

Santa Clara County's Social Services Agency: A Review of the Supervisor Engagement and Development Series (SEADS)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Studies have shown that employee engagement and retention are directly linked to the relationship between an employee and an employee's supervisor, as well as the organization's dedication to providing opportunities for staff growth and development. The correlation between professional and leadership development, trust, and staff engagement is widely acknowledged in organizational research. The objective of this case study is to dissect the impactful elements of Santa Clara County Social Service Agency's Supervisor Engagement and Development Series (SEADS) program and examine the feasibility of a SEADS program for the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA). The desired outcome for SFHSA is to support supervisors to become leaders whom employees want to mirror. We hypothesize that if we focus on supporting the growth and development of supervisors, then we will increase employee engagement and retention. This paper will also review how the SEADS program meets the needs of the SFHSA's three programs: Family Children's Services, In-Home Supportive Services, and Human Resources.

Introduction

In today's dynamic work environment, employees prioritize career advancement, leadership enhancement, and opportunities for engagement. This case study delves into the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) Supervisor Engagement and Development Series (SEADS), initiated in the spring of 2023. The program emerged from insights gathered through an agency-wide staff climate survey, revealing a desire among staff for increased career development, leadership exposure, and avenues for engagement. This model aims to cultivate a culture of trust by empowering participants to lead themselves effectively. Through a cohort-based blended learning model, the training program fosters an environment of collaboration amongst supervisors. Santa Clara County answered the call from internal agency stakeholders with a dynamic program with the intent to support employees who have promoted to supervisors in order to understand their role as well as how they fit into the bigger picture of the agency culture and well-being. Being a supervisor is more than supervising assigned staff. Being a supervisor includes being a role model and collaborator, where individual values harmonize with core values. Santa Clara County recognized the need to develop a leadership program that would offer personal leadership awareness, growth, and messaging and communication development. The SEADS program is intended primarily to help new supervisors gain the tools necessary for their new role, but all supervisors are encouraged to attend since they can benefit from this community of learning.

Central to the SEADS program are monthly meetings held on the second Thursday of each month. These meetings focus on designated topics such as Leading Your Team Through Change, All About

Feedback, and Supporting Supervisors with the Employee Relations Program. A trainer or guest speaker leads each session, allowing ample time for questions and discussion. Additionally, the program provides a dedicated SharePoint site that houses resources from past meetings and information about upcoming sessions. Supervisors also have access to a menu of online courses organized by identified supervisory competencies through the learning management system. Since its inception in July 2023, the SEADS program has successfully cultivated a unique and supportive community for supervisors across the agency, enabling them to learn from each other and grow professionally.

SFHSA Supervisory Training

Transitioning into a supervisory role can be a daunting experience, as individuals move from being individual contributors to overseeing the work of others. While many supervisors are promoted based on their outstanding performance in frontline roles, they often find themselves facing new responsibilities without adequate support or guidance. SFHSA currently offers mandatory training for all new supervisors and managers called 24 Plus for Supervisors and Managers. The training covers critical topics such as self-management and basic models of supervision, including situational leadership and coaching performance. Participants also learn how to administer SFHSA policies and procedures, set expectations, and provide feedback using the SFHSA performance planning and appraisal process, as well as addressing performance and conduct issues. However, this is a one-time training with no follow-up coaching or support.

The 24 Plus course for Supervisors and Managers is meticulously designed to meet

the specific needs of leaders within SFHSA. Participants engage in hands-on learning experiences covering essential topics such as Models of Supervision and Self-Management, incorporating a personal assessment tool, such as the Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Conscientiousness (DiSC) to help improve teamwork and communication and the Situational Leadership II (Blanchard SLII). Trainers also cover coaching, giving feedback, recognition techniques, and familiarization with SFHSA's Policies and Procedures. This comprehensive training also addresses Performance Improvement Plans (PIP), documentation, reasonable accommodations, and progressive discipline, thus ensuring effective management of authority. Performance management at SFHSA is anchored in competency modeling, aligning employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and values with organizational goals. By identifying core competencies, we leverage them as a cornerstone for staff development through competency-based tools, training, and resources. All course materials are easily accessible through a dedicated SharePoint site, supplemented by Success Roadmaps & Trainings to further support supervisors in their leadership journey.

Human Resources

The Human Resources (HR) department at SFHSA plays a multifaceted role in managing the agency's personnel administration, overseeing critical areas such as Employee and Labor Relations (ELR), Health & Safety, Operations, Learning and Organizational Development (L&OD), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB), Payroll, Talent Acquisition, Assessments, and Classifications. With a workforce of around 70 employees supporting over 2,400 agency

staff, HR ensures the smooth functioning of these essential functions.

In-Home Supportive Services

The City and County of San Francisco's In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program provides in-home caregiver services. The primary goal of IHSS is to allow consumers to live safely in their own homes and avoid out-of-home placements. Consumers vary in age but are often 65 years or older, medically compromised, experience physical and/or mental disabilities, are ethnically/culturally diverse, and require in-home assistance to perform and maintain their Activities of Daily Life. As one of the largest programs within SFHSA, IHSS employs approximately 118 Social Workers/28 Independent Provider Assistance Center (IPAC) Techs/6 Quality Assurance Staff/11 Clerks and 26 Supervisors to provide services to over 27,000 recipients.

Family and Children's Services

Family and Children's Services (FCS) provides child welfare services that promote safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families residing in San Francisco. Protective Service Workers (PSWs) perform professional investigation and case management. In this role, PSWs engage with our most vulnerable children, youth, and families to assess safety and risk, develop case plans, and coordinate services. FCS collaborates with community agencies to provide needed services for families including substance abuse services, childcare, visitation, and transportation, among other services. The primary goal for FCS is to keep families together safely, whenever possible, and if a child must be removed and placed into foster care, to work collaboratively with the family to reunify or to find a permanent home for the child. As

of July 1, 2023, San Francisco's population was recorded at 848,019, with 16.7% under the age of 18, an increase from July 1, 2022, where the population was recorded at 808,000 with 13.7% under the age of 18. Protective Service Workers (PSWs) investigate an average of 133 referral families a month, open around 500 cases per year, and manage a current open caseload of 929 families. We had 637 youth in care on 7/4/23. We have seen that go up over the last year. As the youth and family population increases, the number of PSW staff decreases. Currently, we have a 29% vacancy rate for PSWs.

The Need for SEADS at SFHSA

Participating and offering the SEADS program at SFHSA offers several distinct advantages. First, it provides supervisors with invaluable networking opportunities, allowing them to connect and build relationships with their peers. Second, learning alongside colleagues serves as an effective method for comprehending complex concepts and encourages employees to feel more motivated in tackling challenges. Additionally, by advertising topics in advance, participants can prepare questions or challenges, promoting active engagement during meetings. Notably, SEADS has covered a range of pertinent topics for supervisors, such as "Building the Foundation for Effective Supervision," and "Supporting Supervisors: Leveraging the Employee Relations Program," among other pertinent topics. What sets the SEADS program apart from other training is the ongoing support for supervisors. The sessions are held monthly on the same date and time, so supervisors can plan ahead to attend, or just attend the topics that most interest them. Although the SEADS program has not been fully evaluated yet, supervisors continue to

attend even though the program is not mandatory.

At SFHSA, new and seasoned supervisors in FCS and IHSS request ongoing training and coaching on a variety of topics. At FCS, trainers provide some support in providing cheat sheets for what to do when onboarding a new employee, timelines for court reports, and checklists for transferring cases between functions, but internal ongoing training is not available. At IHSS, training for new supervisors is not available, outside of what is offered by SFHSA. HR provides coaching to supervisors and managers whenever there are possible disciplinary issues or if a staff person needs a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). HR coaches staff through these processes. Often supervisors in FCS and IHSS are not well trained in HR processes. With the SEADS program, supervisors from FCS, IHSS, and other programs at SFHSA will receive training on topics that supervisors deal with on a daily basis, such as HR issues as well as How to Transfer a Case Effectively, What Happens in Supervision, Reflective Supervision, and other topics supervisors request. Similar to the SEADS program in the Santa Clara County Social Service Agency, we hope to increase supervisors' knowledge, skills, abilities, confidence, and engagement, in turn creating an environment for staff that fosters growth and positive relationships.

Analysis

Alignment with Organizational Needs The SEADS program aligns closely with the identified needs of supervisors within SFHSA. Current offerings lack ongoing support and fail to provide a platform for peer learning and problem-solving, which is crucial for supervisors transitioning into leadership roles. SEADS addresses this gap by offering monthly meetings, online resources, and opportunities for supervisors

to connect, share experiences, and enhance their supervisory competencies.

Impact on Employee Engagement and Retention: Research consistently demonstrates the significant impact of supervisor support and professional development on employee engagement and retention. By providing supervisors with the tools and resources needed to effectively lead their teams, SEADS is expected to increase job satisfaction and decrease turnover rates within SFHSA. Peer learning and networking opportunities offered by SEADS foster a supportive community, enhancing supervisors' confidence and competence, which translates into a more engaged and motivated workforce.

Comparison with Similar Programs: A comparison of the 24 Plus training provided to SFHSA Supervisors to Santa Clara County's SEADS reveals common success factors and best practices. Both programs emphasize ongoing support, peer learning, and targeted skill development for supervisors. However, the differences are ongoing support for supervisors, opportunities for peer learning, and targeted skill development during the SEADS program's monthly group sessions. By leveraging insights from successful initiatives like the SEADS program, SFHSA can adopt proven strategies and tailor them to meet the agency's unique needs and challenges.

Resource Requirements: Implementing the SEADS program will require adequate financial, human, and technological resources. A new team within the Employee Labor Relations team, the People Support team, led by Felix Caraballo will be in charge of implementing the SEADS at SFHSA. The People Support team at SFHSA is committed to fostering a supportive and empowered work environment for all staff, supervisors, and

managers within the organization. We achieve this by providing comprehensive resources, targeted training programs, personalized coaching sessions, regular 1-on-1 consultations, accessible staff office hours, and more. Our primary focus revolves around enhancing the Supportive Supervision toolkit resources and training/development initiatives, ensuring that all staff, supervisors, and managers have the tools and support they need to manage their work effectively. Through these efforts, we aim to cultivate a culture of empowerment at all levels of the Agency.

Financial and staff resources will be needed for program development, training materials, and facilitation. Human Resources, including collaborating with staff in Learning & Organizational Development is essential for organizing meetings, sending reminder emails, creating flyers, tracking registration, generating topic ideas, finding speakers, reviewing evaluation data, and managing online resources for program delivery. The Workforce Development Team (WFDT) for FCS will also provide resources, including assistance with developing topic ideas and finding speakers. Additionally, technological infrastructure for hosting virtual meetings and managing online resources is crucial for ensuring accessibility and engagement among participants. Whether or not there will be a dedicated staff person to manage a SEADS program at SFHSA is unknown at this time.

Measurement of Success: Success metrics for the SEADS program can include changes in supervisor competency levels, improvements in employee satisfaction scores, and reductions in turnover rates. Regular feedback from participants, coupled with quantitative data, will help evaluate the program's effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. By establishing clear evaluation criteria, SFHSA can track

progress and make data-driven decisions to optimize the program's impact over time. One way to measure the success of the program is to survey supervisors before beginning the program, six months into the program and every 6 months thereafter, as well as request participants complete a short 2-3 question survey after each session.

Sustainability and Scalability: Ensuring the long-term sustainability and scalability of the SEADS program requires careful planning and investment. SFHSA can explore opportunities for securing ongoing funding, building internal capacity for program management and delivery, and expanding the program to reach a broader audience of supervisors within the Agency. The program at SFHSA will not be mandatory, so marketing is essential to encourage participation in the program and sustain the participation numbers. To sustain this program at SFHSA, there should be a dedicated person who assists with marketing tasks, such as monthly email reminders to all supervisors and their managers, announces the topic of the month, tracks registration numbers to assess whether more marketing is needed and reviews the evaluation data. Also, and as important, SFHSA would need to generate monthly topic ideas relevant to and of interest to supervisors.

Recommendation

Given the success of the SEADS program and SFHSA's needs, we recommend implementing a SEADS program for supervisors at SFHSA. The goal of the program at SFHSA will be similar to Santa Clara County's SEADS program. The goal is to increase the competency of supervisors by creating a learning community and give supervisors the opportunity to meet, connect, and learn from one another. We believe the program will help supervisors learn to problem solve, connect with their staff, and increase their supervisory

competencies. The desired outcomes are higher job satisfaction and greater retention of staff.

Retention of staff is imperative to offering support and crucial services to some of San Francisco's most vulnerable populations. In addition to retirements, non-retirement separations have increased since the 2020 pandemic. This decline is especially notable, as the total of the City and County of San Francisco's workforce has dropped in absolute numbers since the end of Fiscal Year 2020. These trends indicate a workforce that is leaving city government employment for reasons that could include cheaper housing, a shorter commute, a higher salary in the private sector, or a career change. It is difficult to improve retention without an adequate understanding of these reasons, which would require conducting consistent exit interview surveys for non-retirement separations, and ongoing stay interviews. Nevertheless, it is clear from the Department of Human Resources reports that the City's pace of hiring is unable to keep up with increasing separation rates. (Civil Grand Jury Report, 2023, pg 15).

In IHSS, the turnover of one social worker would require a reassignment of approximately 200-280 recipients as well as distributing an average of eight new intake cases per month to the remaining Social Workers. This would significantly impact the workload of the remaining Social Workers as well as negatively impact IHSS's ability to meet State and County mandatory requirements. Similarly, the loss of a supervisor would mean a significant increase in workload and supervision responsibilities for the remaining supervisors (e.g., turnover of an IPAC Supervisor would mean redistributing seven IPAC staff to the remaining IPAC Supervisors).

For FCS, the impact is similar. When one PSW leaves the agency or goes out on leave for any reason, their assigned caseload has to be reassigned, which usually consists of a caseload of 14-16 families. When a family is reassigned to a new worker, it negatively impacts the outcome of the case. The newly assigned PSW has to take the time to familiarize themselves with the case history, current status of the case, and must establish rapport with the family to build trust. Often, reassignment during the life of the case delays a permanent outcome for the family. When a PSW does not have a supportive or knowledgeable supervisor, the same could occur. Supervisors must provide supportive supervision that fosters trust between them and their staff.

Various factors are related to staff turnover and include employee engagement and workplace culture (Gallup Poll, 2023). An important but often overlooked mediating factor is the role of the supervisor. "Supervision is the critical front line of culture shaping because it is where employees consistently build trust and receive input that has the most direct impact on their contribution and satisfaction at work" (Vaughn et. al., 2022). It is crucial to provide supervisors with appropriate support and training focused on skills that will foster an environment of trust, respect, communication, and engagement within the workplace. This is important for staff recruitment and retention, as well as providing supervisors with the necessary tools to be effective. Due to the increased

turnover of staff, new supervisors are being onboarded and are a good target audience for the SEADS program. Recognizing this challenge, the SEADS program would be a good addition to supervisor training at SFHSA. We believe that providing ongoing support to supervisors will in turn create happy supervisors, which in turn will have happier staff who feel supported by their supervisors. It is a parallel process. We recommend that SFHSA take on this model to establish comprehensive support for supervisory staff.

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