stage, answers the important question of "why are we doing this?" Being open and realistic about the process and anticipated obstacles builds trust.

The most important principle in planning communications is that there should be no surprises. The approval of *senior decision makers* is generally required before starting the process; they should also be kept apprised throughout the process. Staff should be informed and updated in a timely way, not just in a top-down manner but through representation in the implementation process itself.

Staff communication at this stage should outline why change is being considered, and provide information about the Systems Approach and its use as a framework

Workbook Toolbox

- Developing a Communications Plan
- Communications Tools

to guide change. Creating dialogue with staff in the development of the rationale for change can promote engagement and ensure that staff perspectives are reflected.

Outcomes and Benefits

Identifying concrete outcomes and benefits early in the process establishes goals to work toward. Using the Systems Approach to guide change could lead to the following benefits, categorized according to the time frame in which they would appear.

- Short-term benefits:
    - o Better understanding of the current system;
    - o Increased communication between people and organizations across the system; and
    - o Greater consensus on goals and priorities.

- Intermediate benefits:
    - o Increased partnerships and coordination between services; and
    - o Increased capacity to identify and address gaps in the service continuum.

- Long-term benefits:
    - o Increased use of evidence-based practice;
    - o Increased access to services; and
    - o Improved client outcomes.

To ensure relevance, benefits and outcomes should be informed by and matched to existing mandates, goals and workplans. Identifying desired outcomes at this stage will also support the development of a project *logic model* and evaluation framework as the project moves ahead.

Because all change takes time, the timelines established to achieve outcomes should be realistic. Timelines are also often influenced by external factors, which means that change being implemented in a complex context will need to take into consideration the impact of other organizational or system-level events and processes.

> **Workbook Toolbox**
> - Mapping Substance Use Systems and Client Journeys

Individual Considerations

Fundamentally, the use of the Systems Approach and its guiding concepts is intended to provide a framework that best builds on and supports the skills, experiences and talents of frontline staff. Staff involvement is therefore a key part of the process from the beginning.

Addressing individual-level concerns at the background stage is important in establishing trust as the project moves ahead. Some degree of uncertainty can be expected given that plans are in development and concrete information is not always available. Taking effective action in the other four areas of consideration (context, leadership, communication, and outcomes and benefits) will, however, make a tremendous difference in building trust.

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- Looking at past or ongoing change experiences in the **context analysis** will illustrate whether to expect *change fatigue*.

- Coordinated **leadership** within the organization will ensure a consistent approach, reducing confusion and uncertainty.

- Open, multidirectional **communication** promotes opportunities to hear and address individual issues.

- High-level and short-term **benefits** that are realistic and relevant at the individual level provide incentive and direction. Support for evidence-based practice is a strong predictor of engagement in the change process.

Although the rationale for change will focus on organizational-level issues, each aspect of change will have impacts on individuals. Staff should be involved in identifying the anticipated impacts of using the Systems Approach. Although many of these impacts will be positive, some may cause concern. For example, achieving the outcome of increased collaboration will involve time-management concerns for clinicians with busy caseloads. These concerns provide opportunities for discussion. Open dialogue on concerns throughout the process is key in proactively addressing challenges.

Individual interaction between leadership, staff and partners provides the opportunity to discuss concerns raised at the group level in greater detail. Interaction at this level also provides the opportunity to identify and address concerns specific to the individual, such as self-confidence and personal experience with previous system changes. Later stages of the process will look to further develop leadership throughout the organization, which will be supported by fostering individual engagement right from the start.

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Discussion Questions

The following list of discussion questions is intended as a tool to promote dialogue on key components of the implementation process; there are no right or wrong answers.

Question	Considerations
1. Why is it important to change systems or services at this time? For example, what needs are you looking to meet?	Reasons can be at the broad system level or specific to the change being considered. Considerations may include population gaps or resource realignment. A *SWOT analysis* may be a helpful tool.
2. What change(s) are you planning?	Having a simple, focused, explanation is invaluable in getting your point across. For example: "We are introducing a standardized intake assessment tool."
3. What are the primary goals, objectives and vision for the change? How do these fit into the goals, objectives and vision of your organization?	Clear, measurable goals are important when communicating with staff and project partners. The Systems Approach's guiding concepts provide goals for a client-oriented continuum of services.

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Question	Considerations
4. What aspects of the Systems Approach will be useful in supporting the change process?	The Systems Approach provides a framework that can be used to guide change. Determine which components you'd like to start with, one step at a time.
5. What are the commonalities between the Systems Approach's guiding concepts and your own organizational guiding documents such as strategic directions, mandate or objectives?	Making the link between your guiding documents and the Systems Approach's guiding concepts will demonstrate why the Systems Approach might be a valuable tool.
6. Are there any gaps or inconsistencies between the change being considered in your system and the guiding concepts in the Systems Approach? If so, how might the change being considered address these gaps?	Keep in mind that while the Systems Approach is intended to be flexible, its guiding concepts should underlie any system or service development.

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Question	Considerations
7. Is there currently knowledge exchange capacity available? If so, how can it be leveraged to support the change?	A broad range of <u>knowledge exchange</u> mechanisms can be helpful in the change process; for example *communities of practice* to facilitate uptake.
8. Think of other changes that have taken place in the organization or region. What worked well? What challenges were encountered?	Frequent change can be disruptive. Building on and learning from past experience will help the process and demonstrate connection to the organization.
9. Who are the key groups or people involved in the proposed change? For example, who is • leading (e.g., province, regional management, organization) • approving (e.g., regional director, senior management) • implementing (e.g., management, staff) • impacted (e.g., clients)	Each of the various groups will have different perspectives on the change process, including roles, concerns, objectives and communication needs.

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Question	Considerations
10. Who will be the point person or people for communication with each of the groups identified in Question 9?	A consistent contact makes communication easier for everyone.
11. What are the key messages about the change you would communicate to each group at this stage? (Three key messages should be manageable.)	Pulling out key messages provides focus and consistency. Ensure that communications address questions of "what's in it for me?" and "how will this affect me?".
12. Still thinking about the key groups listed above, identify one benefit or outcome of the change that will be particularly important to each.	Different groups will be motivated by different outcomes. Identifying these motivations will help to understand different perspectives and guide communications.

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Question	Considerations
13. What are the key challenges and opportunities presented by the change process?	Be specific. Don't just say "financial resources," elaborate on what the money is needed for and where it will come from. Don't just say "staff resistance," explain the type of resistance and why there is resistance. Consider the key groups and their roles and perspectives
14. What are some preliminary strategies that might be used to address the challenges identified?	Building on existing strengths provides both recognition of work done to date and a connection between the existing context and proposed change.

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Summary Checklist

This checklist is intended as an opportunity to "check in" and ensure key considerations and activities appropriate to the background stage have been accounted for. The list below is intended to be comprehensive but flexible; that is, not all items will apply in all situations. However, ensuring that as many of the boxes below are checked off as possible will make moving on to the preparation stage easier.

☐   Change leaders have a basic understanding of the Systems Approach and the guiding concepts underlying the Tiered Model.

☐   Organizational leadership is on board with using the Systems Approach to guide development and change.

☐   A basic awareness of the Systems Approach and the guiding concepts has been promoted within the organization or jurisdiction.

☐   A context analysis has been performed.

☐   Possible approaches to change management have been reviewed.

☐   There is a fit between organizational mandates and objectives, and the Systems Approach and its guiding concepts.

☐   A rationale for change has been drafted.

☐   Intended short-, medium- and long-term outcomes have been identified

☐   Past organizational experiences with change have been reviewed for lessons learned.

☐   Senior management recognizes the need for change.

☐   Organizational leadership recognizes the need for change.

☐   Staff members recognize the need for change.

☐   Organizational communication mechanisms supporting multidirectional communication have been identified.

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[2] The purpose of this reference list is to provide a range of options for additional information and ideas. References have been identified by both CCSA and project partners. Some of the references listed are proprietary. Inclusion in this list does not indicate CCSA endorsement. Categories are for ease of reference and are not mutually exclusive; for example, most references under Leadership are also relevant to Change Management.

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Leadership

The Ivey Business Journal (www.iveybusinessjournal.com) provides a number of full-text articles on leadership, management, organizational and other relevant issues, primarily from a private business perspective but presenting concepts that apply in the non-profit sector as well. Examples include *Transformational performance-based leadership: Addressing non-routine adaptive challenges* (Granger & Hanover, 2012) and *Developing leadership character* (Crossan, Gandz & Seijts, 2012).

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The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) website (http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/about_apropos/evaluation/resources-eng.php) provides access to a program evaluation toolkit and a guide to project evaluation, as well as information about PHAC's own data collection and evaluation initiatives.

Suggestions?

We'd like to add to this list to provide a more diverse list of resource materials. If there are any information sources that you have found particularly useful, please let us know!
Send your suggestions to systems@ccsa.ca.

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