

Strengthening Public Health Departments through Process Improvement: Findings from the Common Ground Evaluation

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June 28, 2010

Funder: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Project Officer: Brenda Henry, PhD, MPH

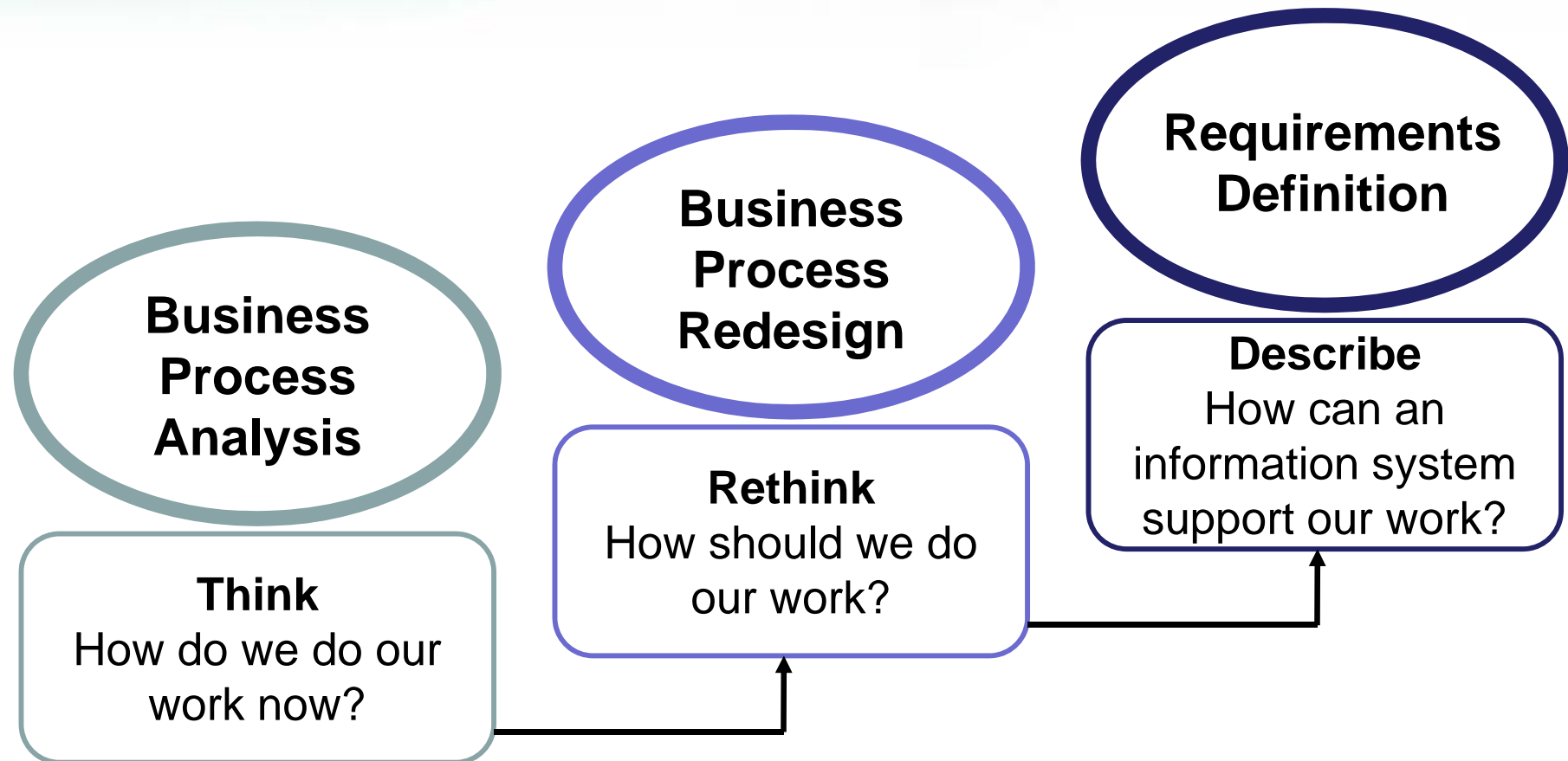
The Need for Process Improvement in Public Health

- The role of health departments:
 - Address population health through disease surveillance, immunizations, health education, preparedness planning, etc.
- The challenges:
 - Health departments are disparately organized
 - Lack of standardization in programs and processes
 - Barriers to information sharing
- The need:
 - Standard models and practices to improve performance

Common Ground: Transforming Public Health Information Systems

- Three-year, \$15 million RWJF initiative
- Uses process improvement methods from the informatics field
- Four-year independent evaluation
 - Did the grantees accomplish the program goals?
 - What were the grantees' experiences?
 - What is the perceived impact of Common Ground on public health agencies?
 - What is the potential for replication of Common Ground?

Common Ground Methodology



Source: Public Health Informatics Institute. (2006). *Taking Care of Business: A Collaboration to Define Local Health Department Business Processes*. Decatur, GA: Public Health Informatics Institute.

Common Ground Grantee Processes

- Data collection and management
- Appointments and referrals
- Community health assessment
- Epidemiological research
- Implementation of public health interventions
- Risk communication
- Electronic medical records
- Coordination of community partners
- Post-preparedness event analysis

Evaluation Methods

- Qualitative Methods
 - Document reviews
 - Focus groups
 - Telephone interviews
 - Site visits
- Quantitative Methods
 - Post-initiative surveys
 - Analysis of health department characteristics

Preliminary Findings: *Benefits to Grantees*

- Improved understanding of overall operations and processes
- Increased collaboration with internal and external stakeholders
 - Between different departmental divisions such as public health and IT
 - Between state and local health departments
- Culture change
- Preparing agencies for health department accreditation

Preliminary Findings: *Implementation Challenges*

- External forces and competing demands
 - Budget shortfalls (economic downturn 2008)
 - H1N1 (2009)
- Lack of buy-in from staff
- Technical terminology
 - “Business” language
- Steep learning curve

Preliminary Findings: *Lessons Learned*

- Leadership/management buy-in is important
- Grantees tied Common Ground to a compelling agency issue to secure staff buy-in
- All stakeholders need to be involved
- Emerging issues may offer opportunities for performance improvement as processes are less entrenched

Summary and Implications for Public Health Practice

- Common Ground funding provided the impetus for grantees to think about their processes
- Methodology may be a tool to help agencies to engage in quality improvement and prepare for accreditation
- Products/ methodology may be useful for other agencies
- Implementation in other agencies may be resource intensive

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