

Organizational Culture in TANF Offices: A Review of the Literature



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Overview

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency by providing cash assistance and promoting job preparation, work, marriage, and two-parent families. States receive block grants from the federal government to design and operate TANF cash assistance programs in addition to other benefits and services that promote these goals. Given the flexibility of TANF, states vary in how they implement their TANF programs locally. In addition to local policies and procedures, the organizational culture of local TANF offices may also affect how TANF policies are implemented and how staff and clients experience the program. Aside from the robust literature focused on theoretical approaches to defining, measuring, or assessing organizational culture, generally, and on some qualitative studies examining organizational culture's role in local TANF programs following welfare reform in 1996, specifically, little has been documented since about what TANF agencies have done more recently to promote or change their organizational cultures to support positive outcomes for clients, staff, and agencies.

This literature review is part of the Understanding Poverty: TANF Office Culture study sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The study includes site visits to local TANF programs to identify promising practices and to understand how agencies have implemented efforts to improve organizational culture.

Purpose

The purpose of this review is to summarize relevant literature describing the role that organizational culture plays in the delivery of TANF services and its implications for clients' and frontline workers' experiences. The review informs fieldwork for the Understanding Poverty: TANF Office Culture study, which aims to identify and describe "exemplars" of TANF organizational culture, that is agencies whose processes and practices align with ones the literature associates with positive client and staff experiences. It also identifies successful strategies human services offices have undertaken to change their organizational culture.

Primary Research Questions

This review summarizes the research literature as it applies to the following key questions:

1. What is the day-to-day influence of the various agencies' organizational cultures on clients and frontline workers?
2. What are exemplars of productive client-oriented office settings and organizational processes and culture?
3. Are there TANF offices that have made conscious attempts at organizational culture change and how have they approached this process? How have agencies and offices evaluated the effects of these changes?

Methods

The research team prioritized peer-reviewed articles and books to explore the theoretical foundations of organizational culture and studies assessing its effect in TANF offices or other

contexts. Additionally, the review includes discussion of non-academic research reports that document applied studies of organizational culture in human services programs. Although this study focuses on organizational culture in TANF offices, the review discusses the implications for TANF office culture of a much broader literature, including studies of organizational culture in the private sector and in other public-sector programs.

Key Findings

This review identifies factors associated with a positive organizational culture and the potential implications for service delivery, staff, and client experiences. It also draws on broader work exploring organizational culture in other public-sector settings as well as relevant literature on organizational culture in the private sector.

- **Defining organizational culture.** No consistent or standardized approach is taken among researchers to measure and analyze organizational culture, but the literature suggests organizational culture can be understood as *a durable set of behavioral expectations or norms that guides individuals' actions within an organization and affects how individuals outside the organization interact with the organization.*
- **Positive organizational culture.** Facets of an agency's organizational culture that can facilitate positive agency, staff, and client experiences include:
 1. Linking goals of local offices and agencies to broader organizational policies and goals;
 2. Defining and regularly monitoring clear outcomes and performance measures focused on positive client outcomes;
 3. Designing client-centered office environments to promote comfort and process transparency;
 4. Designing workflows that are intuitive and not overly labor-intensive; and
 5. Fostering innovation at all levels by decentralizing decision making and giving frontline staff autonomy to exercise discretion.
- **Strategies for organizational culture change.** Agencies interested in changing their organizational cultures can use organizational cultural assessment tools to diagnose deeply held values and beliefs, broad and frequent communication of new and shared visions with staff to increase buy-in and the collective commitment to change, and discrete benchmarks to monitor organizational culture change progress.
- **Empirical evidence from organizational culture change efforts.** Human services agencies typically aim to change organizational culture by changing staff behavior. The literature also contains examples of agencies that have streamlined and redesigned business processes to make service delivery more efficient and accessible while promoting an overall culture of client service. Despite growing research on explicit efforts by agencies to change their organizational cultures, limited empirical evidence exists of the effects of efforts to change organizational culture in TANF offices. A small number of studies have shown positive results related to efficiency in service delivery, client well-being and benefit receipt, staff morale and retention, and overall agency performance.

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-The Authors

I. Introduction

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. Established in 1996 by the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), TANF replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. States receive block grants to design and operate programs that aim to accomplish the four purposes of the TANF program:

1. Provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes
2. Reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage
3. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies
4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families

States, tribes, and U.S. territories receive federal TANF block grant funding to administer TANF programs. Given the flexibility of TANF, states vary in how they implement their TANF programs. Examples of this variation include the amount of cash assistance provided to families, the lifetime limit on the number of months a family may receive cash assistance, and the TANF agency's organizational structure. This programmatic variation also includes processes through which clients apply for services or the way in which clients meet with program staff. This variation has implications for TANF implementation, staff experiences, and client experiences. Additionally, states vary widely in how they allocate TANF funds across programs designed to accomplish each of the four purposes of TANF.

In addition to varying policies and procedures, the organizational culture of local TANF offices might also affect how TANF policies are implemented and how clients experience the program. This review summarizes relevant literature describing the role that organizational culture plays in human services agencies, focusing on TANF service delivery and the relationship between organizational culture and the experiences of TANF clients and staff.

Researchers have long studied the role that organizational culture plays in the operation of public agencies. Attention to the role that organizational culture plays in public assistance agencies, specifically, is somewhat limited but was most pronounced in the period following the passage of PRWORA in the late 1990s and early 2000s. PRWORA represented a notable shift in how the federal government funded welfare programs, the level of control states had in operating their programs, as well as the goals and priorities for welfare agencies.

This shift in goals and priorities included emphasizing 1) the temporary nature of cash welfare programs through time limits; and 2) compliance with work participation requirements to support families' transition to self-sufficiency through employment. This shift placed an increased emphasis on the delivery of employment services and an imperative to increase participation in work activities and limit families' time on TANF. Following PRWORA, scholars studied TANF's implementation, including the way in which organizational culture contributed to or inhibited this implementation.

Compared to research into the role of organizational culture in welfare programs following PRWORA's passage in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the literature provides limited research

since then focused on more recent efforts that TANF agencies have made to purposefully promote organizational cultures supporting effective implementation of TANF programs. This literature review discusses relevant research on the relationship between organizational culture and TANF implementation. It also discusses what the implications of efforts to change organizational culture have been for clients, frontline staff, and the agency as a whole.

The purpose of this literature review is twofold. First, the review summarizes relevant literature describing the role that organizational culture plays in TANF service delivery and the implications for clients' and frontline workers' experiences. Second, it informs a larger study on TANF office culture, which seeks to identify and describe exemplars of TANF organizational culture as well as successful strategies human services offices have undertaken to improve their organizational culture.¹

The Understanding Poverty: TANF Office Culture study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the day-to-day influence of the various agencies' organizational cultures on clients and frontline workers?
- What are exemplars of productive client-oriented office settings and organizational processes and culture?
- Are there TANF offices that have made conscious attempts at organizational culture change and how have they approached this process? How have agencies and offices evaluated the effects of these changes?

Key Contributions

Aside from the theoretical literature focused on approaches to defining, measuring, or assessing organizational culture and some descriptions of organizational culture in state and local TANF programs, little research has described the characteristics of positive organizational cultures in the TANF setting, specifically.

Moreover, with some exceptions, little research has focused on states and localities that have actively sought to change their organizational cultures in support of improved client outcomes.

This review summarizes relevant literature on the relationship between organizational culture and staff and client experiences in the TANF program and studies of explicit efforts to change organizational culture. It identifies key facets of organizational culture in TANF agencies that can reinforce positive agency, staff, and client outcomes. These facets include how TANF agencies define their goals, measure their progress toward these goals, empower staff to provide services aligned with client needs, and develop client-centered processes and physical spaces.

¹ The TANF Office Culture Study is a sub-study of the *Understanding Poverty* project, which is funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. More information about the study can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/understanding-poverty-up-childhood-and-family-experiences-and-tanf-office-culture>

These characteristics of positive organizational cultures drive subsequent study tasks, including identifying state and local programs that exemplify aspects of a positive organizational culture for fieldwork in these sites.

Literature Review Structure

This review provides the reader with a brief overview of relevant general organizational culture research. It is not an exhaustive review of the organizational culture literature. Instead, it focuses on studies, both theoretical and empirical, that can inform an understanding of the role of organizational culture in TANF programs, a key focus of the Understanding Poverty: TANF Office Culture study.

The review is organized into the following sections:

- **Theoretical Foundations of Organizational Culture.** This section defines organizational culture, discusses approaches to measuring or assessing organizational culture, and discusses its theoretical foundations in the public- and private-sector literature.
- **Organizational Culture in TANF Offices: Factors That Influence Client and Staff Experiences.** This section reviews studies examining the relationship between organizational culture and client and staff experiences, including factors associated with a positive organizational culture for them.
- **Efforts to Change Organizational Culture in Human Services Programs.** This section discusses strategies most associated with effective, sustained culture- change efforts, including empirical evidence from evaluations of intentional culture change initiatives in the human services sphere.
- **Conclusions.** This section identifies characteristics associated with a positive organizational culture for staff and clients, discusses strategies organizations can use to change their organizational culture to a more positive culture, and identifies what factors might affect the extent to which organizations fully adopt and embrace the goals of these culture change efforts.

Methodology for Study Selection

This literature review draws from a diverse set of research on organizational culture. It discusses foundational, theoretical studies that have framed much of the subsequent organizational culture research as well as more recent research that has re-evaluated this literature, focused on the study of organizational culture in specific settings, or explored efforts to influence and change organizational culture. The review focuses on organizational culture in TANF offices. However, it also draws on a much broader literature, including studies of organizational culture in the private sector and in non-TANF public-sector programs.

The review took a multipronged approach to identify relevant research within the following parameters.

- **Peer-reviewed articles and books.** The research team prioritized peer-reviewed journal articles and books published by academic presses. Peer review and publication in academic presses indicate review and vetting by other recognized experts within the

authors' respective academic disciplines. These studies were identified through searches in academic research databases and Google Scholar.²

- **Non-academic research reports.** Although academics have explored the implications of organizational culture for human services delivery, particularly in the years following welfare reform, this research is relatively limited. Much of the most applied work documenting the relationship between organizational culture and client and staff experiences in human services programs has been conducted for government agencies and foundations by private research firms. These studies were selectively included, emphasizing ones that most directly address key issues discussed in this review along with others cited in the academic literature.
- **Emphasis on research published between 1996 and 2017.** The passage of welfare reform in 1996 presented an opportunity for scholars of social services, public administration, and organizational culture to study how public agencies responded to a significant policy change. This opportunity catalyzed a renewed interest in organizational culture in human services programs, and it remains relevant to the current study of organizational culture in TANF offices. However, given the long lineage of research on organizational culture, this review includes selected earlier studies most commonly cited in the literature as foundational to the study of organizational culture.

II. Theoretical Foundations of Organizational Culture

Scholars have defined organizational culture in different ways throughout the years, and researchers have not taken a consistent or standardized approach to measure and analyze it. However, some common themes have emerged in how scholars understand the concept as well as what organizational culture can theoretically affect within and outside an organization. The remainder of this review looks at what organizational culture is, what it does, and how it can be assessed.

What is organizational culture? Deal and Kennedy (1982) describe organizational culture as a system of shared beliefs and values that underscore the informal, often unspoken, aspects of organizational life. They describe it, colloquially, as “the way we do things around here.” Other public policy scholars understand it as representing the informal organization of institutions (Simon, 1976; March & Olsen, 1989). Drawn from extensive research in the private sector, Cameron and Quinn (2011) present organizational culture as a combination of observable and unobservable characteristics difficult to detect until they are challenged by incompatible assumptions or behaviors. These challenges, often resulting from new policies or agency leadership, can alter an agency’s mission or organizational structure, bringing to the surface these incompatibilities.

Although no clear consensus exists among scholars regarding the definition of organizational culture, the literature suggests that it can be understood for the purposes of this review as *a durable set of behavioral expectations or norms that guides individuals’ actions within an*

² Preliminary searches conducted included “TANF” and “organizational culture” in conjunction with “welfare,” “social services,” “public sector,” and other such related terms. Additional terms included in searches for “organizational culture” included “goal clarity,” “leadership,” “office design,” and “administrative procedures.” As new insights were gleaned from initial reviews, narrower terms, such as “administrative barriers” and “transformational leadership,” were used to identify additional potentially relevant research.

organization and affects how individuals outside the organization interact with the organization.

What can organizational culture influence? Khademian (2002) emphasizes that organizational culture can influence both processes and interpersonal interactions within organizations and that it plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals act. Organizational culture can be thought of as “commitments” or a common understanding among co-workers that help guide actions and navigate complex office and organizational dynamics that often have conflicting expectations, rules, and responsibilities. Khademian also found that it affects how clients interact with and experience the organization as well as how organizations want clients to view their office settings and the messages they send to clients. As an organizing mechanism, a strong organizational culture can help reduce collective uncertainties, maintain social order and continuity, and forge collective identity and commitment (Trice & Beyer, 1993). It is the “social glue” that binds an organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

The role of organizational culture varies to some extent depending on the broader context or sector within which an organization operates, such as private versus public sector. In addition to this literature review’s focus on organizational culture in TANF offices, lessons from the private sector provide useful framing through which to study organizational culture within TANF programs.

What can organizational culture influence in the private sector? Private sector studies emphasize the role of organizational culture in shaping organizational effectiveness. Private sector research emphasizes that “strong” organizational culture, characterized by beliefs and values widely shared among members, can help organizations navigate uncertainty, change, or even crisis (Collins & Porras, 1996), which is also applicable to the challenges public sector agencies face.

Scholars have attempted to establish a causal relationship between organizational culture and staff and agency experiences more rigorously in studies of private firms or industry sectors than in public-sector studies (Boyce, Nieminen, Gillespie, Ryan, & Denison, 2015). In the context of organizational effectiveness, much of the private-sector research focuses on the extent to which a firm’s organizational culture contributes to productivity and profits (Heskett & Kotter, 1992). For example, in examining the role of organizational culture in effectiveness, Denison and Mishra (1995) used aspects of culture, such as adaptability, consistency, and mission, to measure its influence on profits, sales growth, and overall performance. Similarly, other literature analyzed the effect of organizational culture on profits, customer satisfaction, and other such measures of effectiveness (Boyce et al., 2015); productivity and performance (Denison, 1990); and financial performance and innovation (Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011).

Compared with the public-sector literature, research in the private sector also places a greater emphasis on the ability of leadership to shape and change organizational culture and less emphasis on the broader context (e.g., politics, policy) within which leaders operate (Schein, 2006). For example, some scholars have argued that leadership, broadly defined, has a causal impact on organizational culture (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Schein, 2006), while others have attempted to refine this view, asserting that innovative cultures are directly related to certain aspects of transformational leadership, such as a clear vision (Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008; Antonakis & House, 2002).

What can organizational culture influence in the public sector? Organizational culture can influence productivity, effectiveness, and customer experiences in the public sector as it does in the private sector (Wilson, 1989; Hill & Lynn, 2015; Khademian, 2002). However, understanding organizational culture in the public sector—including the opportunities for changing it—might represent a much more difficult task given the distinct political context and incentive structures within which public agencies operate.

Assessing both the role of organizational culture in the public sector and the means to change it is distinct from assessing the same factors in the private sector in the following ways.

- **Culture operates within bureaucratic context.** Government agencies are often defined by formal policies and procedures, also known as bureaucracy. Bureaucracy standardizes government processes and serves to maximize fair and equitable delivery of public services, which can help maintain consistency, even in the face of shifts in staffing or broad policy changes (Brehm & Gates, 1997; Ban, 1995). At the same time, the inertia associated with bureaucracy can impede agency efforts to adapt to policy changes or other external circumstances. Individual actions and discretion in the context of bureaucratic constraints help express an organization’s culture (Lipsky, 1980), although distinguishing the extent to which these actions are shaped by norms and behavioral expectations or the formal bureaucratic processes themselves is difficult.
- **Compared with the private sector, public agencies often have more ambiguous goals against which to measure the effect of culture change.** Although private-sector organizations focus clearly on financial outcomes, the primary goal of public-sector organizations is sometimes less clear. Even when focusing specifically on human services, agencies often have a diverse set of goals, including client satisfaction, operational and budgetary efficiency, compliance, and staff retention (Cohen & Hyde, 2013). For example, the TANF program has dual goals of both providing financial support and encouraging self-sufficiency. Studies of public agency operations have long emphasized the difficulty in clearly defining the goals of government agencies. This ambiguity has consequences for understanding the role that organizational culture plays in these agencies (Wilson, 1989) and it is exacerbated by high levels of political attention (Derthick, 1990). For instance, scholars have contended that public officials hold organizations accountable to the task of meeting government standards while balancing multiple priorities (Waterman, Rouse, & Wright, 2004; Pandey & Wright, 2006). As a result, bureaucracy plays a significant role in how organizational culture functions, as the challenges posed by a public administration environment often eclipse an organization's mode of operation (Whorton & Worthley, 1981).
- **Public managers do not exercise unilateral control over organizations.** Some research emphasizes the role that public managers can play in shaping organizational culture. Khademian (2002) focuses on how to make culture tangible and actionable in public organizations, asserting that agency leaders do not “manage” culture; instead, they “manage the integration of a task with resources and environment” (p. 53). In contrast to the private sector, in which managers exercise the ability to more unilaterally shape their respective organization’s direction, public leaders interested in changing their organizational culture must do so in an environment with less flexibility and control.

How can organizational culture be assessed? Numerous academics and management consultants have created organizational culture assessment instruments to gauge or classify different organizational cultures (Jung et al., 2009), and researchers use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to study organizational culture (Denison, 1990).

Different instruments are used for different purposes: formative, summative, or diagnostic reasons (Jung et al., 2009). Culture may be measured in two general approaches.

- A **dimensional approach** seeks to characterize organizational culture through indicators of activities and artifacts (Fletcher & Jones, 1992). Examples of common dimensions captured in instruments include shared beliefs, leadership qualities, ethics, values, norms, degree and nature of collaboration, performance, rewards, and work environment.
- A **typological approach** seeks to describe the organization's dominant characteristics (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Glisson & Williams, 2015). Examples include competitive, collaborative, creative, controlling, proficient, rigid, and resistant.

The varied approaches to measuring organizational culture reflect both that it is a multidimensional construct and that scholars vary in how they define it.

III. Organizational Culture in TANF Offices: Factors That Influence Client and Staff Experiences

Empirical work on the causal nature of organizational culture in the public sector is limited. Some public-sector studies describe how organizational culture influences performance, staff characteristics, leadership qualities, and other organizational characteristics (Bloom, Hill, & Riccio, 2003; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Glisson & Williams, 2015; Riccucci, Meyers, Lurie, & Han, 2004), though the causal arrow might just as often point in the other direction. These factors affect and are affected by staff behavior and have implications for the way in which clients interact with the agency and its services. From the broader vision of agency leadership, to individual client-staff encounters, to daily policies and procedures, all layers of an organization directly affect client experiences.

This section focuses on the relationship between organizational culture in TANF offices and client and staff experiences. For each factor below, ways that the research suggests it can influence organizational culture and, in turn, staff or client experiences is discussed.

A. External Political Environment

Federal directives strongly influence the organizational cultures of TANF agencies at the state and local levels. These directives define agency priorities, shape norms and beliefs, and determine many of the organizational situations within which staff work (Moynihan & Pandey, 2005; Hahn, Gearing, Katz, & Amin, 2015). For example, the 1996 PRWORA reforms led to a nationwide shift in welfare offices' goals, from an emphasis on eligibility compliance to a focus on employment and compliance with work participation requirements. This shift in priorities contributed to a broader cultural shift among agency staff by changing how staff members performed their duties and interacted with clients to align with the more work participation

and employment-oriented goals. PRWORA also gave states greater flexibility and responsibility through its shift to a block grant structure. While some states used this increased flexibility and responsibility to shift their vision toward client-centered well-being, others understood “success” as client compliance with the new work participation requirements (Thaden & Robinson, 2012).

The broader political environment within which TANF programs operate, such as the political ideology and degree of support from government officials, influences organizational culture and the ways clients experience TANF programs. Public discourse on poverty and the related policies is heavily swayed by policymakers and government officials’ beliefs and attitudes (Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2010; Kohler-Hausmann, 2007). This public discourse can influence the ways TANF agencies design their programs and processes and the behavioral expectations or norms for staff-client interactions by influencing the beliefs of TANF agency staff regarding clients’ work ethic, social behaviors, individual responsibility, and deservingness. Staff beliefs and attitudes are at the core of an organization’s culture and directly affect the nature and level of services clients receive.

Level of support from government officials. Many scholars argue that TANF implementation and client experiences are directly related to the level of political support from state and local officials, the local media, and the surrounding communities at large (Sandfort, Kalil, & Gottschalk, 1999; Moynihan & Pandey, 2005; Fording, Soss, & Schram, 2007; Ragan, 2003). Fife (2013) found that strong political leadership and visible, active involvement from the highest-level senior officials were instrumental to implementing required welfare reform changes by creating a supportive culture for staff to effectively carry out their roles. For example, her review of efforts to advance a culture of customer service in human services agencies found that agencies with external political support from state and local government officials were more likely to achieve their policy objectives. These agencies were generally afforded more resources, greater flexibility and autonomy, and fewer restrictive regulations. In contrast, Fife found that agencies with low political support and commitment from top-ranking elected officials regressed from earlier performance gains connected to prior reforms.

Political ideology. At the federal, state, and local levels, TANF programs’ organizational cultures and practices are influenced by government policy officials’ attitudes and underlying moral assumptions about the causes of poverty (Hasenfeld, 2010; Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003). Analyses of state administrative data found that political ideology in the state, county, or community within which the TANF program operates (e.g., using measures based on the percentage of voters in each who voted for ideologically relevant ballot measures) plays a significant role in client experiences, particularly with respect to how they are treated for noncompliance and the extent to which they are formally sanctioned (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2008; Fording et al., 2007, Fording, Soss, & Schram, 2011). Policymakers at every level of government shape the nature of staff-client interactions by conveying their assumptions about poverty through legislation and public discourse.

For example, empirical evidence finds that state elected officials’ views and ideology might influence the level of benefits provided, determination of eligibility and compliance requirements, and client sanctioning rates (Soss, Schram, Vartanian, & O’Brien, 2001; Fellows & Rowe, 2004; Moynihan, Herd, & Rigby, 2016; Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2014; Soss et al.,

2001; Fording et al., 2007). The program policies that stem from the broader political climate affect staff practices, norms, and expectations as well as client experiences. In some states, recipients' awareness of variation in benefit levels and program rules across localities has been associated with perceptions of unfairness (Sandfort et al., 1999).

Surrounding human services environment. A transparent, collaborative human services environment can positively affect organizational culture in TANF offices. Strong, reciprocal relationships within governing bodies are especially important for the creation of policies and programs responsive to TANF clients' set of political values, life circumstances, and employment barriers (Hahn et al., 2015; Ragan, 2003).

The broader culture of the public sector also can play a role in successful policy implementation. Hahn et al. (2015) interviewed agency leaders, line staff, and community stakeholders in two states seeking to increase access to work supports. They found that states saw greater effectiveness in leading widespread welfare policy changes when public leaders spanning multiple levels of government and social programs made the effort to build trust and foster relationships with one another. Hence, mutual trust and transparency permeating all levels of government support development and implementation of effective social programs, including TANF.

Influence of existing culture on agency responses to external policy changes. Within the external political environment's influence, agencies can exert some control over how they react to and interpret policy directives, and existing organizational culture can affect these reactions.

After PRWORA, the preexisting organizational culture of public assistance offices in several states was found to mediate the effect of broader federal policy goals and how staff interpret and reinforce those goals (Jewell & Glaser, 2006; Meyers, Glaser, & Donald, 1998; Morgen, 2001). For example, Lurie and Riccucci (2003) found that enduring staff attitudes and bureaucratic structures strongly influenced agency implementation of new policy goals across multiple TANF offices. Although some states and counties ostensibly embraced self-sufficiency through work as the new agency goal, staff attitudes and bureaucratic processes at local agencies remained largely unchanged. For example, the study found that some agency leaders communicated to staff through outdated performance metrics, visual aids, and other messages that elevated AFDC's eligibility-oriented goals over TANF's new, employment-oriented goals such as increasing client work participation rates.³ Some caseworkers, in turn, emphasized goals associated with the former welfare system, while de-emphasizing efforts to increase client employment and self-sufficiency.

B. Economic Climate and Budgetary Constraints

The economic climate can shape TANF offices' organizational culture in many ways, ranging from which programs receive funding to how offices adapt to budget cuts. Funding availability or scarcity affects an organization's structure, processes, and behavior. Resource constraints can create a stressful environment for staff, which affects their performance and work experiences and can, in turn, shape the nature of TANF client experiences.

³ The work participation rate measures the percentage of eligible TANF clients participating in work activities. The federal law outlines specific work activities that can count toward this rate.

TANF organizations faced with severe budget cuts often adapt by cutting or reducing program offerings and contracting with private firms (Pavetti, Derr, Anderson, Trippe, & Paschal, 2001; Esbenshade, Vidal, Fascilla, & Ono, 2016). Some of these practices have the potential to negatively affect clients by reducing the resources available for TANF office staff to work together with contractors toward clients' long-term self-sufficiency goals.

Some organizations have reported that such budget-induced changes provide fewer resources for staff to provide lengthy or individualized case management, resulting in reduced discretion and agency effectiveness (Fife, 2013; Cheek & Piercy, 2001; Esbenshade et al., 2016). For some offices, severe budget cuts to individual programs have been shown to create a culture of disempowerment and to lead to negative staff experiences, including lower levels of reported autonomy, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention (Esbenshade et al., 2016).

Alternatively, some local TANF offices have been able to respond to budget cuts while improving client and staff experiences by implementing cost-cutting strategies that promote staff performance, client service, organizational efficiency, and perceptions of agency effectiveness (Isaacs, Katz, & Amin, 2016; Hahn, Amin, Kassabian, & Gearing, 2016). For example, states involved in the five-year Work Support Strategies (WSS) initiative, which began in 2011, increased the use of online applications to apply for benefits, thereby reducing the need for clients to come into offices and time pressures on staff. However, while cost-saving adaptations might improve the agency's overall resiliency and ability to weather budget cuts or longer-term budget shortages, they can reduce frontline staff members' ability to focus on clients' long-term self-sufficiency in favor of other more immediate service efficiency goals. Limited funding has also been found to hinder an agency's ability to monitor performance, reform programs, improve technological systems, and execute strategic or cultural change initiatives (Ragan, 2003; Hahn et al., 2015).

This research suggests that the way in which agencies respond to economic shifts and financial pressures has implications for client experiences. If the agencies focus on improving efficiency while maintaining a focus on long-term client success, the effects of budget cuts are less pronounced. Conversely, client experiences suffer if budget cuts result in a shift in organizational culture that limits staff discretion, overly focuses efforts on near-term performance measures, and reduces client services.

C. Program Mission and Goals

TANF agencies are tasked with supporting client self-sufficiency while also enforcing compliance with federal- and state-level work requirements. Multiple, cross-cutting federal policies and local organizational goals create ambiguity in the way staff interpret their work priorities. These varying interpretations ultimately shape ground-level implementation of TANF policy (Meyers et al., 1998). The literature suggests TANF agencies whose organizational leadership frequently communicates clear, well-established, and client-centered goals to program staff have implemented TANF programs in greater alignment with the self-sufficiency-oriented goals PRWORA intended relative to organizations with ambiguous or infrequently communicated goals (Meyers, Riccucci, & Lurie, 2001).

Goals that are clear and well-aligned with the organization's mission, that are frequently communicated, and that emphasize measures of client self-sufficiency and well-being as opposed to process measures, combined with agency leaders who effectively communicate these goals, are associated with positive experiences for TANF staff and clients. Further, the way in which agencies monitor progress toward these goals has implications for organizational culture and staff experiences.

Clear and mission-driven goals. Research shows that organizations with simple goals and a clear statement of the aims and values of the organization are associated with higher staff performance, motivation, and perceptions of organizational effectiveness compared with organizations hampered by multiple, conflicting goals (Wilson, 1989; Meyers, Riccucci, & Lurie, 2001; Moynihan & Pandey, 2005; Fife, 2013; Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2014). Clear linkage between agency goals and expectations for staff performance also had positive effects on staff retention. For example, Shim's (2010) study found that child welfare caseworkers who had clear, compelling incentives tied to rewards for job performance were less likely to report intentions to leave their organization.

Mission-based organizational cultures are better equipped to simplify conflicting goals, providing clear expectations for staff behavior, which supports successful implementation of a specific goal (Meyers et al., 2001; Moynihan & Pandey, 2005; Ragan, 2003). Thus, TANF organizations with clear, compelling missions are more likely to attract passionate staff to the organization; cultivate a motivated, highly productive workforce; and inspire sustained support, buy-in, and commitment from staff over time (Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2014). Scholars have argued that having staff members who feel deeply passionate about the mission is essential for organizations to keep them engaged in the day-to-day work that they do (Hahn et al., 2015). Illustrative of this notion, TANF agencies that intentionally hired workers whose personal values, as expressed in new-hire interviews, were consistent with the organizational mission were successful in generating a strong culture of workers who embraced innovative change efforts geared toward furthering the mission and vision (Ridzi, 2004).

Frequently articulated goals. The frequency with which organizations communicate their mission and vision to staff is an aspect of an organization's culture (Kotter, 1995). Staff belonging to organizations that constantly reiterate the mission in context of budget, service goals, staff performance, and other such areas tend to be more supportive of innovative organizational change when the change is framed as a means to advance the mission. Moreover, organizations that consistently communicate a shared vision are associated with improvements in individual and team performance, elevated levels of staff motivation and resilience amid organizational restructuring, and elevated stakeholder engagement and public confidence in the organization's operations (Hahn et al., 2015).

Transformational leadership. Leaders who can convey their aspirational vision in a way that resonates with individual staff members' personal motivations are better able to mobilize their team toward a collective purpose. Transformational leadership is a specific model through which agency leadership frequently communicates a shared vision and goals to align staff attitudes and behaviors with the broader organizational culture (Jaskyte, 2004; Jaskyte & Dressler, 2005). Research suggests that transformational leadership might produce better organizational performance, even when facing bureaucratic constraints and significant

organizational change (Masood, Dani, Burns, & Backhouse, 2006; Ragan, 2003). Program staff who have transformational leaders in their offices also tend to show greater job satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2014).

Client-centered goals. In addition to the clarity and frequency with which goals are articulated, the nature of agency goals can also influence staff and client experiences. Specifically, goals in human services agencies that emphasize client well-being (i.e., client-centered goals) support positive implementation and client experiences (Treskon, Millenky, & Freedman, 2017). Research suggests that compliance-oriented culture and goals, which are sometimes less client-centered, divert time and attention from improving employment outcomes (Hasenfeld, 2010; Thaden & Robinson, 2012).

To align the organizational culture with client well-being and longer-term success, some social service agencies have shifted their client success narratives from stories of compliance to measures of self-sufficiency (Thaden & Robinson, 2012; Hong, 2013). Likewise, Meyers et al. (2001) concluded that organizations seeking to promote a client-centered culture must clearly link their staff priorities with client self-sufficiency outcomes rather than compliance enforcement.

Staff performance metrics aligned with program mission and goals. The standards that an organization uses to evaluate staff performance convey its most pressing goals and priorities. These standards frame an agency's culture and the nature of its staff-client interactions (Meyers et al., 2001; Ridzi, 2004). Content, quality, frequency of use, and focus of performance metrics all contribute to organizational culture. These standards are essential for setting goals, delivering services in adherence to policy, and tracking organizational success.

Studies of TANF's early implementation assessed the degree to which staff comprehended explicit TANF goals. They found that clear performance metrics tied to employment, longer-term self-sufficiency, and other such underlying policy goals increased the accuracy with which staff interpreted and carried out TANF priorities (Meyers et al., 2001; Riccucci et al., 2004; Ridzi, 2004).

Client outcome-driven performance measures. Compared with goals and measures focused on process or compliance, outcome-driven agency goals and program performance measures are more often associated with positive organizational cultures as well as positive experiences for TANF staff and clients. The emphasis on processes versus outcomes influences how staff understand their jobs and which goals they prioritize (Riccucci et al., 2004; Moynihan & Pandey, 2005; Pearson, 2007).

Process-driven organizations might demonstrate high performance in accordance with state and federal benchmarks simply because their accountability measures focus on compliance and processes rather than on outcomes and results (Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010; Monnat, 2010), yet the experience for staff and clients might be negative. Esbenshade et al.'s (2016) case study of business process reengineering in San Diego County's TANF agency found that process-driven goals, especially ones disconnected from measures of client progress toward self-sufficiency, can create a demoralizing culture for staff. As one respondent told the researchers, "[The agency] wants production. They don't want quality any more, just production, production... We're more about numbers than actually taking care of the client, at this point" (p. 85).

D. Staff Attitudes and Beliefs

Shared beliefs and underlying staff assumptions are a fundamental part of organizational culture that affects agency practices and staff-client interactions (Schein, 2006). Staff attitudes and beliefs have consequences for the way that staff interact with and provide services for clients. When organizational culture promotes positive staff attitudes, it can also support job satisfaction and retention, which can, in turn, affect performance and client service quality by providing more continuity for clients and allowing agencies to benefit from accumulated staff experience.

Literature on an array of health and human services agencies has found that organizational culture plays an important role in shaping motivation, organizational commitment, retention, and job satisfaction (Glisson & James, 2002; Shim, 2010; Ellett, 2009; Williams & Glisson, 2014). For example, a study examining social worker turnover in a variety of health and human services organizations, including mental health, child welfare, and medical health, found that a supportive organizational culture, characterized by a high degree of perceived social support among coworkers, positively related to retention and worker satisfaction (Kim & Stoner, 2008). Additional studies found that a supportive organizational culture paired with perceived capability and resilience (Ellett, 2009), stress-coping strategies (Lee, Forster, & Rehner, 2011), or other such positive staff attitudes contributed to job satisfaction and staff intentions to remain employed within the child welfare system.

Empirical findings also suggest that staff members' deeply held beliefs can be associated with disparate client experiences with respect to race and other client identities (Hasenfeld, Ghose, & Larson, 2004; Fording et al., 2007, 2011; Brodtkin & Majmundar, 2010; Wu, Cancian, Meyer, & Wallace, 2006). For example, African-American clients are more likely to face TANF sanctions compared with White clients for similar behavior (Schram et al., 2009; Monnat, 2010; Keiser, Mueser, & Choi, 2004; Kalil, Seefeldt, & Wang, 2002; Soss et al., 2008). Latino and African-American clients are also less likely to have access to education and training opportunities compared with their White counterparts (Goldrick-Rab & Shaw, 2005; Pearson, 2007; Cox & Spriggs, 2002; Johnson, 2010; Bonds, 2006). Another study found that clients who might face intersecting gender and racial stereotypes, such as women of color having many children, are more likely to be sanctioned (Schram et al., 2009). Collectively, these differences in staff treatment based on staff attitudes and implicit biases can reinforce racial, socioeconomic, and gender disparities.

Racialized and gendered attitudes, when deep-rooted in the organizational culture, might continue to perpetuate stereotypes about a large portion of clients who receive assistance. Prevailing attitudes about race or class might also hinder the extent to which TANF agency staff adopt and fully internalize new organizational goals, such as a focus on client well-being and long-term self-sufficiency (Meyers et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 2001; Riccucci et al., 2004; Thaden & Robinson, 2012).

E. Organizational Processes

Organizational processes — agency rules and the way staff execute their roles — represent tangible expressions of organizational culture that affect how clients perceive and navigate their local TANF programs. Both reflect the agency's culture and are influenced by that culture

(Schein, 2006). Organizations can structure processes in ways that maximize access and reduce barriers for clients or in ways that create unnecessary systemic barriers, which might hinder eligible participants from receiving assistance.

Organizational processes can affect staff experiences positively or negatively, as well. Certain agency-wide processes within the TANF system, such as the coordination of services across multiple social services programs, are predictive of positive staff attitudes, including enthusiasm and perceptions of agency effectiveness (Ragan, 2003). When organizational procedures afford staff more flexibility and freedom in the way they deliver client services, they feel empowered to overcome systemic challenges, remain resilient when faced with occupational stress, and commit readily to organizational change. Conversely, when staff feel overburdened by excessive bureaucracy, inflexible rules, and time-consuming and counter-intuitive processes, they are more likely to underperform, face emotional burnout, and resist innovation (Pandey, Coursey, & Moynihan, 2004; DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005).

The literature emphasizes the ways burdensome processes can negatively affect staff and client experiences, while efforts to redesign agency workflows to prioritize customer service can improve experiences.

Administrative burden and administrative exclusion. Administrative burden refers to rules and procedures, such as client intake and verification processes, that impose time and psychological costs on prospective and current program participants (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2014). One study of the effect of administrative burden on TANF clients discovered that perceptions of complicated and demanding TANF offices procedures, eligibility rules, and other hidden costs of participating in the TANF program can contribute to “administrative exclusion,” when otherwise eligible and interested clients do not participate in public benefit programs because of organizational practices rather than substantive eligibility status or their own preferences (Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010). The study found that administrative exclusion was associated with a decline in welfare caseloads since PRWORA’s passage by raising the perceived costs of claiming public benefits beyond the perceived benefit for potential clients. Moreover, the study found that administrative exclusion was most evident among high school non-graduates, non-married individuals, and individuals in deep poverty given the higher probability that former clients with these characteristics were more likely to exit TANF because of procedural rather than substantive reasons. Given the role that organizations play as access points for public assistance, the analysis underscores how formal and informal organizational practices emblematic of an organization’s culture (e.g., a stated emphasis on timely form submission) might reduce access to benefits or produce systematic patterns of exclusion for disadvantaged groups.

Customer service-oriented processes. Changing agency processes can promote a customer service-oriented organizational culture and improve client outcomes (Miller, 2010; Maleyeff & Campus, 2007). Several states have streamlined and redesigned business processes to make service delivery more efficient and accessible while promoting an overall culture of quality client service (Isaacs et al., 2016). Changes to business processes include redesigning the eligibility determination process, simplifying application and renewal processes, eliminating burdensome procedural requirements (e.g., redundant documentation, office visits), staffing an in-person help desk to efficiently direct clients to the appropriate counter or service, and

implementing new web-based technologies to enable electronic transactions (Isaacs et al., 2016). Because of these changes, states have shortened processing delays and have provided more efficient client services.

Section IV provides more detail about the effects of organizational process change efforts designed to change organizational culture.

F. Training and Staff Development

Training represents a key channel through which organizations convey norms and expectations to staff and instill their organizational culture. The emphasis placed on staff training also reflects an organization's culture and priorities.

For organizations to be effective, the research suggests, ensuring that all program staff members are equipped with the necessary resources and technical expertise is imperative to empower them to succeed in their roles. In addition to performance, investing time and funds in training can reduce employee turnover and its associated costs for agencies (Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004). Additionally, TANF caseworkers who believe they received insufficient training report higher levels of occupational stress and lower-quality service to clients (Esbenshade et al., 2016). Without adopting a culture of learning or supplying essential job-specific information to staff, organizations lower their chances of cultivating highly-skilled teams to most effectively serve clients.

The need for training is elevated when organizations implement process changes or are intentionally seeking to change their culture. Meyers et al. (1998) argued that TANF program staff require sufficient information, training, and authority to fully implement policy reforms and organizational change initiatives because “workers would need to understand policy changes as consistent with a larger change in the mission of the welfare system—and believe that policymaking principals are committed to bringing about this change” (p. 20).

Riccucci et al.'s (2004) study of early TANF implementation found that staff members who had received specialized training to adjust to their organization's cultural shift toward client employment were more likely to accurately identify their TANF program's most pressing objectives and perceive them as important. Fife's (2013) analysis of several California TANF offices' efforts to change to a customer-service-oriented culture found that offices that provided their program staff with mandatory training, ongoing feedback, and culture-specific performance evaluations saw stark improvements in organizational performance, staff satisfaction, and client satisfaction. Similarly, to enhance training effectiveness, Idaho TANF agencies provided in-depth staff trainings on program changes while reframing the program vision and openly acknowledging how the current office culture was impeding service quality and innovation (Hahn et al., 2016).

G. Office Design

The office environment and its physical contents are the most visible features of organizational culture. The environment can convey an organization's underlying norms, values, and priorities (Schein, 2006; Bunch, 2007). Workspace design literature, which primarily draws on insights from private-sector research, asserts that a well-designed office layout and atmosphere — that

is office environments with a temperature, noise level, lighting, and air quality conducive to worker well-being — is associated with higher staff satisfaction, motivation, performance, and productivity (Bitner, 1992; Kim, 2014). Moreover, the research suggests that these spatial components can improve performance toward organizational goals by creating a comfortable work environment that facilitates desired employee behavior. In a comprehensive review of private-sector literature, Bitner (1992) found that, for hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and other service-oriented businesses, the spatial layout, office artifacts (e.g., chairs, glass dividers), and ambient conditions (e.g., temperature, lighting) all shape client experiences and overall satisfaction. These findings might have implications for TANF offices, as well.

In addition to private workspace design, the literature explores the way specific spatial elements in public agencies convey important cultural cues and affect client and staff experiences. Physical space, especially entryways and waiting areas, can set the tone for staff-client interactions. Human services offices with cramped waiting areas, insufficient seating, and harsh lighting can heighten the environmental stressors and demoralization that clients feel (Prottas, 1979). Offices with comfortable, spacious seating arrangements, welcoming staff, and lobby systems designed to make processes transparent to clients convey a client-centered culture to all who enter the building. The physical space in which clients and staff interact conveys how staff perceive clients and might influence how clients feel staff perceive them (Goodsell, 1984). For example, offices that have metal detectors at doorways, security officers, and bulletproof glass barriers can set the tone for client scrutiny rather than empowerment. Physical spaces also convey important cues about the agency's goals for clients. A case study focusing on a Georgia TANF agency found that signs and written rules displayed around the office space were used to emphasize an employment-first approach (i.e., the primacy of acquiring a job), rather than promoting training or education (Pearson, 2007).

Co-located services. The presence or absence of services within an organization's physical space also conveys information about the organization's underlying norms, values, and priorities. For example, TANF agencies might co-locate their eligibility and case management services at an employment services provider, reflecting an organizational goal to streamline communication with and increase access to services (Kirby & Lyskawa, 2015). Alternatively, TANF agencies might invite support service providers (e.g., refugee resettlement case managers working with refugees who receive TANF) to co-locate their services within the TANF office or might partner with employment training programs offering on-site childcare and early childhood education, reflecting an organizational goal to increase access to wraparound services to support client success (Elkin et al., 2018; Adams et al., 2016).

The literature also provides examples of ways TANF offices can re-design their space to convey important cultural cues and enhance client experiences, though research in this area is limited. Some TANF offices and other public agencies have sought to improve the client experience by designing friendlier, more welcoming office environments as part of a shift to a client-centered culture (Lurie & Riccucci, 2003). Some examples show promising results. Fife's (2013) study details how California's TANF system transformed its public offices to resemble employment offices by exhibiting "Welcome Job Seekers!" signs and other such visual aids that underscore the importance of working to achieve financial stability. In using the physical office environment, program managers can visually communicate to staff and clients the expectation that employment is a shared priority for clients and caseworkers alike. These employment-

focused office environments also convey to TANF clients that having a job is not just required for obtaining public assistance but also represents a path toward long-term economic self-sufficiency (Lurie & Riccucci, 2003).

Other states' efforts to revamp TANF offices to improve staff and client well-being include revitalizing office spaces to elevate employee morale, redesigning waiting areas to create an inviting atmosphere, introducing visual media to communicate wait times and administrative processes to clients, and changing the physical layout of lobby spaces to alleviate congestion (Hahn et al., 2016; Isaacs et al., 2016; Maleyeff & Campus, 2007). Some agencies have drawn on principles from human-centered design to redesign office processes, workflows, or physical layouts with the user's perspective in mind (Chiarantona et al., 2015). However, empirical evidence of the effect of office layout redesign efforts using human-centered design approaches is limited.

Although revitalization of office and lobby spaces is indirectly associated with greater staff performance and organizational efficiency, the literature suggests alterations to the office environment and structure alone are insufficient for successful culture change (Lurie & Riccucci, 2003).

H. Decision-Making Structure, Staff Autonomy, and Innovation

The organizational decision-making structure and level of staff autonomy shape how an organization's culture functions, and vice versa. Staff feel most effective and empowered when decision-making authority is delegated to lower levels in the organization. Several studies have assessed the influence of an organization's decision-making structure on staff experiences and agency performance.

Staff autonomy and agency performance. Organizational cultures that place high value on flexibility, adaptability, and growth can alleviate the detrimental effect of excessive bureaucratic restrictions (Pandey et al., 2004). Research suggests that organizations characterized by hierarchical cultures, stratified roles, centralized patterns of decision-making authority, and low levels of staff autonomy show poorer work climates compared with decentralized organizations that have greater staff autonomy (Williams & Glisson, 2014; Esbenshade et al., 2016; DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005). Similarly, two studies that analyzed survey data of human services managers found that public sector agencies with hierarchical cultures and centralized patterns of decision-making authority were more likely to underperform on performance objectives compared with organizations that had a more decentralized authority structure (Pandey & Garnett, 2006; Moynihan & Pandey, 2005).

Deeply established bureaucracies and layers of formalization might also make it more difficult for caseworkers to use their discretion to better serve clients, directly affecting clients as well (Bozeman, 2000; Fife, 2013; Esbenshade et al., 2016; Pandey et al., 2004). For example, Esbenshade et al. (2016) observed that because of redesigned roles that set strict limits on the time and scope of welfare caseworkers' duties, more than 80 percent of surveyed workers reported having less autonomy since the transition to the new, formalized system. Scott and Pandey (2000) used an experimental simulation to demonstrate that additional bureaucratic structures and procedural burdens can result in reduced monetary benefits and types of services available for clients.

Organizational emphasis on innovation. An organizational culture that prioritizes learning and adaptation to changing information fosters individual staff competence and collective organizational knowledge to address client needs. In some instances, organizational cultures that value learning are positively associated with job satisfaction, higher organizational performance, and fewer workers intending to leave the organization (Egan et al., 2004; Watkins & Marsick, 2003).

The extent to which human service staff are receptive to innovation might vary with respect to other features of their organization's culture and organizational structure. For example, one study found that an organizational culture characterized by workplace norms of achievement, individualism, and mutual support is positively associated with adaptiveness among service providers, while workplaces with high rates of emotional exhaustion, routinization, and role confusion are negatively associated with innovativeness (Aarons & Sawitzky, 2006). These results are supported by other findings showing that organizational cultures defined by highly centralized decision-making, excessive regulation, and low levels of staff discretion are negatively associated with innovation (Glisson et al., 2008; Welch & Pandey, 2006). Although agency leadership can support innovation and learning, organizations that prioritize innovation at all levels by promoting and supporting staff discretion are more likely to produce positive staff and client experiences.

Leadership support for innovation. An association between leadership and innovation exists, but its direction is inadequately defined by research. Private-sector scholars have asserted that effective leadership contributes to a culture that facilitates innovation (Kotter, 1995; Schein, 2006; Denison, 1990). However, empirical support for the role of transformational leadership in organizational willingness to try new initiatives or adapt to changes in pursuit of agency goals in the public sector is mixed. Based on their review of the literature, Moynihan, Pandey, and Wright (2014) determined that transformational leadership affects organizational innovativeness in the public sector, both directly and indirectly, through key mediating variables, including organizational culture.

This finding supports other research affirming that staff attitudes toward innovation in social service agencies can be improved by transformational leadership (Aarons & Sommerfeld, 2012). However, other studies were unable to identify a direct link between transformational leadership and organizational innovativeness in social service agencies (Jaskyte & Dressler, 2005; Jaskyte, 2004). These studies suggest that transformational leadership is indirectly and negatively related to organizational innovativeness because it promotes organizational harmony and uniformity instead of disagreement and diverse viewpoints. Counterintuitively, creating an organizational culture that encourages differences of opinion and risk-taking behavior is believed to be a constructive way of addressing problems in the private sector as long as employees are still aligned with the company's shared vision (Heathfield, 2016).

These findings suggest that the relationship between leadership and innovation is complex. Additionally, strong leadership in concert with efforts to foster increased staff discretion, constructive debate among staff, and risk-taking might facilitate innovative practices in public-sector organizations.

IV. Efforts to Change Organizational Culture in Human Services Programs

Although culture is durable and difficult to change, recent decades have seen a growing recognition that leadership can use culture change as a management tool to improve client and staff experiences and organizational effectiveness (Schein, 2006; Lurie & Riccucci, 2003). Culture change requires adoption of multiple, wide-ranging strategies including communicating a shared vision with staff and addressing longstanding organizational values and norms. Successful implementation of an organizational culture change initiative can institutionalize a culture that promotes positive outcomes for clients, staff, and agencies. Lack of effective culture change can prevent organizations from reaching their maximum effectiveness (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Kotter, 1995; Fife, 2013).

In human services programs, the principal mechanism of culture change efforts aims to change staff behavior. Evidence shows that observable behavioral expectations can be more important than “deeper” values or assumptions in transmitting culture to staff (Ashkanasy, Broadfoot, & Falkus, 2000; Hofstede, 1998; Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders 1990; Glisson, Dukes, & Green, 2006). In other words, changing staff behavior can affect culture without staff members necessarily internalizing the values and beliefs at the core of those expectations.

The previous section explored the relationship between organizational culture in TANF offices and client and staff experiences. This section focuses on efforts by TANF and other human services agencies to change their organizational culture, discussing the approaches they have taken, the efforts to evaluate these attempts at organizational change, and the results for clients, staff, and organizational effectiveness.

A. Strategies for Organizational Culture Change

To change organizational culture, leaders must examine how the culture formed, how resilient it is, and where its potential points of influence are (Khademian, 2002). As a starting point, scholars and practitioners have developed numerous cultural assessment tools to gauge an organization’s current and preferred cultures through a diagnostic approach. In addition to assessment, the literature discusses several strategies associated with successful organizational culture change efforts.

An early organizational culture change scholar, Kotter (1995) draws from private sector research and theory to propose a framework that organizations can use to succeed in changing their organizational culture.⁴ Several studies since have built on and reinforced Kotter’s framework, illustrating a degree of consensus regarding the key strategies necessary to change organizational culture: establishing a sense of urgency; articulating a new, shared vision widely; communicating with staff frequently; addressing deeply-held organizational attitudes and

⁴ Kotter’s (1995) original strategies to change organizational culture include 1) generating a sense of urgency; 2) establishing a powerful guiding coalition; 3) developing a vision; 4) communicating the vision clearly and often; 5) removing obstacles; 6) planning for and creating short-term wins; 7) avoiding premature declarations of victory; and 8) embedding changes in the corporate culture and processes in every way possible, including training, hiring, and promotion processes.

values; and closely measuring performance through discrete, measurable benchmarks (Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Hirschhorn, 2002; Lurie & Riccucci, 2003).

Research suggests cultural assessment tools, broad and frequent communication of new, shared visions, and use of discrete benchmarks are key tools agencies can use to foster successful organizational culture change efforts.

Cultural assessment tools. Organizations can use cultural assessment tools to evaluate their deeply held values and readiness for cultural change and to develop a strategy for successful cultural change. As discussed in Section II, these tools might take either a dimensional or a typological approach. Examples of cultural assessment tools include the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument, the Organizational and Team Culture Indicator, the Cultural Assessment Survey, and the Management Skills Assessment Instrument.

Some tools also score various managers' competencies in order to align them with and sometimes assign them to lead various aspects of the organization culture change goal (Jung et al., 2009). Other tools provide accompanying culture change toolkits to help managers lead organizations through the transformation process from their diagnosed, present culture to their preferred, future culture. However, according to Jung et al. (2009), a key weakness of cultural assessment tools as a starting point for culture change initiatives is that because they are "administered" to organizations and the results are made relatively easily available, they may "support the perception that cultural change is possible and relatively easy" (p. 1093), when culture change is, in fact, a highly complex process.

Widely communicated, new shared vision and frequent communication with staff. Studies of both private- and public-sector efforts to change organizational culture reinforce the value of strong communication across staff levels and a widely shared vision (Kotter, 1995; Fife, 2013). In a study of four states' human services agencies seeking to implement business process improvements, evidence suggests that frequent communication with office leaders, supervisors, and staff was critical to implementation success (Hahn et al., 2015). In a private-sector organizational change context, Garvin and Roberto (2005) argue that strategies to save about-to-fail organizations must find ways to persuade the workforce to embrace and execute needed changes to ensure that changes persist. Strategies include developing clear messaging to obtain buy-in and to ensure the ideas are correctly understood, making employees feel valued in the transition, and denouncing behaviors that threaten the changes. Frequent communication across all levels of staff is also associated with successful organizational culture change by ensuring buy-in among staff members (Ragan, 2003; Fife, 2013; Isaacs et al., 2016; Hirschhorn, 2002; Khademian, 2002).

Discrete, measurable benchmarks. Efforts to change organizational culture might be more effective when leadership breaks the initiative down into smaller, distinct projects, thereby enabling management to collect necessary resources, develop appropriate tactics for a given task, set clear expectations, and measure whether the desired outcome has been achieved (Hirschhorn, 2002). Organizational cultures that prioritize data collection and analysis, continuous improvement, use of benchmarks, or client service facilitate staff buy-in and adoption of process changes necessary for effective organizational culture reform (Ridzi, 2004; Fife, 2013; Hahn et al., 2016). For example, Ridzi (2004) examined how New York has succeeded in bringing about local policies and processes capable of successfully implementing policy

changes following PRWORA. The case study data suggests that a combination of setting clear expectations, promoting staff buy-in, and strictly monitoring performance measures contributed to successful implementation.

Challenges to successful organizational culture change. Several aspects of an organization's existing culture can hinder culture change, including budget, political leadership, staff training, structures and systems, and values and attitudes. Khademian (2002) emphasizes that the limitations imposed by bureaucracies in the public sector reduce the unilateral ability of managers to change organizational culture. Research on private firms suggests that the principal reason organizational culture change efforts fail is lack of commitment to change efforts and openness to change among management (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Companies that fail to transform themselves often fail to communicate a change effort's vision early and clearly and to not institutionalize the change effort's goals into all aspects of the organization (Kotter, 1995).

B. Empirical Evidence on Effects of Culture Change Efforts

Organizations that have purposefully sought to change their culture have experienced positive results related to client and staff experiences and agency performance. According to Lurie & Riccucci (2003), welfare practitioners often consider changes in structure and processes as "culture changes." Accordingly, these attempts to change organizational culture are often concurrent with business process redesign efforts aiming to improve customer service or operational efficiency. These change efforts might be in response to shifting policy and regulation or might be an intrinsic desire to improve agency performance, client outcomes, or both.

The literature describes the empirical results of several organizational process and change efforts across a range of human service agencies, though examples from TANF offices are limited. Results provide evidence of the effect of culture change efforts on outcomes related to service efficiency, client well-being, staff morale and retention, and overall agency performance.

Service efficiency and client outcomes. Some states have fostered client-centered cultures by removing redundant or time-consuming administrative burdens and making organizational processes more efficient. Examples of states' successful strategies to improve service efficiency include providing application assistance to clients (Schanzenbach, 2009), giving clients the option to apply to multiple programs in one application (Leininger, Friedsam, Voskuil, & DeLeire, 2011), making applications available online or via phone (Schwabish, 2012), and streamlining eligibility and recertification processes (Ratcliffe, McKernan, & Finegold, 2007). Less restrictive compliance regulations and simplified reporting requirements were also associated with increased benefit receipt for eligible participants (Hahn et al., 2016).

Examples of states purposefully changing processes to change culture are more limited, but findings from the Work Support Strategies (WSS) initiative highlight the results of several state agencies' efforts in support of improved client outcomes. The initiative (2011 to 2015) supported six states' human services agencies in developing and implementing streamlined business processes to reduce barriers for working families applying for Medicaid, food

assistance, childcare assistance, and other such work support programs.⁵ With improved customer service and operational efficiency as the initiative's primary goals, these efforts focused on redesigning processes from a client's perspective (Hahn et al., 2016).

By the end of the WSS implementation period, most participating states reported improved benefit access and faster service such as an increased percentage of applications processed on the same day received. In Rhode Island, the percentage of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program applications processed the same day they were received increased from 10 percent in 2011 to 30 percent in early 2015. Clients in some states also saw reductions in temporarily losing their work supports through "churn" (Hahn et al., 2016; Isaacs et al., 2016).⁶

Distinct from the WSS initiative, California implemented a statewide effort to create a mission-driven culture of client-focused services. Local TANF offices restructured their intake procedures and case processes to place an earlier emphasis on employment-related service provision, to broaden supportive services to TANF participants, and to inform best practices using performance data (Fife, 2013). In transforming this critical agency process, staff members were better able to communicate their expectations for work participation early in their interactions with clients. Furthermore, organizations that placed a greater emphasis on timeliness and service saw faster client processing times (Isaacs et al., 2016).

Examples of measurable client outcomes from process and culture change initiatives include: expanding program access, saving client time and monetary costs, expediting benefit receipt, improving benefit retention, and expanding access to other support services (Fife, 2013; Isaacs et al., 2016). In addition, some change initiatives measure "improved customer service" through client experience surveys as an additional client outcome. WSS client experience surveys reveal that shorter wait times in the office and on the phone and faster benefit delivery were among the most important outcomes resulting from the organizational change efforts, from clients' perspectives. In addition, clients associated faster benefit delivery with fewer emergencies. More than half of clients surveyed said they had experienced problems while applying for or re-determining benefits in the past (e.g., loss of car, insufficient food, loss of housing), which they said could have been avoided if they had received benefits sooner (Hahn et al., 2016).

Staff morale, retention, and empowerment. Research evaluating the effect of culture change efforts on staff outcomes is relatively limited, particularly in TANF agencies. However, some studies from child welfare programs and juvenile justice organizations suggest that culture change efforts can produce positive staff outcomes.

Results from an evaluation of the Availability, Responsiveness, and Continuity (ARC) organizational intervention are instructive. The ARC intervention aimed to improve organizational culture and climate for staff in child welfare and juvenile justice organizations through increased staff engagement in policy changes, focus on client services, and concrete case management modifications. The ARC evaluation found that the intervention reduced

⁵ The six states in the WSS initiative were Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and South Carolina

⁶ "Churn" refers to families exiting and then returning to public benefits, in some cases because of failure to complete recertification paperwork or procedures.

workplace stress and substantially reduced caseworker turnover in the treatment group relative to the control group (Glisson et al., 2006).

In other human services agencies, culture shifts emphasizing improved customer service can promote removal of organizational obstacles, development of staff supports, encouragement of frontline decision-making authority, and solicitation of staff input. These elements are collectively associated with a culture of staff empowerment (Fife, 2013). Improved client service is also associated with increased staff morale and lower workplace stress, both resulting from a client service-oriented culture change (Hahn et al., 2016).

Agency performance. Research assessing the direct impact of culture change efforts on agencies' performance metrics is also limited. However, examples of culture change efforts driven primarily by business process redesigns point to the ability of culture change efforts to improve agency efficiency and outcomes in addition to client and staff outcomes. Specifically, culture change efforts are associated with efficiency in benefit application processing, cost savings, and increased ability to meet agency performance metrics.

As evidenced by the WSS evaluation, many localities that applied business process redesign approaches to produce culture change saw improved performance and were better able to meet state and federal performance benchmarks (Hahn et al., 2015). In addition, some localities saw budgetary savings and reduced case processing times due to the improvements (Isaacs et al., 2016).

V. Conclusions

This review summarizes the literature relevant to the relationship between organizational culture and staff and client experiences in the TANF program and to studies of explicit efforts to change organizational culture. The research identifies factors associated with a positive organizational culture as well as the potential implications for service delivery and staff and client experiences. While focused on organizational culture in TANF offices specifically, it draws on broader work exploring organizational culture in other public-sector settings and relevant literature on organizational culture in the private sector.

The literature identifies ways in which organizational culture and its effects on staff can support positive client experiences in areas including program access, program retention, and client success. The components of an agency's organizational culture that facilitate positive agency, staff, and client outcomes include the following.

- **Linking local offices and agencies' goals to broader organizational policies and goals.** Research suggests the value of defining and communicating a clear agency mission that is meaningful to staff at all levels and is aligned with broader policies and regulations.
- **Defining and regularly monitoring client outcomes and staff performance measures focused on these outcomes.** As with the imperative to align an organization's mission with broader policies, organizations should strive to define goal-driven measures of success indicative of positive client outcomes. Recent literature suggests that deemphasizing process measures in favor of outcomes-based measures can cultivate an organizational culture that improves staff and client outcomes. When organizations

establish regularly monitored goal-driven performance measures, overall staff performance and client outcomes benefit.

- **Designing client-centered office environments to promote comfort and process transparency.** Physical spaces and clear visual cues within TANF agencies can help agencies set client and staff expectations and underscore an agency's goals. More welcoming office environments can convey a client-centered culture to clients.
- **Designing workflows that are intuitive and not overly labor-intensive.** Frontline TANF staff often have high caseloads and face stressful work environments. Complicated workflows are time consuming and disempowering for staff and can result in low morale, high staff turnover, and poor agency performance. Simplified processes that minimize these issues can support a more positive organizational culture and associated improvements in agency outcomes.
- **Fostering innovation at all levels by decentralizing decision making and giving frontline staff autonomy to exercise discretion.** A benefit of outcomes-based measures is that they grant staff greater latitude in how they go about meeting these goals. Greater deference to staff members' professional expertise can improve morale and support improved client outcomes.

Culture change efforts in human services agencies often aim to change staff behavior through process changes as part of an overall effort to promote a customer-service-oriented culture. Limited empirical evidence from organizational culture change effort evaluations in TANF and other human services agencies have shown positive results related to service efficiency, client well-being, staff morale and retention, and overall agency performance. These TANF-specific studies, coupled with organizational culture change literature from the private and public sectors, suggests several specific strategies that human services agencies can adopt if they want to improve their organizational culture. These strategies include the following.

- **Assessing deeply-held organizational attitudes and values as a starting point to address them.** Formal organizational culture assessment tools can help managers understand and define their current culture and develop a strategy that addresses areas they want to change.
- **Establishing a sense of urgency.** Organizations seeking to change their culture must commit to the effort and be purposeful in implementing changes.
- **Articulating a widely shared vision frequently.** Communicating the change rationale and the agency's process frequently with staff at all levels within the agency increases buy-in and the collective commitment to change.
- **Establishing clear benchmarks and closely monitoring performance.** Efforts to change culture must include well-defined measures of success. In addition to defining the ultimate goals of the efforts, agencies should establish measurable short-term outcomes that are indicative of success. Benchmarks and monitoring allow staff and leadership to assess performance and implement the necessary course corrections should efforts fall short of expectations.

This literature review summarizes relevant literature describing the role that organizational culture plays in the delivery of TANF services and its implications for clients' and frontline workers' experiences. The review informs fieldwork for the Understanding Poverty: TANF Office

Culture study, which aims to identify and describe exemplars of TANF organizational culture. It also identifies successful strategies human services offices have undertaken to change their organizational culture. To date, relatively few studies have been conducted that assess the impact of organizational culture on the day-to-day experiences of TANF office staff or clients, specifically. Similarly, few studies have been conducted that describe TANF agencies' efforts to change their organizational cultures to support improved client and staff outcomes. This lack of studies underscores the need for additional research about the role of organizational culture in TANF agencies and efforts to improve it.

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