A case study of intended and implemented TANF policies in the New York State Bridge Program

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A CASE STUDY OF
INTENDED AND IMPLEMENTED TANF POLICIES
IN THE NEW YORK STATE BRIDGE PROGRAM

By

Yi-jung Wu

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
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Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
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A Case Study of Intended and Implemented TANF Policies in the New York State Bridge Program

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Yi-jung Wu

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Abstract

In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act changed public policy. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), affecting both educational policy and social welfare policy. Simultaneously, policy implementation responsibilities devolved to states.

State-specific systems changes associated with this policy shift have not received sufficient scholarly attention. This case study focused on TANF’s implementation in one state-administered, inter-agency program with special reference to the relationship between intended and implemented policies. A theoretical framework developed from the relevant literature pertaining to systems change, policy implementation, inter-agency and inter-professional partnerships, organizational learning, and human capital guided the empirical investigation. Twenty-five face-to-face, semi-structured, in depth interviews were conducted with thirty professionals in eight offices, across three counties. Member checks confirmed the appropriateness of data interpretation and articulation. Additionally, relevant documents were collected and reviewed to identify relevant changes and to triangulate the research findings.

Findings revealed that TANF policy implementation triggered multiple systems changes. For example, study participants identified changes in organizational structure, organizational culture and climate, and organizational short-term goals. Along with the organizational changes, some (but not all) professionals became involved in inter-professional activities, which spanned agency boundaries.

TANF-induced systems change presented opportunities for organizational learning. This study identified a particular kind of organizational learning accompanying
TANF’s implementation. TANF’s firm mandates ushered in a top-down organizational learning process associated with single-loop learning.

With TANF’s implementation, education-as-human capital development, a service strategy preferred by some study participants, was replaced by employment-first mandates. Study participants identified other changes in service delivery alternatives and strategies with TANF’s implementation.

The complexity of TANF’s implementation in an inter-agency program necessitated multiple theories, which needed to be integrated. This theoretical integration stands as one contribution to future research. Lessons learned for future research and implications for policy implementation comprise other contributions deriving from this study.
Acknowledgements

This has truly been a long journey. It is a journey that has been filled with tears and laughter, frustration and excitement. It is a journey that truly taught me the lessons of commitment, determination and perseverance. It is a journey that could not have been completed without the support and encouragement of many.

First and foremost, I wish to thank all the professionals who were willing to spare a few moments out of their busy schedule to share their observations and insights. I truly enjoyed our conversations and learned a great deal throughout the interviews. This study could not have been conducted without their support and willingness to share.

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Jui-nan Wu and Chun-hua Huang, for their unconditional love that has allowed me to pursue and fulfill my dream; to my parents-in-law, Chia-Ming Yang and Yu-Yun Su, for their understanding and support; to my sister and brother-in-law, Yi-chin Wu and Yu-Lu Chen, for their
encouragement and prayers. Without their love and support, the completion of this journey could not have been possible.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this work to my husband, Tung-Mou Yang, who has been and continues to be always there to love, support, encourage, help, and remind me in good and bad times. During the times that I lost confidence and felt disappointed, he was there to give me his honest opinions and to pick me up with his love and care. I could not be more blessed to have such a wonderful life partner to learn from and to hold hands.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my Dear Heavenly Father. It is Him who surrounds me with so many blessings. It is Him who teaches me the most important and precious lessons in life—Faith, Hope, and Love.
Chapter One Introduction

In 1996, President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). In it, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) was enacted to replace the sixty-year-old federal entitlement program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The rationale driving the 1996 welfare reform initiative was developed in response to a perceived public demand for changes in welfare policy. The net result was that the AFDC “entitlement” program was targeted for replacement. The replacement, TANF, was developed as a temporary assistance program with two important features: (1) limits on the time one can receive government benefits; and (2) accountability mechanisms that make the recipient directly responsible for overcoming barriers to successful employment (Nathan and Gais 1999; Zedlewski 2003; McPhee and Bronstein 2003).

In keeping with the TANF emphasis on immediate employment and individual accountability, welfare policy began to change. More specifically, “work first” approaches began to replace “education-first” programs (Anderson, Sundet, and Harrington 2000; Haskins 2006; Sawhill, Weaver, and Kane 2002). Such was one of the dramatic shifts accompanying TANF policy.

As to be expected with such dramatic shifts in policy, state and local agencies involved in educational and job training activities under AFDC sought to adjust their missions and activities to meet the new regulatory requirements. Program goals, structures, and administrative procedures were reformulated to comply with TANF mandates (Sandfort 1999; O'Shea and King 2001). Educational activities that were defined loosely under AFDC became narrowly tailored under TANF to the singular
purpose of job acquisition and retention (Holcomb et al. 1998; Shaw 2004).

Initially, all of the TANF employment programs included education and job training services. The intent was to build clients’ knowledge and skill, ideally enabling them to be removed from the welfare roll. However, an endemic tension remained—namely, the tension between work-first and education-first approaches to workforce development. More specifically, proposals for “real-world (pragmatic)” learning in workforce education gained increasing popularity (Brewer, Campbell, and Petty 2000; Steinberg, Cushman, and Riordan 1999).

Policy debates and research alike have centered on which approach (education-first or work-first) better serves the TANF population. With TANF, “better service” was evaluated in relation to the most important outcomes. In addition to reducing welfare caseloads, the most important outcome was to enable TANF clients to exit the public welfare system. To achieve these two outcomes, clients had to be provided with adequate knowledge and job skills so that they would obtain and retain good jobs, become self-sufficient, and eventually advance their careers to improve the overall well-being (Ganzglass 2006).

Multiple questions are nested in this policy rationale. Notwithstanding the importance of client outcomes, prior questions about the shift from AFDC to TANF, especially systems changes accompanying TANF’s implementation, are important. Questions about systems changes accompanying policy implementation, once addressed, provide understanding about the extent to which new workforce competencies and organizational capacities were developed in agencies serving the TANF population.

The research reported in this dissertation study was designed to address this need.
This is a case study that utilizes the experience of New York State (NYS) as a platform from which to understand systems change as it relates to education and job training of welfare recipients under TANF requirements. The study examines the transition and transformation of the AFDC-based NYS Bridge Program to achieve compliance with TANF mandates. The research utilizes logic modeling (W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2004) and an integrated theory-of-change model (Argyris 1993; Argyris and Schön 1974) to identify critical components of effective systems change. Several theoretical frameworks are employed to structure the investigation and to interpret relevant findings about the “goodness of fit” between the Bridge Program’s envisioned and actual implemented strategies under TANF mandates.

This first chapter begins with an introduction to the TANF and the Bridge Program. It then presents logic models of the envisioned TANF and the Bridge Program. Research themes and questions follow, with special emphasis on, the relationship between TANF and the Bridge Program, including how the Bridge Program’s structure relates to TANF mandates. The significance of the study and the research agenda is addressed following the discussion. A brief summary is presented to conclude this chapter.

**Background**

Appreciation for the research and the Bridge Program depends in part on an understanding of the profound changes accompanying welfare reform. AFDC was established under Social Security Act which was considered the cornerstone of the U.S. welfare system (Anderson, Sundet, and Harrington 2000), establishing the foundation for many social programs that exist today (Melnick 1994). TANF is often depicted as one of
the most dramatic reforms of a social service system (Lurie 2001). TANF fundamentally changed social welfare policies in the United States by using governmental policies, programs, and services in service of two outcomes. The first outcome was to modify welfare recipients’ behavior, while the second was to alter the work culture for the frontline social service workers who provided support services (Nathan and Gais 1999; Lurie and Riccucci 2003).

To achieve these outcomes, major shifts were needed in policy rationales and policy theories. These shifts provide an avenue for appreciating some of the most important differences between AFDC and TANF. These shifts are identified and described briefly next. Policy transition between AFDC and TANF are introduced in the following sections.

**Block Grant vs. Entitlement:**

a. Block Grant--

The 1996 welfare reform embodied a striking shift from cash assistance to work focused policy, signaling the importance of the work-first rationale for reformers (Zedlewski 2003; McPhee and Bronstein 2003). Espousing “work ethic” beliefs and a need to “end welfare as we know it,” President Clinton signed PRWORA starting the “sixty-month lifelong TANF” benefit clock for those on AFDC (Stein 2004; Nathan and Gais 1999). Motivated by the incentives from the federal government in controlling financial expenditures in social service programs, this approach of federal block grant ushers in new incentives and requirements consistent with an expectation that TANF clients move quickly to employment (Watkins 2007; Hagan and Owens-Manley 2002).
b. Entitlement--

Implemented in 1935 as part of the Social Security Act, the intent driving the new policy was to have poor mothers and children stay together, thereby ensuring childcare and family unification (Jones-Deweeever, Peterson, and Song 2003). However, the financial burden for the federal government and local communities increased rapidly as a result of the federal match requirements for the state-operated AFDC programs. As an entitlement program, recipients could continuously enroll in the program as long as their conditions were consistent with eligibility requirements for obtaining cash assistance. As the AFDC roll escalated to its historical peak in the early 1990s (O'Neill and O'Neill 1997), the growth in caseloads drew increased attention from policy makers who were already concerned about the program for reasons of costs (Seccombe 2007).

*Empowerment in Program Design vs. Shared Rule-making Authority*

a. Empowerment--

Under TANF, the federal government essentially delegates its authority to states for the administration of the welfare program (Lurie 2001; O'Neill and O'Neill 1997). Under this policy devolution strategy, the states have the discretion to define the eligibility, design the service programs, and impose requirements. Although program implementation becomes a state function under TANF, the federal government is still the major financier for welfare-based programs. The federal government poses a series of specific mandates for the states to comply with in order to qualify for federal funding.

In essence, federal financial incentives serve as a “carrot” to entice states into compliance (Zedlewski 1998). For instance, states can only receive full federal funding after 2002 if seventy percent of the TANF recipients are participating in employment.
related activities for at least thirty hours per week (Lee 2000). This financial incentive (or disincentive) has become the major check-and-balance between the federal and state governments to sustain the equilibrium between power delegation and mandate compliance. In other words, although the states are granted with maximal flexibility in program design, they still need to align their service delivery with federal mandates (Lurie 2001). Otherwise, the loss of financial support from the federal government immediately jeopardizes the operation of the programs and the benefits of the recipients.

b. Shared Rule-making--

Under AFDC, the federal government shared the rule-making authority with states (Page and Larner 1997). The federal government required the states to offer cash assistance to all clients who were eligible under the law; the states were responsible for administering the service programs and setting the benefit levels under the federal government’s supervision. In addition, state governments could apply for AFDC waivers from the federal government to implement demonstration projects outside the federally mandated program guidelines (Lurie 2001).

*Employment-orientation vs. Education and Family-orientation:*

a. Employment-orientation--

TANF has fundamentally changed the structure of income support for poor single parent families. The primary mechanisms for change is the enforcement of the new “time limit” regulations on how long a recipient can receive welfare and mandated requirements that recipients seek immediate employment (Jones-Deweever, Peterson, and Song 2003). As noted by Anderson, et al. (2000), the major principles of TANF are: work, not welfare; personal responsibility, emphasizing the “temporary” and
“transitional” nature of welfare; and power and flexibility to the states.

With employment promoted as the first priority to the welfare recipients for the main purpose of caseload reduction in TANF (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2005), work-related activities and exemptions are clearly defined in TANF regulations (Hagan and Owens-Manley 2002). First, parents are required to start work-related activities within two months of becoming eligible, or they have to engage in the provision of community services. Second, state governments need to report to the federal government their plans of implementation regarding TANF recipient work activities. Failure to comply with federal mandated work requirements results in strong sanctions for both individuals and states.

b. Family-orientation--

AFDC provided children in poor families with reliable, continuous financial support, enabling mothers to stay home for childcare. This rationale was based on the concept of “sanctity of the family.”

The 1988 Family Support Act (FSA) solidified the concept, endorsing both family unification and education as primary goals when working with AFDC population (Hagen and Lurie 1994). Although the FSA emphasized the obligation of being employed, it aimed more towards long-term employability rather than short-term welfare caseload reduction. The FSA supported formal education—including participation in higher education—as a way of enhancing the recipient’s long-term employability and self-efficiency (Nathan 2000). Moreover, even if parent(s) were not involved in formal educational, traditional schooling activities, they could participate in job training activities and the hours spent in job training were still counted toward the required
activities in FSA (Wiseman 1991; Rom 1989).

With TANF, social service designs focused on family unification were progressively eroded and then largely abandoned. Opponents to this shift expressed concerns about the instability of income for most recipient families. They also expressed concern about the likelihood of vulnerable families becoming ineligible for transitional supports such as childcare during times when the family drifts just over the qualifying threshold, which marks their service eligibility (Larner, Terman, and Behrman 1997). In contrast to these concerns, proponents held the view that family recipients ultimately were responsible for making the necessary life changes to ensure both stable incomes and economic self-sufficiency.

c. Education--

Through the FSA, Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) became a critically important component for AFDC recipients. The federal government provided $1 billion in funds annually to the states from 1991 to 1994 and $1.3 billion in 1995 for administrating JOBS. With the money, the states were expected to provide training, education, job search, assessment, and other supportive services to the AFDC recipients. Fifty-five percent of the money was mandated for providing additional supports, such as remedial education and extra training, for “hard-to-serve” recipients—e.g., long time recipients of welfare with no job prospects.

Recognizing the challenge faced by families with inadequate educational training, states often utilized the funding to encourage AFDC young mothers to go back to school. States provided families with state supported transitional services while attending school, such as childcare (Bane and Ellwood 1994). If included in the state’s approved plan,
recipients could even utilize time spent in school/training to meet the twenty-hour work participation requirement under AFDC, counting educational hours as working hours. Here, in short, were the essentials in an “education-first philosophy.”

Despite their investment in an educational-first rationale, policy makers were often disappointed by the AFDC case numbers following the enactment of the Family Support Act (Page and Larner 1997). AFDC recipient numbers continued to climb, reaching their historic peak in 1994 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2002).

As a result of the climbing numbers, Congressional support for “education-first” strategies began to wane. What did this mean for TANF clients and the service providers charged with serving them? New York State provides a timely opportunity to address this question.

TANF in New York State

New York is one of the top three most populated states participating in TANF since 1997 (Office of Family Assistance 2007). Although New York declared TANF to be a major success in reducing caseloads in the years immediately following its implementation (Governor's Press Release 1999), the number of the welfare “stayers” and “cyclers” has prevented the caseload from declining further in more recent years (Seefeldt and Orzol 2005). A “stayer” refers to someone who stays on welfare continuously for more than two years. A “cycler” is defined as someone who is not on welfare continuously; this person is “on and off it” and tends to “recycle” through the system on a intermittent basis during a two year period (Zedlewski 2003).
An estimated 45% of welfare stayers and cyclers are stuck in the welfare system. Because of the lack of adequate education (Miller 2002), these people are unable to get off the welfare “treadmill” (Richardson, Andersen, and Wu 2002). Over half of these people are believed to have multiple barriers to employment, such as lack of educational and employment training. They are limited by both inadequate education and limited work experience (Zedlewski 2003; Loprest 2003).

The Bridge Program in New York

The Bridge Program was established in 1993 by the New York State Legislature with the stated intent to help end the cycle of public assistance dependency and increase self-sufficiency of the individual. Its purpose was to facilitate the recipient’s achievement of basic educational training and credentialing in order to increase their employability. At the time of its founding, the major clients of the Bridge Program were AFDC recipients. Since the enactment of welfare reform in 1996, the Bridge Program has re-focused its service delivery to comply with TANF mandates.

The Bridge Program is housed in the University Centers for Academic and Workforce Development (UCAWD). These centers are housed in the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the State University of New York (SUNY) Central System.

In addition to the SUNY Central System, there are three main regulatory players: the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), Local Department of Social Services (L-DSS), and Local Bridge Offices (L-Bridge). Actual “front-line” implementation is done through local Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs), Community Colleges, “One-Stop” Centers, and community based institutions throughout
the New York State (Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance 2005).

*Incorporation of the TANF Priorities by the Bridge Program:*

The priorities of the Bridge Program have been reformulated to endorse TANF’s “work, not welfare” focus (Anderson, Sundet, and Harrington 2000). There are three basic tenets of the new Bridge Program as set out in the Bridge Program mission statements.

First, the program has been restructured to increase responsibility and self-sufficiency of TANF recipients. In other words, TANF recipients are to be held accountable for supporting themselves, first through governmental subsidies, transitioning off welfare entirely, and then being self-sufficient and economically independent. Acknowledging that many TANF recipients need to improve or sharpen their academic or professional skills in order to be employed, the Bridge Program offers an educational mechanism through which the TANF recipients are able to equip themselves with adequate job skills (Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance 2005). Targeted case management and employment support services which could be designed to customize individual and employers’ needs are offered to ensure continuity of employment efforts (UCAWD 2009).

Second, the program is designed to enhance the quality of the local workforce and employability of the TANF population, thereby directly supporting economic development in New York State. Since 1996 welfare reform, the federal government’s controls over the states’ financial accountability and employment requirements have been stricter than ever. Although states have the discretion to customize their relevant services with the available funding, they must adhere to strict federal mandates regarding
outcomes as measured by employment rates for TANF clients. To meet threshold requirements, programs and services are specifically designed to meet local employer needs. Adopting the intent of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, the Bridge Program takes WIA’s concepts of “validated skill standards and continuous improvement” to match their TANF services with targeted, locally acknowledged labor needs (UCAWD 2009).

Third, the program seeks to demonstrate the value of inter-agency cooperation and coordination when implementing public policies (UCAWD 2009). Based on the statement of the program mission, the Bridge Program serves as the focal point through which education and employment expertise, services, and resources are coordinated. By virtue of its mission, the Bridge Program brings together four major players in the field of educational and job training: OTDA, SUNY-Bridge, LDSS, and L-Bridge. The service designers in the Bridge Program hope that through the interdependency among different agencies, it provides a critically needed structure through which common goals are defined, limited resources are more efficiently and effectively allocated, and TANF objectives are met.

*Three Specific Activities to Accomplish Bridge Priorities:*

Services in the Bridge Program are geared to enhance employability of TANF clients through customized education and training programs. According to the UCAWD data, as of 2009, there are sixteen programs offered by the Bridge Program in thirty-five participating New York State counties. These programs are grouped according to three major identified service needs: educational outreach at the *pre-employment* stage to
facilitate the development of individualized goals and courses of action; \textit{post-employment} to increase skills related job retention, job advancement, full-time employment, and self-sufficiency; and \textit{at-risk youth} interventions to assess academic need, explore career choices, and provide remedial academic services (UCAWD 2009). Therefore, due to the diverse and comprehensive coverage of the services in the Bridge Program, inter-agency partnerships are necessary for pulling different expertise together to implement the intended program goals successfully.

\textbf{The Logic Model and Theory-of-Change for the Bridge Program}

Logic models for TANF and the Bridge Program are presented below as a graphic means to graphically illustrate the incorporation of TANF principles by the Bridge Program. An integrated theory-of-change model then follows, showing the relationship between defined problems, interventions, and expected outcomes in the Bridge Program.

Logic modeling is based on \textit{theoretical assumptions} often embedded in the stated problem. Oftentimes, these theoretical assumptions and the causal relationships they implicate are implicit and not amenable to empirical investigation. Logic modeling makes these assumptions and causal relationships explicit and testable. It sets the stage for empirical and theoretical investigations.

Logic modeling has its own limitations. Even so, it enables the identification and validation of theoretical assumptions and the problem(s) needing to be solved. Logic modeling then proceeds with the identification of appropriate \textit{inputs}, such as financial resources, professional personnel and supports. Inputs then are instrumental in the
planning and implementation of feasible activities and interventions to address the problem(s). As stakeholders plan activities, they operationalize goals in terms of intermediate and long-term outcomes. Short-term outcomes are planned and expected to be seen in one to three year(s), whiles long-term outcomes are expected to be achieved within four to six years or longer (W.K.Kellogg Foundation 2004).

In 1995, Carol Weiss (Weiss 1995) introduced the “theory of change” as an analytical tool for investigating why and how policy initiatives work or do not work (Weiss 1995; Connell and Klem 2000). Evaluations employing the tool generally examine four dimensions of program evaluation: plausibility, feasibility, meaningfulness, and testability (Weiss 1995; Connell and Klem 2000; Connell and Kubisch 1998; Anderson 2004). In a theory of change approach, normative assumptions are contrasted with proposed positive actions to determine plausibility and feasibility (Weiss 1995; Connell and Klem 2000; Anderson 2004). Congruence between the goals and the designs of the initiatives is examined to determine meaningfulness and feasibility (Connell and Kubisch 1998). This approach also utilizes identified policy assumptions and the causal logic implicit in these assumptions to formulate a testable theory of change, one that presents the causal hypotheses that present the connections between activities and desired outcomes. Examples follow.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-term Outcomes</th>
<th>Short-term Outcomes</th>
<th>Activities/Interventions</th>
<th>Assumptions/Impacts</th>
<th>Literature/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Identified (Empowered) Theory: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Key Components</th>
<th>Implemnetation Strategies</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TANF</td>
<td>Job training and placement, increased government-local and non-profit service provision, increased collaboration with other community agencies and professionals, increased administrative and programmatic accountability</td>
<td>- Increase partnerships between state and local government agencies and non-profit organizations to improve service delivery</td>
<td>- Improved job placement and earnings for participants</td>
<td>- National program guidelines, state implementation strategies, local service coordination, increased funding opportunities, increased capacity among service providers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Integrated (Displaced) Worker State Bridge Program
Expected Outcomes

- Reduced school dropout rate
- Increased educational attainment
- Improved self-sufficiency and long-term self-sufficiency
- Increased earnings
- Reduced unemployment rates
- Improved health outcomes

Problem Statement

- Lack of employability
- Decreased educational attainment
- High number of unemployed and underemployed
- Limited support services

Strategies

- Provision of educational services
- Identification of at-risk youth and students
- Support services and employment

Jobs and advance careers

Strategies:

- Customized educational action plans
- Development of educational programs
- Identification of individual needs
- Provision of post-employment support

Figure 1-1: Theory of Change: New York State Bridge Program after TANF
Theoretical Discussions

Prior to implementation, a proposed program is discussed in terms of how it is “intended” to operate. Its policies are “espoused policies”—formal ideas “on the policy drawing board.” These espoused policies are statements of intention and direction. They are the “policies that people report or describe to the others (Argyris 1993).” In other words, espoused policies stand as the envisioned, verbal acknowledgement of the desirable policy goals and values.

Ideally, espoused policies make clear who is responsible for what (i.e. matters of governance) as well as the implied link between these arrangements and outcomes (Argyris 1993). However, espoused policies are not yet formalized into objective truths or concretized into actual action steps to be taken by the implementing organization. In this study, “intended” and “espoused” policies are used interchangeably.

An implemented policy (e.g., policy-in-use) is concrete and action-oriented. It reflects “policies that people actually use to design and implement their actions (p.65) (Argyris 1993).” In this study, “implemented policy” and “policy-in-use” are used interchangeably.

In theory, implemented policy should be congruent with the espoused policy. In practice policies are often implemented in ways that are not congruent with intended policies. When this discrepancy occurs, and when it is not detected because policy makers assume implementation fidelity, sub-optimal and unplanned outcomes result (Argyris and Schön 1974; Simon 1976).

When the “mismatch” between the espoused policy and implemented policy is detected, an important attribution problem presents itself. Do policy leaders attribute this
discrepancy or mismatch to faulty theory as manifested in espoused policy? Or is the failure to achieve expected outcomes due to our inability to implement in a way that assures fidelity to our original theoretical demands? Or perhaps, are the expected goals simply unattainable under the constraints of real-time implementation? Alternatively, are all of these possibilities worth entertaining? And, what theoretical adjustments needed? Questions like these, once addressed, enable potentially powerful policy learning, development, and change. They illuminate the dynamics and mechanisms for organizational learning. And they highlight the import of studies like this one, which compare and contrast espoused and intended policies.

Implementation is a critical mediating event and hence a special link between espoused and enacted policy. Successful implementation requires adaptation of policy from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; Dusenbury et al. 2003; McLaughlin 1987). Communication with those persons at the micro-levels of implementation is particularly important because the success of a given policy relies on the agreement and the adaptation of the system to accommodate the operational demands of micro (local) level (Ricucci 2005; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; Lipsky 1980).

Framed within the concepts of intended and implemented policies, the study looked into the adaptations exhibited by staff at inter-, intra-agency, and individual levels (see Figure 1-2). The study explored the consequences and implications of partnerships for each of the Bridge relevant programs and see how their policies have changed in response to welfare reform.
Three overarching research questions follow from this policy implementation framework.

**Research Questions**

1. Ten years following enactment of TANF, what systems changes have occurred as a result of the implementation of TANF-related, Bridge Program goals and strategies?
2. Has the Bridge Program developed new systems capacities to achieve the TANF expected outcomes?
3. To what extent has the economic idea of human capital development (and human capital theories in general) influenced TANF’s implementation and systems change mechanisms?

![Figure 1-2: Different Stages and Levels of Analysis](image-url)
Different Levels of Relationships

In order to identify, describe, and explain differences between intended and implemented policies in the Bridge Program after TANF, it is important to ascertain the structural constraints within which policy makers and line staff must operate. For purposes of this study, constraints refer to the factors and forces that recommend some alternatives, while ruling out others.

Three major constraints are important. They are: 1) constraints that inhibit the development of partnerships at the individual, intra, and inter-agency staff levels to facilitate the carrying out of federal mandates; 2) constraints arising from new understandings about human capital development and the returns on disaggregated human capital investment; and 3) constraints that limit the devolvement of former federal power and responsibility to the state and local governments. Each constraint is described briefly below and the associated research questions are delineated. These sub-questions served as the major references for drafting the actual interview questions.

Individual Relationships:

The 1996 welfare reform altered the rationale and culture of the welfare service provision by imposing a series of policy changes on welfare service agencies (Lurie and Riccucci 2003; Hagan and Owens-Manley 2002). The change produced a domino effect disrupting the operations and relationships both within and between service agencies. These changes were generally implemented as a result of internal directives regarding workers’ daily routines, program mission, and “program culture” (Kendrick et al. 2006).
**Intra-agency Relationships:**

The administrative and political accountability procedures mandated in TANF required social services offices to revise their task plans and protocols to meet federal regulations (Sandfort 1999; Hasenfeld 2000). The Bridge Program was no exception. Although the details of service design and delivery were within the state officials’ discretion (Nathan and Gais 1998, 1999), the federal government retained its supervisory role in overlooking the state plans. Mandated changes in TANF, therefore, affected individual staff. They were forced to change their job orientations and behaviors as a result of the federal mandates (Watkins 2007; Lurie and Riccucci 2003).

**Inter-agency Relationships:**

As the federal mandates regarding employment requirements and time limitations on financial support got stricter, the provision of services to the TANF population became more complicated. Inter-agency partnerships in the Bridge Program allowed different agencies to share and compliment resources and expertise to serve the needs of the TANF population while still complying with federal mandates. The ability to form these partnerships facilitated the passage of the New York State Welfare Reform Act of 1997 and the state’s compliance with the federal mandate (Mazzeo et al. 2006).

Inter-agency partnerships addressed two major concerns of welfare reform: immediate caseload reduction for workers and employment for needy parents. Although it was recognized that career related services, education and training were keys to meeting goals (Gueron and Hamilton 2002), only five percent of TANF funding is allocated to career-related activities in New York State—a percentage lower than the eight percent national average (Greenberg and Minoff 2006). Inadequate funding made
the formation of partnerships among state agencies extremely critical. It was only through resource sharing (both monetary and expertise) individual agencies could meet their federal/state imposed requirements (Graham and Barter 1999). Since career and educational services were the major foci in the Bridge Program, the poorly funded services could become problematic. Understanding how the Bridge Program responded to welfare reform at building partnerships at all levels of bureaucratic structure provides a more comprehensive picture in learning the impacts of reforms in the policy arena, especially in the social welfare services.

Several important, empirical questions derive from the preceding rationale. They are grouped under categories, each of which represents an important unit of analysis.

1. *Individual:* How have the changes imposed by TANF affected the culture of the Bridge Program front line workers? How has it affected their ability to carry out their duties? What was/is the working relationship among members in the working team? Do the members endorse the common vision for TANF?

2. *Intra-agency:* What has changed within the Bridge Program post TANF regarding its policies, governing/operating structure, and administrative processes? What changes in the goals of the Bridge Program have occurred as a result of TANF?

3. *Inter-agency:* What inter-agency partnerships developed as a result of TANF? Has there been a fostering of inter-agency team work?
Human Capital

At its core, human capital theory posits stocks of capacities – knowledge, dispositions, health. In economics, these capacities are expected to yield returns when applied in work or other activities. The acquisition of skills, knowledge and dispositions represents an addition to the human capital stock, akin to an investment. The debate in the field of social service for the investment priority on welfare recipients has been swinging between the ends of education and employment.

With the passage of TANF, a series of employment-related services were re-organized and re-designed to fulfill the federal mandates. The new approach valued short-term job training and immediate job placements for the clients (Applied Research Center 2001; Center for Woman Policy Studies 2003). In the Bridge Program, professionals are expected to refer TANF recipients to different services based on their employability. Ready-to-be-employed recipients are channeled to employment specialties for further placement services.

For those persons who lacked skills and knowledge, targeted services are offered to meet their specific, individual needs. Services include academic and professional preparation provided by educational service agencies. The Bridge Program is also offered post-employment training for the TANF recipients relating to job retention and career planning (Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance 2005).

Human capital development, of course, involves more than education and schooling. It also involves health and overall well being. The implication is that education, health care, and social services need to be connected firmly and effectively for optimal human capital development. Policies in the Bridge Program should be expected
to follow suit. The following working questions are also designed to explore this aspect of the Bridge Program.

Working Questions:

1. Is human capital development an explicit priority in the Bridge Program? If so, how is it operationalized? If not, is it an implicit priority driven by implicit policy theories?

2. What changes have been noted in the concept of human capital pre- and post-TANF?

3. How were/are the concepts of education and employment integrated and reconciled within the Bridge Program?

The New Federalism

The federalist system in the United States has been a primary factor influencing policy process at the federal, state, and local levels (Scheberle 1997). Under federalism, each level of government has defined roles and areas of authority. For policies not specifically reserved to the states by the Constitution, the federal government retains primary control over the formation and the authorization of policies (Kingdon 2003). However, local government is the “front-line player” that actually implements policies (Riccucci 2005). The state serves as an intermediary buffer between the federal authorizer and the local implementer.

Having a good working relationship among the three levels is vital to effective policy implementation in the field. Without an effective working relationships in place, relevant resources can not be pulled together to gain maximum results on the
development and implementation of programs (Scheberle 1997). Important empirical questions about these empirical relationships need to be addressed.

Under TANF reform, one of the important system changes was that state governments were granted substantial discretion in developing educational service plans (Kettner 2002). Given such autonomy, state educational plans tended to vary widely. Unlike AFDC, however, PRWORA fixed the amount of federal dollars available to the state. Under the “block grant” approach, state governments became directly responsible not only in determining how to distribute grant funds but also in planning for service provision when there was not enough federal money for all the TANF services identified as relevant and appropriate. With federal government no longer funding the program as an entitlement, welfare policy entered into a “new federalism” model and its reliance on decentralization and delegation principles (Nathan and Gais 1998).

Under the banner of new federalism, the state governments dominated the implementation of reform mandate and resource allocation (Johnson, Hedge, and Currinder 2004). However, it was the front-line officers in LDSS and L-Bridge who were the ones actually carrying out state plans and providing feedback to the state regarding policy implementation (Lurie 2002). The relationships among federal, state, and local governments become even more intertwined as the three levels learned to share the responsibilities and burdens of social welfare programs in areas of financial, performance, and personnel accountability (Behn 2001). Evolution of policy from AFDC entitlement to TANF work-first greatly influenced welfare related agencies pushing them toward valuing inter-agency relationships more than pre-TANF.
Working Questions:

1. How was the Bridge Program held accountable under ADFC? How is it held accountable today under TANF?

2. Over time, how have relationships changed between the three levels of government to accommodate TANF mandates?

3. How has TANF impacted Bridge Program service design?

Bureaucratic Discretion vs. Intended and Implemented Policies

No matter how much power the top policy makers have, arguably they can never determine the actual outcomes of the policy because they cannot completely control individuals’ orientations and actions (Nakamura and Smallwood 1980; Windham 1980). Final outcomes are the direct results of a series of micro-decisions made by individuals who are responding to their perceived interpretation of the stated policy, its regulatory penalties and rewards of the policies (Windham 1980; Lipsky 1980; Lurie and Riccucci 2003; Hagan and Owens-Manley 2002).

This rationale provides important reminders. Front-line workers are, by virtue of their position, delegated with the authority to administer eligibility determination and service referrals. They are in essence the experts in interpreting and applying the laws/regulations giving rising to policy. Such discretion has been referred to as “policy on the pavement” (Caselia 2002). This policy on the pavement mantra calls attention to the de facto policy making powers of front line workers in street-level bureaucracies (Lipsky 1980).

Front-line workers’ discretion and decision-making, therefore, comprise a major determinant of policy implementation. So, when discrepancies occur between espoused
and enacted policies, front-line workers provide a logical starting point for analysis. For example, how much direction and guidance have enacted policies provided for front-line workers? How much discretion do they enjoy? And, are policies aligned at all levels of the system?

Questions like these are salient to the New York State Bridge Program. Although relevant social service agencies at state and local levels are required to align their internal policies to accommodate TANF requirements, many service details were not made explicit. So despite the sanctions and block grant, a certain amount of discretion remains at each level due to micro-level decision making (Lipsky 1980). This state of affairs may give rise to the gap between intended versus implemented policies (Argyris and Schön 1974).

Working Questions:

1. **Leadership:**
   
   Who were the opinion leaders during the implementation of the Bridge Program under the NYS TANF Plan? Have their opinions changed across time regarding their perceived goals, the understood constraints, and expected outcomes? Have they emphasized system alignment and compliance? If so, why?

2. **Leadership vs. Middle Managers:**
   
   How was New York State Plan conveyed to the middle managers in the Bridge Program under TANF mandates? Have middle managers’ perspectives and interpretations of the perceived goals, constraints, and expected outcomes changed over time? Have middle managers, in essence, changed the plan as they have implemented it?
3. **Middle Managers vs. Front-line Workers:**

   How did the middle managers in the Bridge Program communicate the changes to the front-line workers? Have front-line perspectives/interpretations of the perceived goals, understood constraints, and expected outcomes changed over time?

4. **Front-line Workers:**

   Do front-line workers see themselves in alignment with the intended policies of the Bridge Program immediately following TANF implementation? Have they deviated and developed street-level policy? What deviations have they made? Why? What impacts follow from these deviations?

**The Significance of the Research**

This study promises knowledge in three domains. Policy-relevant knowledge is the first domain, and it spans the several priorities encompassed under TANF and the New York State Bridge Program. Policy implementation knowledge is the second domain, including the ability of agencies to harness sufficient resources in supporting the policy change (Fowler 2004) and their abilities to engage in organizational learning in conjunction with policy implementation. Systems change knowledge in support of human capital development is the third domain, including the import and challenges associated with complex, inter-agency partnerships.

*Investigating Changes of Agency Partnerships in TANF Reform:*

There is rich literature in how agencies may or may not work together (Alter and Hage 1993; Bardach 1998; Warglien 2002). The studies are generally, however, about the natural and gradual emerging needs of agencies over time rather than immediate,
dramatic and dynamic changes over night, such as the welfare reform. Focused on the process of forming partnerships, there is little work that has been done to examine complex partnerships driven by dramatic and abrupt policy change.

For example, although Alter and Hage (1993) have examined the needs of partnership and the stages of working together, they failed to examine the shocks from policy mandated change. Nor did they assess the environmental change that can influence agencies’ working routines and jeopardize their existing working relationships due to sudden resources competition (Hatch 1997).

Bardach provides another case in point. Although he neatly delineates cases in public partnership establishment and also looks into the endogenous factors such as culture within agencies, he does not mention how government policy changes may impact existing working relationships across time (Bardach 1998). Like other researchers, he grounds his work in established partnerships, developing partnerships, especially ones challenged by dramatic and rapid policy change, promise different knowledge and understanding.

In the same vein, The Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD) has examined the issue of service integration as it pertains to the special, at-risk, adult education (OECD 1998a, 1997, 1998b). OECD’s publications tend to explore “why” service integration is needed for effective partnership building and “how” to promote it. However, these publications do not provide details regarding the evolution of partnerships and the effects of the changing relationships upon subsequent policies.

*Examining Intended and Implemented Welfare Reform Policies*

This study contributes to a growing body of research in policy implementation,
especially at the state and front-line levels (Lurie and Riccucci 2003; Riccucci 2005; Weissert 2000). Lurie and Riccucci have collected rich data from front-line workers in terms of their level of discretion and behavioral changes. Weissert’s (2000) edited book covers the five Midwest states’ experiences in implementation, strategies in cost controlling, and welfare caseload reduction. Current research in the field of welfare reform is mostly concerned with who is in control and accountable in the process of implementation. Many studies focus on outcomes and the evaluation of reform efforts, presenting case studies to illustrate the pitfalls of policy and the frustration of the policy makers. Importantly, researchers do not backtrack to examine the whole process from the initial planning to the eventual implementation stages as it relates to TANF induced changes in organizational views on educational training.

This dissertation study responds to these needs. With a focus on the Bridge Program, this study compares the intended to the implemented policies following the enactment of welfare reform. Interviewees include staff that have lived through TANF reform and who are currently working in the Bridge Program. The research not only offers insightful understanding of an important dynamic policy process but also recognizes the congruence (or incongruence) between policy intentions and policy implementation.

Discussing the Association between Human Capital and TANF

Welfare reform was primarily aimed at the immediate reduction in welfare caseloads. Playing well in the public media, it was appealing to policy makers more concerned with the next election. Short-term interests apparently prevailed. Apparently, there more policy concern was expressed for specific skills needed for local or regional
economic development than long-term policies to strengthen overall human capital (McPherson and Schapiro 1998). So, despite the original design of the Bridge Program to engage individuals in human capital development activities and to help welfare recipients acquire adequate educational credentials and skills for long-term employments, changes occurred that resulted in organizational adaptations to meet short-term expectations relating to immediate employability.

Although the 1988 Family Support Act endorsed the idea of education-first and was supported by JOBS from 1991 to 1995, the potential long term effect was cut short by the 1996 welfare reform. With TANF’s overwhelmingly focus on work-first strategies, policy shift occurred across all of TANF service agencies and programs, including the Bridge Program. As a result, even though human capital approach is still mentioned and included in relevant program description, the available services tend to be basic and short-term solutions. All the Bridge Program activities are essentially constrained by the State TANF Plan and the State Maintenance of Efforts (MOE) requirements.

Proponents of the human capital enhancement approaches see higher education as a critical component for the welfare programs, wanting such services to be implemented in addition to the cash and direct employment related services. Higher education degrees usually lead welfare recipients to full time salary-based with fringe benefits job, rather than hourly-waged part time position. Labor market research also suggests that there is an economic payoff to post-secondary credentials for low-income families. Men with an associate’s degree earned eighteen percent more than high school graduates and women earned twenty-three percent more (Grubb 1999). Attaining a bachelor’s degree or graduate credentials is correlated with even higher economic payoffs (Sawhill 2006).
This is where the Bridge Program might play a significant part in system change. This program might provide TANF recipients with more opportunities and wider access to higher education. Moreover, the investment in human capital is able to create and generate long-term benefits to the overall well-being, such as better health and positive role models, for the clients’ families (Edin and Lein 1997).

In this dissertation research, an investigation into the missions of Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), State University of New York (SUNY), and Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) were conducted. It is important to understand whether these three major Bridge related agencies share a common belief/goal of advancing human capital advancement opportunities for TANF recipients through their collaborative efforts.

Ten years after the reform, the study offers more comprehensive knowledge about New York State social service systems. It also provides a deeper understanding in how the welfare reform has impacted policy making at different levels. Moreover, the study also allows the opportunities of examining and contrasting the original intended rationales with the actual implemented policies to fill in another missing piece of puzzle in the social service arena.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The remainder of the dissertation is organized as the follows.

The second chapter presents the literature review. This review is the foundation of the dissertation. The review covers salient areas such as espoused versus theories-in-use. It also provides an overview of the educational, labor, and social services components of the change process and discusses the policy implementation process and
learning in the context of the reform.

The third chapter frames the methodology for this research. In order to pursue the “whys” and “hows” in the Bridge Program, a case study methodology is employed. According to Yin (Yin 2003a), when the issue is a phenomenon within real-life context, researchers usually have very little control over the events. Therefore, case study method is appropriate and offers insight into the situation. In this study, interviews are conducted as the major data collection approach. Unstructured observation and document analyses are undertaken as additional data collection methods. Multiple methods approach allows the researcher to draw from the strengths and minimize the weakness associated with different research methods. This methodology also provides a multi-method research plan (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

The fourth chapter is devoted to the data and their analysis. The systems change, the process of implementation, and the inter-agency and inter-professional partnerships are examined to understand the overall policy process and the relationships among different agencies and professionals. Moreover, the fundamental element of human capital in social services and the organizational learning process across agencies are also investigated.

The fifth chapter presents the theoretical articulations and implementation of the study findings. And finally, a sixth chapter offers a synthesis of the research findings, offers conclusions, and provides policy recommendations, limitations of the research, and possible future research.
Chapter Two Literature Review

The policy shift from AFDC to TANF has ushered in systems change in the Bridge Program, which serves for the TANF population. Bridge Program services primarily focus on the pre-employment, post-employment, and at-risk youth training to achieve program goals. Although the achievement of program goals is a critically important question, this research does not address questions about goal attainment. Rather, this study is structured to address the three overarching research questions presented in Chapter One. It focuses on New York State Bridge Program to evaluate intent versus actual implementation of the TANF based policy.

The literature review presented in this chapter identifies and discusses the relevant theories and theoretical frameworks for the dissertation research. Special interests reside in theories and theoretical frameworks that enable understanding of what occurs in the “black box” between policy planning and policy implementation.

This black box metaphor merits explanation. The policy process has often been criticized as a “black box” because it contains a series of complicated and intertwined factors that cannot be explained by simple and direct causal relationships (Easton 1965; Birkland 2005). Different levels of agency interactions will be examined in the Bridge Program’s black box to understand the policy process (Figure 2-1).

The literature review in this chapter draws from, and integrates, five complementary areas of scholarly work. These areas are both theoretical and empirical in nature. The first, systems change theory, is always concerned with the improvement of policy performance, outcomes, and the premises to reach the policy expectations. Several of the studies reviewed, on the broader response in the social service system to
TANF, have embedded their questions and analyses in systems change theory.

A second body of scholarly work concerns the congruence and alignment between original intended and actual implemented policies. This literature gives particular attention to relationships in the macro policy, meso agency, and micro stakeholder levels (Figure 2-2).

The third body of scholarship focuses on inter-organizational (inter-agency) partnership theory. This work examines how partnerships develop and the transformations that take place. It also investigates relationships of actors at different levels of the agency as well as across agencies implicated in the partnership. Scholarship in this area is particularly relevant to the present study because the policy for the Bridge Program anticipates the emergence of a new inter-agency partnership in response to TANF.

The fourth body of scholarship concerns organizational learning theory. The studies relevant in the area examine how organizations adopt changes in mission, goals, and policy environment with a particular focus on whether they learn, how they learn, and learning-related dynamics and outcomes.

The fifth body of scholarship is from economics: It is the concept of human capital. Human capital’s relevance for the present study lies along two dimensions. First, human capital theory provides a possible explanation for the decisions of the actors. Both front line workers and clients are foremost among these actors. Second, a human capital framework offers one way of thinking about policy theories, the Bridge Program’s configurations under TANF, and overall program results.
Many empirical studies in the TANF services programs have been done with a focus on outcome evaluations. However, not many empirical studies have been conducted that approach the evaluation of TANF services through an examination of systems change, inter-agency relationships, and organizational learning. The literature review draws studies from different disciplines to examine these issues, including such sectors as community services (Kendrick et al. 2006), children and family services (Schorr 2006), and educational services integration (Honig and Hatch 2004). Although these studies offer ample theoretical framework and normative arguments from experts in the field, the richness that can be attained from specially designed empirical studies is still missing.

Figure 2-1: Different Stages and Levels of Analysis
Understanding Systems Change Theory and Research

Definitions and Principles of Systems Change

Systems change in organizations refers to a series of adaptations that occur in structures, operational processes, behaviors, beliefs, and even climates and cultures as a result of a policy shift. Change occurs as a result of a repositioning of authority among participating individuals and agencies in the services field (McDonnell and Elmore 1987).

For example, McDonnell and Elmore (1987) examined several strategies that serve as incentives to enhance policy effectiveness. Leaders utilize legal, economic, and political strategies to develop and initiate new policy goals that lead to system change (McDonnell and Elmore 1987). There is, however, a caveat to this rationale: Honig (2006) found that if there is not enough capacity for political and contextual supports at the system base, outcomes may not be fully attainable.

Systems change has generally been evaluated from the perspective of a single system. However, as more contemporary public issues become “wicked problems,” a single systems change usually evolves into cross-systems change. The literature provides a rationale.

“Wicked problems” are “not amenable to solution through traditional, linear planning, and top-down management (Rittel and Webber 1973).” Ultimately, solutions to the wicked problems have to take place in a multiple agency context. In this inter-agency context, system players no longer operate alone, i.e., without the involvement of people from other systems (Hsia and Beyer 2000).

For example, Schorr observed that in the contemporary American world of children and family services, problems arise from: 1) the lack of common purposes; 2) no
common goals in sustaining partnerships; 3) unwilling to be hold accountable in service outcomes; and 4) no clear motivation in embracing systems change.

Schorr further indicated that the systemic challenges are two-fold and in response to manifest needs. First, there are significant differences in agency visions and cultures in carrying out services. Second, the relationships across multiple causes and effects in different agencies make the recognition of common vision and culture even more difficult (Schorr 2006).

Kendrick et al. attempted to utilize the idea of cross-systems change in social and community services (Kendrick et al. 2006). They defined systems change in reference to changes in agency structures, regulations, cultures, relationships, and even professional attitudes. They argued that cross-systems change planning needs to include the following aspects: 1) the supportive leadership at all levels, 2) the appropriate participated stakeholders from agencies, 3) the common recognized knowledge and values from stakeholders, and 4) the vision toward a long-lasting and sustainable systems change.

In all the aforementioned theoretical analyses, it is recognized that the establishment of cross boundary working relationships is a centerpiece in cross-systems change. This literature indicates that, although service agency leaders may be aware of the need of organizational linkages, these linkages do not develop quickly. Rather, the development of inter-agency partnerships is a slow evolutionary process. It requires time for collaboration, dialogue, and the adjustment of business processes. For example, the partnership activities may require resource redistribution in order to meet system and organizational needs (Chubb and Moe 1990; Fowler 2004). Eventually, it is the process of partnership development that ultimately results in changes across all elements of the
system (Hanninen 2000).

**Purposes and Components for Successful Systems Change**

The ultimate purpose of systems change is to overcome the challenges/barriers that threaten the accomplishment of policy/program outcomes (Schorr 2006; Eilers 2002; McDonnell and Elmore 1987). Barriers to successful implementation of policy usually arise as a result of incoherent and confusing governmental policy conditions. For example, the conditions might involve policy and value crisis in society, deteriorating governmental performance, and/or a search for a new approach by government (Robert and King 1996). The solutions to improve all such conditions generally require organizational innovation and partnerships (Schorr 2006; Hsia and Beyer 2000; Kendrick et al. 2006).

Systems change can be bi-directional, i.e., they can be bottom-up, top-down, or both. Each strategy has its respective warrants. For example, the top-down strategy is usually the most common and effective initial catalyst for systems change—with a known limitation. These changes may not be sustainable.

In contrast, the bottom up strategy is slow and with uneven, immediate impacts. But the systems changes resulting from a bottom-up strategy are more sustainable than those from a top-down strategy (Thompson and Fulla 2001; Eilers 2002; McDonnell and Elmore 1987). Moreover, the bottom-up approach effects change in the status quo since the front-line workers generally interpret and implement legislative statements of intent (Lipsky 1980; Lurie 2006; Riccucci 2005).

Regardless of how they occur, systems changes represent organizational innovations. These innovations may be within-system, cross-system, or both. For cross-
systems change to be successful and sustainable, typically, it must encompass the following key related components. These include: 1) a joint vision of the system, 2) the long-term commitment, and 3) a flexible mindsets to test alternatives and adapt strategies to accommodate system demands (Kendrick et al. 2006; Roberts and King 1996; Schorr 2006). The literature indicates that inter-agency partnerships are necessary for the success. (The relationships will be addressed more fully below.) Although cross-systems change is sometimes seen as a solution for addressing the problems of a fragmented system, the organizational requirements are often too complex to accomplish in the short-term.

The Contributions to Systems Change Theory to This Study

The literature provides special guidance. As the policy environment becomes more complicated, a single strategy to effect systems change probably will not suffice because of the multiple dimensions of most current service systems, which need to be prioritized for change (Honig 2006). Particularly within the social services system, professional agencies tend to serve the same targeted clients but through the lens of their individual agency’s mission and service expertise (Ragan 2003). As clients present with difficulties that cover a wide range of life challenges, it appears to be imperative that system stakeholders adapt to the demands of an ongoing comprehensive and coordinated social service environment.

The aforementioned empirical and theoretical studies of cross-systems change are derived from studies of diverse public services systems. These systems include children and family services, juvenile justice services, and community services. The studies all pinpoint the uncertainty of systems change and identify several important variables to
successful changing process. Variables include: 1) acknowledging the need of cross-boundary working relationships (Hsia and Beyer 2000), 2) recognizing the common purpose of the systems change (Schorr 2006), and 3) assuring strong leaders in each agency/level (Kendrick et al. 2006).

Nevertheless, none of the research studies reviewed for this dissertation have examined the impact of urgent, time-sensitive federal mandates and deadlines on systems. In the Bridge Program, the cross-systems change occurred within a mandated timeframe, with states receiving sanctions (primarily withholding of a federal bonus) for non-compliance. Nor did the studies examine the issue of “single systems change” versus “cross-systems change,” a major limitation given the importance of understanding complex service systems.

With the enactment of the 1996 welfare reform, the Bridge Program has had to adjust its services to fit the system requirements in order to remain a viable service provider. It serves as an example of the changes in the reformulation of internal and external organizational relationships and resource allocation strategies (Lamothe and Denis 2007). Thus, this dissertation study of the Bridge Program will contribute to the literature in the field through the provision of empirical data for the study of complex change in the welfare service system.

The literature reviewed indicates two important priorities for this dissertation. The first priority is to define and investigate the difference between “single systems change” and “cross-systems change”. The second is to identify and describe the relationship between these two kinds of change.

Another difference is important. It is the difference between intended and
implemented policy. The following section will examine the process and the relationships between the intended and implemented policies. The discussion will focus on the factors and the intertwined relationships which account for the successful systems change.

**Understanding Intended versus Implemented Policies**

**Definitions and Relationships**

Argyris’ early research, albeit focused on organizational behavior, is especially salient to this dissertation study because his theoretical constructs and empirical findings illuminate the difference between intended and enacted policies. This review thus begins with his research on organizations, especially organizations able to change and ones that lack the capacity to do so (Argyris 1964, 1957).

This study’s use of intended (espoused) versus implemented (enacted) policies can be traced to organizational research. These theoretical constructs were initially developed by Argyris and Schön as a “theory-of-action” and a “theory-in-use (Argyris and Schön 1974).” Argyris and Schön explored how the understanding between “theory-of-action” and “theory-in-use” could increase the professional effectiveness of administrators (Argyris and Schön 1974).

Working from a micro point of view, Argyris argued that people tend to operate either intentionally or unintentionally in the two different theoretical frameworks (Argyris 1993). He explained theory-of-action (“intended” theory) as normative theory. Normative theory explains how individuals conceptualize the process of reaching goals efficiently and effectively. On the other hand, theory-in-use (“implemented” theory) is the pragmatic application of theory. Theory-in-use emphasizes concrete actions and
strategies that individuals apply as they construct actions plans to accomplish intended goals (Argyris 1993).

Argyris first conducted interviews with Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) to understand their envisioned “theory-of-action” for accomplishing organizational goals. He then examined the actual strategies and methods used by the CEOs during implementation. Through a comparison of their actions (“theory-in-use”) with their envisioned “theory-of-action,” Argyris concluded that the two different theoretical frameworks co-exist in people’s minds. These are: 1) the initial intention of an action which is conceptualized as the normative “ideal” approach; and 2) the actual implementation action plan used to carry out the original intent.

The differences between theory-of-change and theory-in-use serve as an examining lens for two possible incongruities. Both influence policy implementation.

**Process Components between Planning and Implementation**

The twin theoretical constructs, theory-of-action and theory-in-use, are salient to public policy research. Intended policies are the ones that are designed, planned for, and purposively deliberated in advance. Theoretically, policy makers conceptualize causal links between a problem and its “ideal” solution in the formative stages of planning and program development. As the process of policy planning is nearing completion, the implementation process begins with the initiation of planned activities and practice strategies (Roberts and King 1996).

Discrepancies generally arise between the envisioned strategy and real-time implementation. Policy planners are inclined to remain normative whereas implementers tend to become pragmatic in their application of practice (Lipsky 1980). Successful
implementation of intended policies would require the recognition and willingness to adjust objectives and actions to accommodate differences between the planners and implementers. As a result, the connection from problem to solution is not always straight-forward and tightly connected. Importantly, the relationship between the original plan and how implementation is actually accomplished is usually not a linear one (Sawhill, Weaver, and Kane 2002).

Organizational leaders espouse their policies in ways that seem normative and rational. These espoused theories are based on the organizational values and assumptions. Schein (2004) argued that one of the successful factors in achieving desired policy outcomes depends on the goodness of fit between organizational values and expected policy changes. If the espoused policies from the top match the original agency tacit assumptions, the intended policies are more likely to be carried out (Schein 2004). Moreover, policy implementation requires fluidity and “mutual adaptation.” Here, implementers are required to reconcile their micro agency implementation environment with the macro policy context (Berman and McLaughlin 1978; Honig 2006).

The successful implementation of a policy also demands a dynamic feedback loop. In other words, as the planners deliver reconstructed goals to practitioners, local implementers need to tailor strategies to fit the local condition and then provide additional feedback to planners (McLaughlin 2006). Feedback, ideally, enables organizational and policy learning. Thanks to organizational learning, the policy goals and the designs should become mutually beneficial. In other words, the policy implementation feedback process enables planners and implementers to learn more from one another over time (Datnow 2006).
Policy Dynamics between the Planning and Implementation

Written laws usually structure and provide the general intentions of policy makers and their expected changes in policy. However, written laws often fail to provide sufficient details to explicitly direct the implementation process (Friedman 2003). If the intended policies and the agency assumptions are divergent, policy discrepancies are likely to arise. Any discrepancies are predicted to result in less than optimal outcomes. Sub-optimal outcomes are attributable to congruities between the actual policy-in-use and the espoused policies (Recesso 1999). These incongruities can be particularly pronounced when the intended policy mandated by a policy intervention is of questionable value (Behn 1991).

The policy process involves two dimensions: individual stakeholders and agencies (Figure 2-2). In the relevant literature, “stakeholder” is generally defined to include all people who represent particular interests (Barnes and Sullivan 2002). “Agencies” refer to public organizations which are formed to perform a specific desired services (Syanger 1999; Denhardt 1995). The stakeholders, in the case of the Bridge Program, are the individual professionals providing employment and educational services. Agencies are the organizations which their budget and expertise are needed for implementing the Bridge Program policies.

Professional stakeholders involved in the policy process need to share a common vision before effectively acting on policy. Clarity must be attained as several key definitions are developed. These definitions include: 1) the relationships and interactions between planners and implementers (Laurian et al. 2004), 2) the capacity and commitment to staff and leaders (McLaughlin 1987), and 3) the information and
knowledge available to participants of the policy (Bryson and Anderson 2000).

Agency stakeholders must come into alignment. They need to achieve both clarity and coherence on several key priorities. These priorities are: 1) agency missions, structures, business processes, artifacts and the intended policies (Meier and McFarlane 1996); 2) the resource distribution; and 3) the methods of implementation that will be used.

As the individual stakeholder and agency dimensions interact with the external policy environment (Hagen and Lurie 1994), a series of inter-agency activities at different levels may result. This interactive relationship is illustrated in Figure 2-2. Figure 2-2 depicts the relationships that generally develop during the implementation process. (A detailed and extended framework will be laid out and discussed more in the later inter-agency partnership section.)

Failure to engage stakeholders and agencies in both the planning and implementation processes can account for much of the incongruity between intended and implemented policies. Moreover, if the policy formation process is not responsive to the needs of stakeholders and agencies, it may also jeopardize the congruity between the intended and implemented policies.

Figure 2-2: Dynamics of Policy Implementation
The process of moving the policy from the drawing board of the planning process (Kendrick et al. 2006) to the “pavement” of implementation (Caselia 2002) contains two layers of complexity. The first layer of complexity is at the macro level. The related literature indicates that implementation is by definition a process of joint action and negotiation (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). The purpose of the joint action and negotiation is to reach agreement on implementation strategies. The final agreement which serves as the “equilibrium” point is a result of the negotiation process between stakeholders and involved agencies.

For example, Pressman and Wildavsky studied the Economic Development Administration in Oakland. They discovered that a series of negotiations and redistribution of power and resources would need to occur in the implementation process before policies can be successfully realized at the street level (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). Majone and Wildavsky later argued that “the process is the purpose (Majone and Wildavsky 1979).” In other words, the process of implementation eventually results in actions that overcome the barriers of institutional fragmentation, confusing goals, competing interests, and inadequate resources.

The second layer of complexity involves inter-governmental interactions. These interactions often lose their transparency because of the complexity in implementing federal policy (Bardach 1984; Kingdon 2003). Under the American federalist system, federal government generally initiates policy, enforcing its promulgated regulations through the application of sanctions or incentives to force state government compliance. Critics, however, point out that the lack of clarity in both goals and regulatory protocols often result in a no-win situation. Lower governments are held responsible for the
implementation of a given policy (Hill 2003), however, they are neither provided for adequate guidance nor directly monitored by federal government to determine their level of success in implementation or compliance with federal mandates.

It is the front-line workers who have the discretionary power within the fragmented hierarchical structure of the policy system (DiIulio 1994). When discretion is granted to implement a new policy, front-line bureaucrats usually exercise their discretion. They tend to interact with clients and other stakeholders in a way that serves their interests and/or offers the least disruption to their standardized routines (Gilg and Kelly 1997; Simon 1976). The asymmetric information between the federal government and the state government; the state government and the local government; the local government and the street level bureaucrats contributes to a special problem. This problem is called the principal-agent problem (Moe 1984; Reitan 1998). As a result of the principal-agent problem, the federal government is often unable to ensure expected outcomes and seeks recourse through application of its authoritative powers to impose sanctions.

In summary, the literature indicates that there is an interaction between policy formation and policy implementation that synergistically affects final outcomes. From the perspective of Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), successful implementation requires a feedback process, one that enables organizational learning and may inform the policy formation process. The feedback process also renders more attuned actions to the demands of implementation negotiation. And then the actions account for more needed redefinition of authority (As Figure 2-2). The content of the “intended policy” shapes how implementation occurs, defines roles, sets parameters for what “tools” are legitimate,
and then supplies resources for inter-agency relationships (Bardach 1984; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984).

**The Contributions to Implementation Theory in the Context of This Study**

Argyris identified the differences between the “theory-in-action” and “theory-in-use” in both the private and public sectors (Argyris and Schön 1974; Argyris 1993). This theory, translated from organizations to policy, is salient to this dissertation study.

Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) and Bardach (1984) specifically addressed the dilemma of implementation in the public sector by examining various public programs in California in the 1960-70s. The latter two studies indicated the political dynamics between the policy planning and implementation. These dynamics include policy formulation, resources diversion, and joint decision-making (Bardach 1984; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). Although the studies were done more than three decades ago, most of the political struggles in the process still apply in the current policy environment. The studies particularly examined the interactions between legislators and the local implementation offices.

This dissertation study of the Bridge Program emphasized the politics and interactions in the local implementing offices. Specifically, the study examined the “theory-of-action” and “theory-in-use” and the interactions among leaders, middle managers, and front-line workers in the process of policy implementation.

Pressman and Wildavsky and Bardach also identified the coordination of agencies as one of the important but problematic factors in carrying out policies (Bardach 1998; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). In this Bridge Program study, the researcher attempted to explore the related, but different concepts of “inter-agency partnership” and service
provider collaboration. (A detailed discussion of inter-agency relationships and collaboration is presented next.).

The successful implementation of the Bridge program relies on the efforts from multiple TANF relevant agencies. A successful partnership also promotes mutual benefits among relevant agencies at all levels. The following sections discuss the literature on inter-agency partnerships with a specific focus and relevance on this study.

**Understanding the Inter-agency Partnership Theory**

**Definitions and Principles**

The literature suggests that when intended and implemented policies are aligned, systems change is successful. Inter-agency relations provide one focus for examining this alignment. More specifically, inter-agency partnerships are successful when intended and implemented policies are congruent. In addition, inter-agency partnerships bring the ideas of innovation, integration, and cooperation to harness the strengths and expertise in different agencies (Milbourne, Macrae, and Maguire 2003).

Partnerships are formed initially to bring two or more agencies working together for their mutual objectives (Fletcher 2006). With the increasing complication of social issues and public policies, few policies can be carried out by just one organization or agency. Throughout the establishment of the partnerships, the organizations are committed to make progress, improve performance, and share risks and benefits (Allen 2002).

Federal agencies respond to social challenges and issues through the creation of policies and new regulations. Policy implementing agencies at the state and local levels adapt these regulations, amending their way of doing business to accommodate new
policy demands (Nakamura and Church 2003). The degree to which partnerships are
developed and maintained is contingent upon resources, funding, and institutional
interests and boundaries (Roberts and King 1996; Nancarrow 2004).

The following sections identify and discuss the important and necessary elements
in the relevant literature. These are the elements which account for the occurrence of
partnerships. The discussion starts at the meso level. The meso focus includes the
examinations of transformations within and across relevant agencies.

Then the discussion moves to the micro level. At the micro level, the discussion
first explains the different contributions from individuals at different levels. Later the
focus addresses the approaches which accomplish the vision of inter-agency partnerships.

**Key Elements Linked to the Emergence of Partnerships**

**At the Meso Level—**

_Inter-agency Transformation and Adaptation:_

Organizational transformation occurs when the status quo does not adequately
resolve problems and enable the organization to meet new challenges (Boonstra 2004).
Enactment of new policies sets the stage and requires the change of organizational and
business processes. The changes are designed to accommodate the changing regulatory
environment (Hammer and Champy 1993; Espejo et al. 1996). Pressman and Wildavsky
believed that “each element is dependent on the other so that program implementation
becomes a seamless web (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984).” However, even though the
relationships seem to be related between the policy objectives to results, the processes in-
between the planning and implementation are far more complicated than just a simple
linear relationship.
Policies are continuously transformed by implementation actions. The involved agencies discover the need for resources redistribution and redefinition to the desired objectives (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). At the same time, policy changes force the involved agencies to adopt the following approaches: 1) to develop a cooperative culture, 2) to develop more flexible organizational boundaries, and 3) to establish a synergetic cross-boundary relationships that allow them to function within the new policy environment (Espejo et al. 1996).

The literature indicates that it is important to have all the relevant agencies develop and embrace the same vision; and then to be able to work together as a team of stakeholders in the policy transformation process. Once the common vision is recognized, it is more likely that the involved agencies would bring their individual interests, expertise, and resources to the table for collective planning and implementation.

In the process of joint working relationships, stakeholders ought to focus on the goal of balanced mutual benefits rather than to seek maximizing individual interests (Alkhafaji 1989). As public polices are structured in response to “wicked problems,” inter-agency partnerships seem to be one of the promising venues to solutions. The recognition of the multiple dynamics of the wicked problems should also result in increased inter-agency efforts for integrated services (Lawson 2004).

During the development of inter-agency relationships, it is important to get all the stakeholders together. Having the appropriate involvement allows stakeholders to express their concerns and explore their joint interests in a constructive way (Gray 1989). Moreover, the participatory process is also able to posit the solutions in terms of cross agency interests (Taket and White 2000). In this case, agencies are no longer isolated
within their individual service silos. Instead, their representatives reach out to build working relationships with other professional agencies.

Moreover, an identity change accompanies some inter-agency partnerships. The solutions require all stakeholders to form a “new brand” (Bovaird 2006), one that reflects and promotes a common platform and mission. The recognition of the new brand helps the involved agencies explore, defines the problems, and then achieves the common objectives through collective actions.

Furthermore, the process of inter-agency transformation in partnership establishment allows consensus building. The successful partnership could also facilitate mutual understanding and trust (Lawson 2004; Reitan 1998). Eventually, the process engenders several other desirable outcomes. These outcomes include: 1) a logical planning, 2) a strategic design, and 3) a synergetic emergence of positive outcomes within and across relevant agencies (Longogia 2005).

*Intra-Agency Transformation and Adaptation:*

Inter-agency transformation and adaptation comprise key factors in managing successful partnership establishment. However, Howe points out that partnerships among agencies can only be successful when leaders and staff at the intra-agency level are clearly committed (Howe 1992). In other words, important stakeholders inside each agency must work together toward the common goal in order to advance and sustain inter-agency partnerships. This level of commitment is needed to ensure transformation of the organizational culture and structures (Espejo et al. 1996; Morrison 2000).

Changes in the structure may be altered through laws and regulations. Changes in culture need to go through a time-consuming, challenging, but fundamental process.
Cultural changes sustain transformation leading to the development of the inter-agency relationships.

Culture is a parameter that illuminates organizational actions and values. Schein concluded that culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that is learned by a group (Schein 2004). As new members are introduced to the group, culture becomes the value and approach for them to perceive, to understand, and to feel as members within the group (Schein 2004). Therefore, culture is considered as the defining characteristic of the agency which projects an organizational image to outsiders. Culture reflects different organizational structures and missions (Riddell and Tett 2001; Sandfort 1999). Culture also sets the boundary that separates one agency from the others (Martin 2002).

Culture can also be diverse within the same agency due to divergent structures of accountability and job descriptions. Being able to merge a new value into the internal organizational culture can help to facilitate external adaptation and internal integration (Martin 2002; Schein 2004). The point to be made here is that the emergence of a unified culture and structure is critical in the process of intra-agency transformation. The transformation process reflects the adaptation and adoption of new policy values which is defined by the stakeholder agencies (Martin 2002). The readiness of intra-agency transformation serves as the pre-requisite for inter-agency transformation. It is only when internal agency culture, actions, and structure align in support of policy change, that the formation of inter-agency partnerships can be easily accomplished and then sustained.

**Different Roles in the Partnerships**

At the Micro Level—

Members of agencies have distinct missions and roles in the organizations.
Leaders direct and control the direction of the agency. Middle managers and front-line workers perform the activities needed to ensure the expected goals from the top is accomplished (Osborne and Gaebler 1993). Making transformational changes is never easy in organizations because human beings are usually resistant to change (Thornhill et al. 2000; Useem and Kochan 1992). Furthermore, professionals may or may not possess the skills and/or commitment needed to ready the organization for intra and inter-agency change (Eilers 2002; Radin and Coffee 1993). In the following sections, the functions, missions, and the influence of each member’s role during the organizational change process will be examined and illustrated.

Leaders:

In the process of transformation, leaders are the ones who first and directly receive the “shock” from the introduction of change. Although leaders do not always welcome the new change, they seek to maintain the competitiveness and the survival of the agency by addressing and planning for transformation (Connolly and James 2006). For example, in this study of the Bridge Program, leaders are obligated to implement a policy that they did not co-construct. As a result, the Bridge Program leaders have little autonomy in the process of policy planning and implementation.

Specifically, leaders are constrained in three ways. First, they have to break new ground in “coping” with the macro policy environment changes through planning activities (Lipman-Blumen 1996; Behn 1991). Second, they have to re-direct the agency. The re-direction transforms the existing business process into a system which is more compliant with upcoming policy demands (Behn 1991; Thompson and Fulla 2001; Honig 2006). Third, leaders have to convey the need for change and proposed strategies for
accomplishing change to each agency member (Armstrong and Stephens 2005; Thompson and Fulla 2001). The leaders’ ability to function effectively is defined by the ability to accomplish these three dimensions.

Middle Managers:

Middle managers are the “unsung professionals (Rosser 2004)” because they are positioned in-between the leaders and the front-line workers. It is the leader who steers and formulates internal policies to support the changing policy/political environment. It is the front-line worker who carries out the actions that operationalize stated “intentions” (Van Gils 1997). Therefore, middle managers are the crucial change agents in the time of transformation.

Middle managers possess the combination of professional abilities and legitimacy in controlling the macro and micro information in the organizations (Livian 1997). They provide sustained support for front-line workers. Middle managers maintain front-line workers’ morale and satisfaction toward the agency and leadership during periods of organizational transformation (Frohman and Johnson 1993). Moreover, they play an important communication and support role, embracing and relaying attitudinal and behavioral changes from the front-line level to upper management (Whichard and Kees 2006). And finally, they have the responsibility to monitor the new policies and procedures. They inform the leadership to understand the pending problems and recourse needs (Rosser 2000). As such, if middle managers are persuaded and committed to organizational change, they become a powerful and effective means for the leadership to promote the changes to the street level workers.
Front-line Workers:

Front-line workers are the ones who directly interact with clients. They usually transform the organizational missions into actual goals and realistic actions. At the same time, they are expected to be advocates and deliverers of public policies through their daily interactions with clients (Lipsky 1980). As a result, front-line workers are constantly playing dual but conflicting roles of helpers as well as the gatekeepers in the policy arena (Lipsky 1980).

Front-line workers generally exercise their professional power in the process of services (Hagan and Owens-Manley 2002). Despite their critical role as order receivers as well as the order implementers (Lee 2000), front-line workers are the least powerful group in the transformational process of adopting new policies and/or regulations. Thus, front-line workers’ understanding of the policies is crucial to the actual implementation. They are usually held accountable in the outcomes of policy changes (Hill 2003). Nevertheless, they have little authority over the redirection of policy and/or resources for the support of policy implementation.

Although front-line workers might not have the authority to shape and amend the development of polices, they have an extraordinary degree of professional discretion and autonomy in the process of actual implementation at the street level (Lurie and Riccucci 2003). When enacted laws become actual service programs, front-line workers are directly responsible for operationalizing the laws from static texts (intended policies) to dynamic actions (implemented policies) (Riccucci 2005). They are depicted as the “leaders on the street” (Vinzant and Crothers 1998).

The complex interdependency between the manager and front-line worker levels
plays a determining factor in the success of agency transformation (Lipsky 1980). For managers, front-line workers' individual actions “add up to agency behavior (Riccucci 2005).” Managers rely on the actual implementations at the front-line level for fulfilling policy requirements and transformational outcomes. As a consequence, managers supervise front-line workers’ behaviors in an attempt to assure that appropriate and effective services are provided to the clients (Hill 2003; Friedman 2003). Front-line workers need managers to understand their professional and psychological needs and dilemmas, depending on managers for understanding and support in completing their tasks. Once their efforts are recognized, the transformational process proceeds more efficiently.

**The Relationships between the Three Roles**

Leaders, middle managers, and front-line workers are all bounded by different regulations, job descriptions, and business routines. In order to assure the effective development of partnerships, the three players need to align together on a common platform. The successful implementation in both systems and cross-systems change cannot be attained without the common recognition of partnerships among the leaders, middle managers, and front-line workers.

From a rational actor perspective, agency members think in terms of the general welfare of the agency and work toward the optimal goals for the agency. However, in reality, human beings usually attempt to react on “maximizing self-interests” while working in agencies. Under the restriction of bounded rationality, individuals only make “satisficing” choices based on standard operating procedures and self-serving goals (Simon 1976). Moreover, the asymmetric of information in the principal-agent
relationships may compound the problem of bounded rationality among professionals at different levels. In reality, there is usually not enough information for professionals to maximize the benefits of decisions (Moe 1984; Simon 1976; DiIulio 1994). As a result, the positive and coordinative relationships between the leaders, middle managers, and front-line workers are important in achieving the goal of systems change and cross-systems change.

**Types of Inter-agency Partnerships**

In many cases, inter-agency partnerships are formed to compensate for the deficits of more demands in the cross-agency or cross-sectoral service delivery system. Agencies prefer operating as “individual silos” because working as partners usually brings unwelcome extra work to already stressed agency professionals (Harris 2003). The initial momentum and willingness of inter-agency partnership building, therefore, generally depend on policy mandates. However, even though partnerships can be mandated, the genuine and long-lasting working relationships and interactions do not occur as a result of a policy edict. Implementation demands are the most difficult to be carried out when multiple agencies are involved in the process (Robinson and Cottrell 2005).

The literature indicates deeply engaged and truly interdependent partnerships are relatively rare. Such special partnerships take time and careful stewarding. They typically derive from the establishment of a framework for coordination (Ragan 2003).

Partnership development also derives from the fundamental dynamics of policy implementation (Figure 2-2) that are premised on the presence and interactions across policies, stakeholders, and agencies. The ideal partnership journey starts from working along, cooperation, coordination, and finally collaboration. Each partnership makes the
journey at its own pace, meeting the challenges in meeting cooperation, coordination, and collaboration goals (Figure 2-3).

After a review of the literature, the model of partnership evolution for implementation can be seen to take one of three routes. The three routes, expressed in colloquial terms are: 1) “It’s my own business (working alone within single agency);” 2) “It’s also your business (cooperation and coordination);” 3) “It’s our business (collaboration).”

Figure 2-3: Three Routes for Partnerships in implementation
The Evolution of Inter-agency Partnerships

Organizations are ready to move from standing alone to working together once intra-agency and inter-agency transformation is underway. In addition to the readiness of transformation, well organized channels of communication need to be embedded in agency structures (Imperial 2005). Moving from partnership pathway 1, “it’s my own business”, to partnership pathway 3, “it’s our business” is the ideal evolution in partnership development. However, not every partnership can reach the ideal stage of a collaborative and interdependent partnership.

The following sections introduce and illustrate the partnership evolution not only at the agency level, but also at the individual worker level. Agency leaders’ behaviors represent the agency level. Leaders are the ones who articulate agency goals, make decisions for the agency’s future, and guide the agency forward (McGrath et al. 2005). The middle managers and front-line workers represent individual workers. Contextual characteristics of each stage and facilitators for advancing to the next stage will also be identified. Table 2-1 presents the meso agency and micro individual characteristics in the relationship evolutionary process.

Stage 1: Working Alone to Cooperation:

A. At the Agency Level—

Working alone is the typical approach in agency operation. Particularly in the public sector, working across agencies is considered a recent evolutionary innovation in organizational governance (Alter and Hage 1993). According to Weber’s ideal type of bureaucracy (Weber 1946), agencies are well-bounded and protected by organizational structures, regulations, and specific job descriptions. Structured by specific agency
mission (Kerson 2002), the organizational structures, regulations, and job descriptions become the boundary objectives (Star and Griesemer 1989; Lee 2005). These boundary objectives maintain an agency’s legitimacy and predilection to working solely within their individual silo service subsystems. The structural boundaries serve as a justification to avoid working with others (Halley 1997).

Moreover, the massive bureaucratic structure and the complicated array of interwoven rules become barriers to effective information flow and the channel of communications (Riley and Brophy-Baermann 2006). The dysfunctional nature of information flow and the fragmentation of communications prevent agencies from understanding one another. The structural incompetence even further jeopardizes the coordination efforts and deteriorates the increased competition among agencies. Often it requires a federal government mandate to establish a need for partnership. Necessary actions are then required to align individual organizational agendas with potential agency partners (Eilers 2002; Thompson and Fulla 2001). These mandates often take the form of policy “carrots” or “sticks” to encourage cooperation through incentives or regulatory sanctions (Fowler 2004).

B. At the Individual stakeholder Level—

Simon argued that the work of agency professionals is not dominated purely by one’s job description. Self-interest also is important (Simon 1976). Existing boundary objects, such as the organizational structure, protocol, job description, play the controversial roles as both the “protection” and the “red tape” to partnerships (Star and Griesemer 1989; Lee 2005; Kerson 2002). The initiation of cooperation involves individuals and groups that agree to play the role of boundary spanners in order to
respond to requests from one another (Claiborne and Lawson 2005; Zucker et al. 1996).

Nevertheless, new cooperative activities can make professionals feel threatened and
deprived due to the uncertainty of the changes (Kaufman 1985). For example, Harris
concluded that, among most workers, working together is primarily a symbol of more
work (Harris 2003).

As a result of such perceived disincentives, change often requires a strong
momentum from the top initially to encourage inter-agency cooperation between
professionals. Even though individuals might have different views and are resistant to
the change, the well structured bureaucratic hierarchy has defined the source of authority
for the professionals (Weber 1946; Barnard 1968). This hierarchical setting allows the
agency leaders to set the stage for the change from individual work into partnered
coopration.

Regardless, success in moving toward cooperation does not guarantee the
sustainability of efforts. Continuity of cooperation generally requires the professional to
recognize the pressure from the top. Once the pressure is recognized, the professionals
would be motivated to reach out as the initial boundary spanners for cooperation
(Mulford 1984; Kerson 2002). Only if the relationship of inter-agency cooperation is
initiated and sustained, can inter-agency coordination become possible.

Stage 2: Cooperation to Coordination:

A. At the Agency Level—

Although organizational behaviors are usually bounded by defined structures
(Kerson 2002; Sandfort 1999), the presence of wicked problems has resulted in more
opportunities, demands, and incentives for inter-agency cooperation. The process also
forces the redefinition and recreation of agency boundaries. The new agency boundaries could allow increased organizational complexity to address cooperative arrangements.

Specifically, cooperation is the willingness to enrich the relationships among relevant players in achieving a common goal (Alter and Hage 1993; Fear and Barnett 2003). In order to strengthen the cooperative inter-agency partnerships, agency leaders have to start building the “organizational ties” with other stakeholders based on the “assigned action” provided by the mandate received from higher authorities (Honig 2006).

Generally, the initiation of cooperation involves individuals and groups who agree to play the role of boundary spanners in order to respond to requests from one another (Claiborne and Lawson 2005). When organizations intend to cooperate with one another, the first objective is usually to maximize individual agency’s interests and attain its goals. The negotiation processes are usually self-centered and immediate payback is expected. There are still fundamental differences in organizational values and some specific recognitions in organizational missions at the stage of cooperation (Austin 2000).

The idea of bringing the cooperative efforts into coordinative relationships can be reached only when stakeholders perceive the recognition of “common mission”. At the stage of coordination, long term mutual beneficial relationships are also foreseen by involved agencies (Davis and Sims 2003). As the common mission starts to emerge from the cooperative relationships, agency leaders could identify one another’s expertise and begin to see the possible benefit of working together as a team (Connell and Klem 2000). Although the concept of the “team” is still ad hoc and mostly based on individual interests at this stage (Gardner 2003), the process toward coordination has started.
B. At the Individual Stakeholder Level—

In the process of agency cooperation, individual professionals are assigned by the leaders as agency representatives to work together on a common product with a shared goal (Gardner 2003). In this stage, the job description of “working with people across agencies” is carried out through coercive power from the top. Regardless of coercion, agency members have their discretion to decide the level of efforts to implement the order (Vinzant and Crothers 1998), as long as the baseline of the requirements is fulfilled. As a result, agency professionals still hesitate to change their routine behaviors. This mindset would position the changes away from the “zone of indifference.” Orders are accepted reluctantly with constant questions of the authority (Barnard 1968). When a policy is placed in this awkward position, it is hard to manipulate and sustain policy changes at the individual level for the long-term.

In the process of turning cooperation into coordination, the individual actions and motivations are still driven by the sense of urgency. Agency members usually choose not to consider coordinative efforts as a regular part of their job because it is atypical and they are “just being told to do so.”

The concept of coordination cannot be realized until the concept is “bought-in” by agency members. Although agency members act passively in the beginning, they might gradually become accustomed to the new relationship and realize the need and the benefit of working together. As a result, buying-into the concept of working together is the premise and the stepping stone for the stage of coordination at the individual level (Hall 1999).
Stage 3: Coordination to Collaboration:

A. At the Agency Level—

Once a common mission is acknowledged, involved agency leaders attempt to establish new working protocols and structures for the new relationships. Partnerships become a team-based systems, perpetuating by the establishment of ownership among partnered agencies (Beyerlein et al. 2003). Coordination further implies some sustainable control over intra-agency relations to assure that agency functions are organized in a systematic matter (Axinn and Axinn 1997).

In the stage of coordination, the creation of participatory decision-making is critical and has two distinct dimensions. First, it facilitates the process of reaching a consensus on a common mission. Second, it moves participants from the concept of “working together” to a series of concrete actions (Cresswell et al. 2005).

In addition, since agencies are participating in the process, the new identity of the team and the strong sense of ownership are generated among participated agencies. When partnered agency leaders are involved in the planning and implementing process, they are able to speak out their organizational position. The leaders feel comfortable to negotiate their organizational interests in this emerging partnership. They are willing to bring relevant stakeholders together to help identify the common group objective and vision. They are also committed to turn the needed elements into actual results (Fletcher 2006).

In this process, consensus can be reached throughout this process of participation. As long the leaders recognize the consensus and they acknowledge the respect from the other partners, they are more willing to accept and advocate the new relationship within
their individual agency (Corrigan 2000; Cresswell et al. 2005). In addition, the leaders recognize the ownership of the relationship and the product. The genuine recognition of ownership does not only result in the re-definition and the recreation of boundary objects (Harris 2003), but perpetuates the formation of common vision and facilitates the movement from coordinative relationships to collaborative ones.

Organizational and work-related cultural changes also are key factors. Their influence begins in the coordinative stage. Culture is a shared mental model within each agency in regard to the agency missions, visions, values, and even working processes (Martin 2002; Schein 2004). An effective inter-agency coordination has to be culturally competent for its long term sustainability (Grant and Haynes 1996). Therefore, recognition and acknowledgement of cultures among alliance agencies are important in understanding the internal and external responses from one another (Harris 2003; Standifer and Bluedorn 2006; Huxham and Vangen 2000).

As the cultural transformation emerges, agency and stakeholder motivation increases. Agencies start to focus on accomplishment, teamwork, and eventually come to value and appreciate the difference among one another (Schein 2004). The stage of collaboration would start based on this premise.

B. At the Individual Stakeholder Level—

In the stage of coordination, people are aware of one another and are committed to the partnership. Agency members are informed and are aware of other agencies’ activities which tends to ensure compatibility and collective sharing of tasks (Biggs 1997). If partnership establishment is done correctly, it changes the structures and boundary objects. The partnership would also result in modifications to agency missions, values,
and all operational substantive procedures (Hooper-Briar and Lawson 1994). As agency members synchronize their values with agency procedures and the common vision, they generate more synergetic and effective collaborative relationships among one another.

As agency members work together to meet a jointly held objective, they learn. The explicit lesson of reaching the common goal is clearly recognized as a benefit by partnering agencies. In contrast, implicit lessons, such as the establishment of shared value, culture, trust, and understanding, are the essential tenets for successful long-term learning by the agency (Zucker et al. 1996).

In going from coordination to collaboration, agency members recognize the actual mutual benefit generating from their participation in the partnership (Kumar, Fenema, and Glinow 2004). The mutual benefits include developing trust, which is an important bonding agent for long term development and sustainability of the inter-agency partnership relationship (Hornby and Atkins 2000). Trust in essence reinforces the sense of oneness among agency members. The sense of oneness in turn orchestrates the sense of community and creates the inter-dependency needed for continued iterated interactions.

At this stage of partnership development, structural requirements demand agency member inclusion, acceptance, identity, and fair power distribution. Group members start to acknowledge and accept the differences between one another (Schein 2004). Moreover, agency members embrace the multi-cultural mentality and attempt to embrace rather than reject the cultural differences among different agencies (Saji 2004).
Table 2-1: The Evolution of Partnerships

Stage 4: Collaboration:

The term “collaboration” often is equated with the fulfillment of rationality, efficiency, and effectiveness (Longogia 2005). Collaboration usually occurs in contextual setting in which fulfillment of tasks is recognized to be complex, uncertain, and interdependent among relevant agencies (Lawson 2003). As the collaborative partnership is cultivated further, the positive relationships develop.

Social capital is one construct used to depict these positive relationships. Social capital is described by Putnam as “networks for collaboration.” It is a capital accumulation process including the development of networks, norms, values, and trust. These factors facilitate cooperation, coordination, and collaboration for mutual benefits (Putnam 1995). The successful practice in collaborative partnerships is at least partially based on the concept of positive social capital accumulation. Capital accumulation is a direct result of experiences and skill building accomplished through positive prior working relationships and professional learning (Connell and Kubisch 1998; Friedman...
Collaboration is not a new term. However, the growing use of the term poses problems in definition, operationalization, and measurement for the academic community and the practitioners. These issues are important because collaboration has become a new paradigm in the public sector for the effective and efficient mobilization of financial and personnel resources.

Even though collaboration is considered as one of the primary strategies to breaking down the barriers that encourage silo-service delivery, it is no panacea (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006). At the agency level, agency leaders have to ensure that pre-conditions and resource demands are well met before they actually engage in the process of collaboration (Longogia 2005). Cross-fertilization as a result collaborative relationship building also enables and enriches process and product innovations (Corrigan 2000; Lawson 2004). Specifically, collaboration can result in two important innovations: 1) increased capacity to work across service sectors both formally and informally; and 2) increased production of new organizational knowledge, structures, and practice strategies (Morrison 1996).

At the individual’s level, collaboration offers professionals unique opportunities to “span” their daily boundaries and routines. Collaboration allows for cross training and new skill development at the individual level (McGrath et al. 2005). Inter-professional collaboration also helps the cultivation of inter-agency partnerships.

Collaboration has become an “ideal type” in the contemporary public policy arena. Unfortunately, too much emphasis has been placed on marketing the idea of collaboration and too little attention is addressed on understanding the process and the final product of
collaboration (Longo gia 2005; Lawson 2004). If the process and the product are not clearly understood, collaboration is reduced to a mere symbol instead of a legitimate policy theory of action. The following sections attempt to discuss the evolution of collaboration and the “ideal type” of collaboration at the agency and individual levels.

A. At the Agency Level—

Collaboration requires a deeper level of inter-agency activity than mere cooperation and coordination. Unlike partnerships based on stable cooperation and coordination, collaboration needs more than a perceived common vision within the community. Specifically, collaboration is a partnership that requires mutual accountability, strong voluntary commitment, and equality in pursuit of shared goals (Connolly and James 2006). Through collaboration, agency leaders exercise their authority and power to make shared decisions and mobilize agency resources across organizational boundaries (Claiborne and Lawson 2005). Collaboration depends on perceived interdependence among stakeholders (inter-professional collaboration) and agencies (collaborative partnerships). The inter-dependency occurs as a result of the recognition that public problems extend beyond one agency’s or one professional’s ability (Crosby and Bryson 2005a).

B. At the Individual Stakeholder Level—

In the stage of collaboration, agency members recognize one another as a community, and they share an identity. They know who comprises the community and what the partnership needs to maintain itself. Agency members share a common culture and objective, and are generally trusting of one another (Harris 2003). The preservation of the new collaborative partnership and its values become a new important common goal.
among agency professionals. The adaptations of information exchanges, joint planning, regular communications, shared objectives, business assessments, and a shared vision all become natural collaborative processes (Huxham and Vangen 2000).

Channels of Communication for Inter-agency Partnerships

Communication is a core issue across the process of partnership establishment. Effective communication between the partnered agencies cultivates and accelerates the growth of the partnership (Austin 2000). Communication is “an interactive process that gives, receives, and checks out meaning” within the community of stakeholders (Kerson 2002; Compton and Galaway 1999). The lack of communication contributes directly to misunderstanding of agency roles (Connell and Klem 2000). It would also be a prevention of long term relationship building. The process of communication is complicated due to the issues of turf, trust, organizational readiness, and organizational capacity (Secker and Hill 2001). Nevertheless, if its content is multidimensional, complementary, dynamic, and specific-to-its-setting, it can be effective (Cresswell et al. 2005).

The impact of traditional bureaucracy on communication is twofold. The direct command-and-control design within one single agency is structurally effective for top-down communication. However, the design of specialization often results in the fragmented channels of communication. In this case, information is often separated into different packages with little potential for effective communications between agencies. As a result, the poorly coordinated channels of communication also jeopardize the timeliness and the accuracy of the information.

The impact of dysfunctional communications may be dramatic. It may result in
wasted resources because of agency duplication of efforts and even competition for limited clients. Problems like these are not detected and addressed when communication is dysfunctional (Imperial 2005).

Continual communication and feedback assure the benefit of a common dialogue and shared language (Robinson and Cottrell 2005). They also enable organizational and inter-organizational learning, especially the kinds that facilitate the development of collaboration among people and collaborative, inter-agency partnerships. As the involved agencies recognize the importance of commonality through communications, they start to share the “common language, common definitions for service delivery, and common thinking about responsiveness (Eilers 2002).” Only if shared values and positive communication channels flow constantly across levels and agencies, the progress of inter-agency partnerships can be continued and sustained (Martin 2002).

**Contributions to Inter-agency Partnerships Theory in the context of this Study**

Research has tended to address only parts of the evolutionary aspects of collaboration and collaborative partnerships. No examples of research could be found that examines the entire evolutionary process of inter-agency partnership as proposed above. In the Bridge Program study, the researcher will attempt to fulfill the gap.

Because of the TANF mandates, it was expected that the Bridge Program would progressively develop new inter-agency and inter-professional working relationships. Ideally, agencies and people would work collaboratively as they implemented new TANF welfare policy.

Consistent with some literature on collaboration (Lawson, 2004), the Bridge Program would develop both process and product innovations. Process innovations are
the effective establishment of good “business” relationships with its inter-agency partners. Product innovations are the formulation of effective collaborative strategies to bring about true welfare reform. Questions about the Bridge program can be formulated accordingly.

Genuine collaboration would allow the inter-agency partnerships in the Bridge Program to connect and compliment with one another. Eventually, the mandates from the welfare systems change could be implemented effectively with positive results for both welfare recipients and the system serving this population.

Understanding Organizational Learning Theory

Definitions and Principles

Honig suggests that, ideally, “organizational learning leads to demonstrable improvements in organizational performance (Fiol and Lyles 1985; Senge 1990; Honig 2006)” Other analysts agree. They suggest that organizational learning is particularly crucial in the ambiguous and complicated policy environment for successful implementation. Effective policy feedback is critical, with agencies needing to be constantly in the learning mode for survival (Honig 2006). Organizational learning is a necessity in the process of systems change and development of inter-agency relationships.

Organizational learning is also a process which is well described by the metaphor of “functional brains” in Morgan’s “Images of Organization” (Morgan 1998). The learning process occurs when organizational renewal becomes the necessary and dominating vision. The learning process requires agencies to explore new approaches and strategies rather than relies exclusively on their existing routines and values (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999). Learning organizations respond to environmental change. They
manifest themselves as complex learning systems with the capacity to reflect, action on, and incorporate new practice strategies (Senge 1990; Honig 2006).

In the rapidly changing world, organizations constantly face new challenges requiring new types of strategies for organizational survival and renewal. Organizational development and adaptation are the two fundamental factors for organizations to survive and renew in this constant changing open system (Senge and Sterman 1992). The learning process itself needs to involve multi-level learning, including individual, group, and organizational based learning. Such learning requires interpretation, integration, and institutionalization of the new knowledge by both the professional membership, the organizational groups within the agencies, and the organizations as a whole (Crossan, Lane, and White 1999).

Boundary spanners—who transcend professional and organizational jurisdiction—are especially important to organizational learning (Halley 1997; Kerson 2002). For example, boundary spanners may facilitate the development of new, shared objectives. Then these new objectives can be accepted and implemented successfully by organizational members (Reitan 1998).

**Two Types of Organizational Learning in Policy Changes**

As agency members face the changes demanded by new policies, they find themselves involved in one or both types of learning processes. The first type is a “single loop” learning process (Argyris 1993). The single loop learning process initially makes agency members aware “where they are” in terms of current policy implementation versus “where they ought to be” according to the original stated top-down policy requirements. Based on their acknowledgment of the agency’s true position, agency
leaders craft strategies to react to the immediate needs for the change, such as personnel change.

Single loop learning is “infrequent, discontinuous, and intentional” learning (Imperial 2005). Single loop learning goes through the identifiable stages. The first is “unfreezing,” which is caused by the changes. The second is “transition,” which is the process of acknowledging the interventions for the changes. The third is “refreezing,” which enables the immediate responses and solution to fix identified problems in the short-term (Weick and Quinn; Cumming 2004; Hatch 1997).

Single loop learning is limited learning. Because single loop learning addresses only immediate concerns, solutions tend to be short term and at times superficial. In order to remedy the pitfall of targeting efforts to attain short-term, non-sustainable outcomes, it is believed that organizations need to take a double loop learning approach to increase sustainability of efforts and attain long-term desired outcomes (Argyris 1993).

Double loop learning is a process of systematic feedback which helps organizations grow and improve through continuous and advanced goal-seeking. It is a process of “freezing,” which is initially figuring out the consequences of the changes; “rebalancing,” which is the process of readapting and reorganizing the entity; and then “unfreezing” which is a process of continuous change and improvement allowing self-organization and self-renewal (Weick and Quinn 2004; Cumming 2004). Double loop learning organizations constantly look into their own underlying assumptions and values as they attempt to alter undesired outcomes (Hatch 1997). They change missions and goals as well as the strategies employed to achieve them.
Contribution to Organizational Learning Theory in the Context of This Study

Most of the organizational learning studies are initially done in the private sector to improve firms’ performance for better profits. In the recent years, as more and more business-like approaches have been adopted in the public sector (Osborne and Gaebler 1993). One prominent example is the concept of learning organization, which has been applied more in the public sector. For example, organizational learning has been applied to examine and evaluate the performance of public policies, such as academic performance in schools and the effectiveness of different school programs (Honig and Hatch 2004). Even so, studies utilizing the concept of learning organizations in the context of social service systems are few, particularly in the relevant areas of the 1996 welfare reform.

As the Bridge Program has transformed itself as part of the shift from AFDC to TANF, the question arises regarding its ability to balance the needs of its clientele with the regulatory demands of the new environment. The program has encountered a dramatic value and rationale change due to the 1996 welfare reform. All the relevant agencies and players in the social service systems have been subjected to increased uncertainty due to the policy shift. Agency leaders have had to accept, adopt, and learn new strategies for maintaining organizational survival and reputation.

Opportunities for empirical inquiry are plentiful and important. For example, the literature makes it plausible to hypothesize that double loop organization learning has been difficult for people and their agencies because this kind of powerful learning requires agencies to go through a systemic cycle of thinking and action planning in the creation of new practice strategies (Connell and Klem 2000). This process requires new
“mental models” and a “shift of mind” as well as the “putting the ideas into practice” (Senge 1990).

The process of strategy development and institutional adaptation has become an important focus for agency leaders and members who have had to navigate between federal mandates and the realities of street level case management. In addition, the learning rationale is also helpful to be applied in the inter-organizational setting. As inter-organizational learning takes place among agencies, the successful implementation of systems change and cross-systems change becomes promising.

**Understanding Human Capital Theory**

**Definitions and Principles**

At its core, human capital theory posits stocks of capacities—knowledge, dispositions, health— that yield returns when applied in work or other activities. Following Schultz (1961) and Becker (1993), such stocks are durable. Durability means that they are not consumed when they are used, and they are not subject to obsolescence. In short, human capital lasts.

The acquisition of skills, knowledge and dispositions represents an addition to the human capital development. In fact, human capital development, in economic terms, is a special investment. The value of human capital investment lies in the additional returns, both monetary and non-monetary, arising from the use of the increased stock in a range of activities (Schultz 1961; Woodhall 1987).

Relevant theory posits heterogeneity of the human capital stocks. The theory and literature distinguish between, for example, health capital and education capital. Education capital is further disaggregated to allow, for example, for “specific” skills as
well as “general” knowledge. Although formal education and training activities provide
the principal means though which human capital is augmented, the theory properly
understood accommodates a much wider range of activities— informal and formal. For
the purposes of this study, human capital stocks may be increased in the course of
informal learning on the job as well as through separately organized trainings or
education. Whether— and the extent to which— this occurs is an empirical question.

When applied to education, Schultz and Becker have shown that investment
yields returns in the labor market in the form of an increased likelihood of labor force
participation (a particularly salient finding for the TANF population) and higher earnings
(Becker 1993; Schultz 1961). Investment in education, broadly, also yields other indirect
additional returns in the form of improved health, greater efficiency in consumption, and
greater efficiency in learning activities (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1994). Research also
shows that relatively larger human capital stocks of parents are associated with relatively
larger learning and development outcomes for their children (Upchurch, Lillard, and
Panis 2002; Sawhill 2006). Further, Bowles and Gintis (1975) among others have noted
that human capital theory brings basic social institutions such as schooling and family
into the realm of economic analysis.

**Returns on Investments in Human Capital**

Accumulated research demonstrates the association between education and
earnings (Barker 1999; Becker 1998; Grabb 1999; Psacharopoulos and Nguyen 1997).
Much of this research has focused on earnings differentials by education level. Over the
past forty years, individuals with a bachelor’s degree consistently have earned 50 to 70
per cent more than those with a high school degree or its equivalent (the latter comprise
the target population for the Bridge program). Carefully designed studies take into account an “omnibus” of factors. These factors include the time-shape of both earnings returns and the costs of acquiring additional education show returns on investment, evaluated over a lifetime, on the order of 10 per cent per year (Psacharopoulos and Hinchliffe 1972; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2002).

The tendencies shown in prior research are predicted to be maintained because the demand for skills and knowledge in the labor force is expected to rise substantially. For example, the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities (2004) reports that two in every five jobs created in the coming decade will require a college degree.

While definitive findings are available, controversial issues remain to be fully addressed in the research and in theory. For example, few studies sort out those differences in earnings returns that can be attributed to differences in skills acquired as distinguished from capacities and knowledge acquired through formal education (OECD 2001). Qualifications, whether from high school or college, differ in the levels as well as qualities of the capacities and knowledge acquired. Research on explanations for the observed differences in learning are contested, particularly on how far differences in spending per student account for differences in learning outcomes or wider social well-being (Hanushek 1996; McMahon and Wagner 1982; Hedges and Greenwald 1996).

Where social welfare policy interacts with educational policy and economic policy—as in the case of TANF, human capital development has special salience. It provides an appropriate framework for the decisions and choices of individual and the most promising strategy to lessen social burden and to advance toward social equality and social justice (Banting 2005; Garfinkel and McLanahan 1994).
For example, Upchurch, Lillard and Parris find that higher levels of education are associated with lower non-marital pregnancy rates and increase the well-being of children (Upchurch, Lillard, and Panis 2002). Sawhill believes that the advancement of human capital is a powerful way to ‘break the link between family background and a child’s chance to succeed (or fail) later in life (Sawhill 2006).” Other research studies confirm that human capital investments embodied in the disadvantaged improve well-being of individuals and families in the present and across generations (St. Pierre, Layzer, and Barnes 1995; Murnane 1994).

**Contributions to Human Capital Theory in the Context of This Study**

From the vantage point of the policy drawing board, the Bridge program implicitly appears to advance a human capital orientation. In this respect, it stands somewhat apart from an orientation in TANF that gives primary focus and attention to the movement of clients from dependency directly into employment. Critics of TANF argue that unless policies and practices share a human capital orientation and the actors within the agencies and organizations concerned (among which, in New York State, the Bridge program), case load reductions cannot be achieved and sustained over the medium and long term (Zedlewski 1998).

However, few studies evaluate TANF policies against a broad human capital framework. For example, Michalopoulos and Berlin focus on returns of TANF in the form of reduced public expenditure as clients take up employment (Michalopoulos and Berlin 2001). This study, and others, does not examine or project returns out to the medium term, in the form of sustained employment or career advance. Nor does the extent research consider how the employment paths might vary; or the wider range of
potential individual and public benefits that might arise from an alternative approach would foster abundant and valuable human capital acquisition for the TANF population. Even where studies have investigated TANF from a human capital orientation, the research has not explored the acquisition of skills through informal means while on the job (Turner and Main 2001).

Although the Bridge Program’s missions are pragmatically focused on coordinating different resources from various governmental agencies and non-profit organizations, there remains a question of what concepts it has adopted and internalized regarding the provisions of educational services to the TANF population. The Bridge program’s mission to focus pragmatically on partnerships does not refer to a human capital rationale, even if its activities link to powerful human capital producing entities. This study seeks to explore the extent to which the actors in Bridge and partner agencies perceive and act in ways aligned with a broad human capital approach in the program.

**Chapter Two Summary**

Prior research on complex collaborations and partnerships characteristically has reduced complexity by adopting one theory or theoretical framework and focusing on just one unit of analysis. Advantageous in many respects, this approach yields limited knowledge and understanding about the complexity of new institutional relationships. Future research needs to embrace complexity through designs that focus on two or more units of analysis. This study is designed accordingly.

Chapter Two examined the theoretical frameworks and discussed the current research in the field that will be used to inspect the data and the case in Chapter Four and Five. The literature section also serves as a salient theoretical foundation for the two
logic models and the theory-of-change which are first introduced in Chapter One.

Deriving from the theoretical foundation in this chapter, the detailed plan for research data collection and analyses will be presented in the following chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Mid-Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
<th>Theoretical Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Long-Term Outcomes**
- Elimination of welfare dependency
- Increase in mainstream employment
- Increase in welfare earnings
- Decrease in welfare caseloads
- Decrease in need for emergency interventions
- Decrease in cost of child care

**Mid-Term Outcomes**
- Improved school performance and attendance
- Increased self-esteem and confidence
- Increased job skills and marketable skills
- Increased job opportunities
- Increased family stability
- Increased social support

**Impacts**
- Increased employment
- Increased earnings
- Increased social capital
- Increased community involvement
- Increased economic independence

**Theoretical Assumptions**
- Increased (employed) Theory: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- Educational outcomes
- Economic self-sufficiency
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services Supported</th>
<th>Expected Outcomes</th>
<th>Mechanisms</th>
<th>Informations</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase use of early childhood education and care</td>
<td>Improved academic performance</td>
<td>Collaboration with local providers and organizations</td>
<td>Increased engagement in learning activities</td>
<td>Higher employment rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen local businesses</td>
<td>Increased economic opportunities</td>
<td>Improved access to capital</td>
<td>Increased partnerships</td>
<td>Increased business growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen local government</td>
<td>Increased government accountability</td>
<td>Improved service delivery</td>
<td>Increased transparency</td>
<td>Improved community trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen local health care</td>
<td>Improved health outcomes</td>
<td>Increased access to care</td>
<td>Improved health indicators</td>
<td>Reduced health care costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- Funding secured by the State for multiple projects.
- Additional projects will be launched in 2023.
Expected Outcomes

- Dropout rate decrease in youth
- Decrease in youth dependency cycle
- Educational attainment increase
- Reciprocal, breakig
- Increased self-sufficiency and self-support
- Long-term self-
- Federal and State
- Reutilization of
- Services acquired
- Coordination of
- Services and resources

Strategies

- Educational services provision of "preventive" identification of at-risk youth and families

Path

- Path to build educational services to provide educational and employment opportunities for individuals affected by cancer and their families

Strategies

- Customized educational action plans to develop individualized educational opportunities for individuals affected by cancer and their families

Problem Statement

Theory of Change: New York State Child Bridge Program after TANF
Chapter Three Research Design and Method

Research Rationale

The study examined the NYS Bridge Program by focusing on three research questions:

1. Ten years following enactment of TANF, what systems changes have occurred as a result of the implementation of TANF-related, Bridge Program goals and strategies?
2. Has the Bridge Program developed new systems capacities to achieve the TANF expected outcomes?
3. To what extent has the economic idea of human capital development (and human capital theories in general) influenced TANF’s implementation and systems change mechanisms?

Drawing on the literature review and a pre-research examination of the Bridge Program’s structure, the following preliminary analytical framework guided this research.
In the policy environment of public assistance for families, there have been continuous reforms over the past seven decades. Research literature in this field has been rich and has addressed the cyclical nature of the reform process. Among the numerous reforms that have occurred over the last seventy years in the social service arena, TANF is considered perhaps the most drastic one. TANF has dramatically curtailed the lifelong guaranteed assistance benefit for needy families. Many support programs have been initiated or re-designed to align and implement newly defined policy goals under TANF. The New York State Bridge Program, the object of this research, has been one such program.
Research Design

Case Study Methodology

A case study methodology was chosen for this study. This methodology provides a means for gaining knowledge and understanding about organizational macro-level mechanisms, the meso-level leadership, management, and governance mechanisms, and individual micro-level factors impacting the Bridge Program implementation process. This methodology also enables the collection of data indicative of changes across time. It is suitable for the complexity inherent in the Bridge Program and the multiple units of analysis a study of the program encounters.

Complexity cannot be wished away in the research design. In fact, the research gains importance when it embraces and addresses this complexity. It is critical to note that the Bridge Program involves three major agencies at different levels of governance (state: OTDA, SUNY-Bridge; local: Local DSSs, Local Bridge Offices). Inter-agency relationships are complicated and political. Understanding these complex relationships can be best accomplished through a single case study.

Yin (2003a) observes that case study methodology is employed primarily for answering the “whys” and “hows” a set of events occurs. It is not appropriate for determinations of whether a given end is predictable. Case study methodology is most appropriate when “investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin 2003a).”

One of the major advantages of a case study is the depth and the comprehensive coverage that it provides on any given subject. Essentially, it facilitates theory
articulation, enriching and facilitating “theory building” research. It makes possible the development of preliminary concepts (Yin 2003b) and allows for a clearer definition and understanding of the unit of analysis in the research. Importantly for this study, case study methodology promises to sharpen understanding of inter-agency interactions and the impact they have on organizational behaviors and social context (Hartley 2004).

The Bridge Program was chosen as focus for a single case study to achieve three related goals. These study goals are: 1) To describe the policy process, beginning with the planning stage where implementation plans are developed and including the implementation of TANF policy; 2) To explore the congruity/incongruity between policy as planned and policy as implemented; and 3) To identify, describe, and explain the potential causes of whatever discrepancies are evident between policy planning and implementation.

Yin (2003) addresses several specifications for a single case study. Two of these have direct relevance to the Bridge Program. First, the case should represent a theoretical extreme or a unique case. Second, the case should be representative of typical cases so that knowledge attained from its study can be used for purposes of generalizing our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon to other cases.

The Bridge Program provides a unique opportunity to study the effects of welfare reform. For example, it provides the opportunity to study changes in organizations. At the same time, it enables the study of service delivery, albeit through the perceptions of study participants. Human capital development is of special interest via employment training, educational services, and job placement.

In summary, the Bridge Program is fundamentally shaped by a rapidly changing
and complex public policy environment. Given its complicated and complex nature, a case study approach is the most appropriate methodology for gaining understanding in the program. This methodology also is the most suitable one for articulating theory about complex policy and systems change.

**Multiple Research Methods**

Each research method has its particular strengths and limitations. Therefore, researchers often combine multiple methods to gain the knowledge and understanding they seek (Brewer and Hunter 1989). Case study methodologies are specifically designed for multiple levels of analysis, such as tracking different administrative levels and different discrete projects within a single study. Case studies are not reliant on overly rigorous data collection protocols and analytical scale measurement (Yin 2003a).

Reflective of the typical case study approach employing multiple research methods for data collection, this study began with *in-depth semi-structured interviews*. Then a *document analysis* was employed. And finally, a *member validation of findings* was in place at the end. The three different data collection methods provided a “built-in” triangulation of findings.

**Sampling Method for the Interviews**

To identify candidates for the interviews, this study utilized purposive sampling using a snowballing methodology. Purposive sampling is generally used in the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study, with the size of the sample depending on the purpose of the study (Wengraf 2001).

In this case study, the Bridge program director at SUNY was the first interviewee.
This key informant provided basic information on the program relating to the overall administrative structure, the relationships among relevant agencies, the enablers and barriers, and also the policy implementation status. In addition, interviewing the Bridge Program director at SUNY helped the researcher identify other potential key players at different levels across partnering agencies (Table 3-1).

A snowball sampling method (Wengraf 2001) was used for the recruitment of additional interviewees following the first round of interviews. The intent of using snowball sampling (Wengraf 2001) was to gain information from important players residing in different agencies. As the interview process proceeded, key stakeholders were identified in other Bridge Program partner organizations. Although there were only thirty interviewees, the coverage of the interviewees at different levels across different agencies appeared to meet research requirements as indicated by researchers such as Creswell (2003). Fourteen out of the thirty interviewees experienced the transition from AFDC to TANF.

To reiterate, the purpose of this single case study was to explain “why” and “how” the Bridge Program was impacted by TANF. The selected interviewees allowed the researcher to identify, from the study participants’ perspectives, the essential and central issues that arose during the TANF implementation process (Patton 2001). Once the researcher began to “hear” the same responses, she concluded that additional interviews would not add knowledge about the policy implementation process and its outcomes.
Table 3-1: Number of Interviewees from Different Agencies at Different Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Middle Managers</th>
<th>Front-line Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridge Program in SUNY Central (SUNY)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Department of Social Services (LDSS)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Bridge Program Offices (L-Bridge)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. The benefit of semi-structured interviews derives from the flexibility this method offers for following up on new information and exploring key points using probing questions. Interview questions (Appendix 1) were designed for purposes of maximizing the ability of the researcher to answer the “how” and “why” questions.

The same interview protocols were used in every interview with a minor exception. For professionals who have been working before and after TANF, several extra questions in regard to the historical development and the difference comparing between pre-TANF and TANF time were asked.

Interview questions were phrased in the ways that accommodated the interviewees’ level of knowledge. The researcher attempted to lead interviewees toward the goal of identifying answers (Maple 1998) to the three main research questions structuring this study. The researcher also utilized some probing keywords and questions to explore new avenues of research not specifically addressed in this proposal. These
new avenues appeared to yield fertile knowledge and understanding.

Processes:

Interviews have been defined as “conversations with purposes (Kahn and Cannell 1958).” Among qualitative research methods, interviews allow researchers to collect insightful information using a structured framework. Semi-structured interviews help uncover the key variables for further model building, testing, and articulation of concepts.

In order to give interviewees more time to understand and think through the purpose of the interviews, a copy of the research objectives, interviewee consent form (Appendix 2), and interview questions were sent to interviewees through emails (by email) one week before the scheduled date(s) of the interview(s). An email reminder that included the same documents was sent out again two days before the interview. Note-taking and digital recording were the two means of collecting and keeping the interview data. The researcher explained the purpose of the consent form and obtained the informed consent from respondents before starting the interviews.

Advantages:

The semi-structured face-to-face in depth interviews allowed for a richer discourse around TANF related issues by the interviewees. Since the research theoretical framework covered a great range, the length of each interview ranged from one to three hours. In some cases, the interviews had to be cut short due to work related time constraints. Regardless, a personal and trusting relationship between the professional being interviewed and the researcher evolved as the interview proceeded. In many cases, the professionals were willing to provide valuable and relevant documents for further analysis. Having established a trusting relationship helped in the later collection of
follow-up outreach to interviewee for member checking of findings.

Limitations and Constraints:

One of the limitations of semi-structured interviews is that the pre-determined structure of the questions might limit the range of the interview conversations and lead to data omission. As a result, the researcher did not strictly follow the designed questions. Instead, she allowed the conversation to flow naturally and freely to important topics that arose during discourse. At the end of each interview, interviewees were given an opportunity to freely express any important issues that were not addressed in the interview questions. This approach helped to facilitate exploration and discovery of previously unidentified key points. Unexpected digressions in the conversations often took place, resulting in a rich understanding of contextual factors that had a significant impact of policy makers.

To maximize the benefits and minimize lost opportunities and/or incorrect recall, the researcher developed after-interview protocols to ensure her methodology continued to adequately capture the needed data. For example, the interview notes were reviewed immediately after the interview with particular attention to new and unexpected ideas and avenues for exploration. Appropriate adjustments were also made on the interview framework and questions as deemed necessary.

Data Analysis:

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Then the researcher coded the data using a specific initial template (Appendix 3), a template developed from the research literature. This coding and analytic method is known as template analysis (King 1998); its purpose is to organize the analytical logic and to contrast the answers of the interview
questions with the established theoretical framework. As a result, template analysis enabled the research to identify, describe, and explain familiar, predictable data. At the same time, it also accommodated new, sometimes path-breaking information that could signal the need for a new theoretical direction. The codes were organized hierarchically based on the major theoretical themes and the sub-themes of the study.

The qualitative software named “Atlas.ti” was adopted as the primary coding tool. After completing one third of the interviews and transcripts, the initial coding template was re-organized and re-developed based on the available interview data. The revision of the template made the research framework more comprehensive and more reflective of the current state of the Bridge Program. In addition, the new template was compared with the initial one. This allowed for the identification of originally omitted variables and provided the evidence and foundation for theory articulation and advancement.

The coding template was structured to cover three identified units of analysis: individual, intra-agency, and inter-agency. These units of analysis were nested within five theoretical frameworks: systems change, intended and implemented policies, partnerships, organizational learning, and human capital. The frequency of codes during the final coding round was compared with the expected theoretical themes of the study. In keeping with established methodologies (Miles and Huberman 1994), the analysis of the coded transcriptions helped identify the important variables and the specific and general trends that emerged out of the answers provided to the stated research questions.

**Document Analyses**

In addition to interviews, document analyses were conducted as a part of the data collection process. The researcher reviewed public documents which were collected
through Internet and provided by interviewees. These documents were all good sources to understanding context and the settings in which studied subjects work (Marshall and Rossman 1999). The major purpose of document analyses was to confirm findings emerging from the interviews. Document analyses also helped to uncover and integrate knowledge gained from a more macro-level, top-down perspective that cannot be attained through interviews with individuals. This method served as a major methodology for triangulation and articulation of the study’s findings.

Process:

The documents were chosen by interviewees based on their judgment of usefulness to the researcher. Although the documents were read and analyzed for specific themes in accordance with the proposed research framework, the analyses were not done systematically in the model of a rigorous content analysis.

Advantages:

Documents and references to public information provided by the interviewed professionals served as supplemental materials to the interview data. Documents from the professionals helped in mapping the business operational logic and flow of administrative processes underlying TANF implementation. Information from the public websites re-confirmed many of the statements from the interview professionals. Moreover, the documents saved the researcher from needing to obtain explanations of regulations during the interviews.

Limitations and Constraints:

The use of documents from agencies was selective in nature, fitting the needs of the researcher to support interview findings. One of the concerns in document analyses
was that documents might be narrowly focused, with a specific purpose in mind by the interviewee that supported their point of view. This could possibly lead to bias in the conclusions reached by the researcher (Marshall and Rossman 1999). On the other hand, the non-intrusiveness of the methodology and the fact that it required no interaction between interviewer and interviewee could be major advantages of document analyses. Quite often, it allowed for the discovery of important and specific organizational artifacts that would not be covered in an interview (Newman 1999). Moreover, if the document analyses were done correctly and carefully, they could offer the researcher broader and deeper understanding of the program. These analyses also provided a different analytical lens for examining the phenomena being studied.

Data Analysis:

The researcher read the documents with a critical but open mind so that more important variables could be considered throughout the analytical process. Documents were reviewed by the researcher and were contrasted with the original theoretical framework. At the same time, the analyses of documents also provided the opportunity to compare and contrast statements contained in the documents with the interview statements/results.

Member checking

Member checking was another method of data collection. Member checking of interview findings provided a test and confirmation of the emergent understandings from previous interviews, helping to better support and articulate the research findings. In addition, member checking also offered additional evidence for the appropriateness and accuracy of the interview data interpretation (Roach, Elliott, and Webb 2005). The
interviewed professionals were also able to provide updates if there was any change ever since the interviews were first conducted.

**Process:**

Once the interview data were organized and analyzed, a set of preliminary findings was organized in the form of executive summary (Appendix 4). This summary was sent to twenty-one professionals whose email addresses were available. The professionals were asked to respond to the summary via emails, phone calls, or regular mails.

A second email was sent out one week after the first email as a reminder for those who had not responded to the summary. A third/final email was again sent out one week after the second email reminder. The researcher received fourteen replies via phone calls and emails in response to the executive summary. Some of respondents also gave a brief update in regard to the current situation.

**Advantages:**

As mentioned before, two major advantages derived from member checking. They were the ability to re-confirm the data interpretation and the opportunity to allow program updates from the professionals. Member checking also provided the opportunity to observe the alignment (or misalignment) between the theoretical interpretation from the researcher and the practical experience from the professionals (Webb 1997; Springer, Abell, and Hudson 2002). Moreover, sharing the study findings with the interviewed professionals also offered different lens and aspects for the practitioners’ to re-consider and re-examine their daily routines.
**Limitations and Constraints:**

The major limitation and constraint of the member checking was the potential opinion bias from the “self-selective” process. In this case study, the participants of the member checking approach were from the pool of the interviewed professionals and represent only a small fraction of those working in the Bridge Program. People who were not chosen for interviewing were essentially excluded from the selection process. Moreover, the summaries received by the researcher were collected via emails and phone calls. The researcher had no way of knowing the specific reason(s) for those who did not reply. In this case, the problem of “self-selection” potentially introduces some bias in the study.

**Data Analysis:**

The responses from the professionals were *not* organized and analyzed by using the scientific software of Atlas.ti. Regardless, the suggestions and comments were first re-examined and re-evaluated by the researcher. If there were conflicting statements, the researcher also re-confirmed and clarified the points with the respondents. Finally, all the comments and suggestions were incorporated in the final writing of the dissertation.

**Research Credibility, Validity and Reliability**

Conducting a credible study requires meeting the standards of internal and external validity, as well as reliability. In essence, credibility rests on sound application of the sound methodological techniques. First, it has to be designed to assure high quality data collection and analysis. Second, it has to be conducted by researchers who are trained with solid understanding in research methods (Patton 1999). Moreover, elements such as internal and external validity and reliability are important indicators for
credibility assurance in the research.

Validity, an important concept in qualitative research, is defined as “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them (Schwandt 2007).” Research validity is referred to in terms of accuracy, and the trustworthiness of instruments, data, and findings in the research (Bernard 2000). More specifically, internal validity addresses the operationalization of the research and whether the methodology/instrument chosen truly reflects what the researcher intends to measure (Campbell and Stanley 1966). External validity’s emphasis is on the generalizability of the findings (and is less of a concern in case study methodology).

Reliability means dependability or consistency (Newman 1999; Lincoln and Guba 1985) of the collected data. It often refers to whether or not the researcher obtains the same answers when using the same method(s) repetitively (Bernard 2000). The level of reliability reflects the degree of consistency on both the process and the product of the research (Hoepfl 1997).

Triangulation is a powerful and vital approach to assure the overall credibility of a research. It is believed that no one single method can explain and describe the research questions comprehensively (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Creswell 2003; Patton 1999). The following four aspects of triangulation contribute to verification and validation of qualitative analysis (Patton 1999): 1) methods triangulation which employs various data collection methods and confirms findings using different data resources; 2) triangulation of sources which consults different data sources using the same method to determine consistency of findings; 3) analyst triangulation which uses multiple analysts to review findings; 4) theory/perspective triangulation which interprets data with multiple
perspectives or theories. Each method views research from different aspects (Newman and Benz 1998; Creswell and Miller 2000). The main purpose of conducting multiple research methods is to “triangulate” the research questions using various reliable information sources for answers (Patton 2001, 1999). These multiple method approaches help to enhance the credibility, internal and external validity, and reliability of the study.

In this case study, the researcher employed three types of triangulation to assure the credibility of the study: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, and theory/perspective triangulation. In order to reach the greatest level of internal validity in the study, the researcher designed a research framework that carefully and systematically strived to incorporate a sound theoretical approach.

The interview questions, member checking, and document reviews were guided by theory and the logic modeling presented in Chapter 1. This provided a framework of explanation that gave insight into causal connections between the various levels of analysis and variables being examined. To verify the relevance of the theory, logic model, and interview questions, a former Bridge Program professional was used as an expert consultant and peer reviewer. This expert reviewed the framework and the coding template prior to actual interviews being conducted. This safeguard helped to improve the clarity and the use of language, as well as theoretical integrity of the model being presented. Moreover, it enhanced the validity of the measurement instrument (Newman and Benz 1998), the interview questions.

Yin (2003a) argued that the general criticisms of case study methodology do not discount the value and import of case study research. Although he accepted that lack of external validity and reliability could be problematic, the researcher could address these
issues through three approaches. The first approach was to ask the same questions of different groups of people through different data collection methods. In this research, interviewees were mainly from eight different agencies (OTDA, SUNY, 3 LDSS, 3 L-Bridge) at different levels (leader, middle manager, front-line worker levels). The same interview questions were applied to all interviewees to ensure the greatest degree of validity. The researcher also tried to systematically design the data collection instruments and to standardize the recording process to ensure reliability of the data collection process.

The second approach was to investigate the same questions and phenomenon through multiple research methods. In this study, interviews, member checking, and document analyses were conducted in order to triangulate research findings. Use of these different data collection methods helped to identify potential problems with validity. For this study, the case study method did not require multiple cases to identify general themes and patterns. Rather than external application to other situations, the intent was to generalize findings to our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon being studied and thereby build our theoretical capacity to explain such phenomenon (Yin 2003a).

The third approach was to employ the mechanism of member checking after the data analysis (Creswell and Miller 2000). An executive summary was sent to interviewed professionals for their confirmation in regard to the research findings and interpretations. Moreover, the research findings were presented at a professional conference. The findings presented were confirmed and acknowledged by the professionals/experts in the field.

Although a single case study cannot guarantee external validity, this case
study still offers several vital contributions to the field of education and companion fields such as social work and public policy. It provides the means to describe and explore the actions and alternatives to a policy transitional process not previously understood well.

The single case study design allows a finer categorization of levels of analyses and a more detailed examination of micro-level data from those inside the organizations being studied. This design is able to untangle the relationships among variables and offer insight into the “black box” of educational policy making for those within the welfare system. In addition, the process enhances the internal validity by illustrating and explaining in detail the link between planned and implemented policy interventions and its impact on the overall system in which it operated (Yin 2003a).

**Delimitations and Other Salient Limitations**

Several limitations have been identified in the previous discussion. Others merit mention here.

The time, financial, and personnel resources needed to complete the study comprise an important limitation. There are currently sixteen Bridge programs, operating in thirty-five counties across the state. This study represents only twenty-five interviews, conducted in eight Bridge related agencies across three counties with thirty “field” professionals. In the same vein, only a limited number of Bridge employees were interviewed.

Due to the scarcity of time, financial, and personnel resources, only interviews, member checking, and document analyses were conducted in the case study. The findings could provide only a limited perspective of the Bridge Program in New York State. Therefore, the researcher recognized that there were limitations in terms of the
study’s access to professionals at all levels and the degree to which findings could be
generalized. In addition, because of time limitations afforded by a single interview and
the complexity of the policy area, the researcher focused only on the most salient issues
relating to system changes under TANF.

Another net effect was that this study relied on information provided by those
representatives of the agencies chosen for interviewing. Because each representative
only knew their own role and job the best and based their statements on their individual
perspective and knowledge in the field, their responses were unavoidably selective.
Importantly, their responses might be expected to exclude countering views that would
offer contrasting information.

Limitations like these placed extraordinary demands on the researcher. The
researcher had to rely on the “truth-telling” by respondents. At the same time, she had to
be alert when pulling statements together and tailoring the pieces together for the
snapshot of the whole picture. The rationale for the multiple research methods in this
case study, provided in this chapter, stemmed in part from needs to address these potential
limitations and problems and to address them systematically through good research
practices.
Chapter Four Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. Methodological considerations are presented in part one, i.e. how data are organized and analyzed. The second part presents a theoretical interpretation of the research findings.

Methodological Considerations

All transcribed interview data were categorized using Atlas.ti. They then were analyzed using a coding scheme (Appendix 3). This coding scheme was based on the five main theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous literature review chapter. These frameworks were systems change, intended and implemented policy process, partnerships, organizational learning, and human capital theory.

Coding foci reflected the three overarching research questions:

1. Ten years following enactment of TANF, what systems changes have occurred as a result of the implementation of the Bridge Program goals and strategies?
2. Has the Bridge Program developed new systems capacities to achieve the TANF expected outcomes?
3. To what extent has the economic idea of human capital development (and human capital theories in general) influenced TANF’s implementation as well as system change mechanisms?

In the Atlas.ti program, each of the five main frameworks comprised a “super
family.” Consistent with Atlas.ti, each super family encompassed two or more families of coding foci (see Table 4-1). Coding families, in turn, encompassed individual codes related to the family theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Super family</strong></th>
<th><strong>Family</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systems Change</td>
<td>▪ Program primary goal and operational principle, AFDC and TANF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Changes in individual’s roles, responsibilities, and orientations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Organizational change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended vs. Implemented Policy Processes</td>
<td>▪ Staff’s attitude toward changes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Lipsky’s street level bureaucracy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Principal-agent issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>▪ Mutual recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Interactions among partner agencies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Artifact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Learning</td>
<td>▪ Single-loop learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Double-loop learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Capital Theory</td>
<td>▪ Educational focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Employment focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Other human capital issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 4-1: Atlas.ti. Coding Families

Presentation of the data starts with of a brief definition of each super family. Impacts of each super family are discussed after the definition. Immediately following the discussion, a concise table of research findings in this specific super family is presented. Each table includes the findings from every coding family that falls within that super family. Findings then are presented and discussed through the perspectives of the study participants.

Documents in paper and electronic form were provided by the study participants
before, during and after interviews. Some of the major findings are derived from an analysis of these documents, particular when examining/comparing intended verse implemented policies.

**Research Findings**

**Super Family I: Systems Change**

This study sought to examine the extent to which the shift from AFDC to TANF induced systems change, manifested in organizational change, among the partner agencies implementing the New York State Bridge Program. Systems change in organizations was defined as a series of policy-induced adaptations that occurred in their structures, operational processes, climates, and even cultures. Manifested as organizational characteristics, systems changes also were evident in the shift of orientations, attitudes, beliefs, roles, and behaviors of organizational members (both at the individual and inter-organizational level) across time.

The shift to TANF appeared to be instrumental in catalyzing systems change. TANF established a new regulatory and service baseline for the involved agencies. Moreover, TANF in essence redefined both the policy planning process and implementation of the Bridge program. New partnership arrangements developed. Organizational learning patterns changed. The concept of human capital was re-framed.
Primary Findings in the Family

Family 1: Program primary goal and operational principle, AFDC and TANF

Study participants claimed that the primary goals, self-sufficiency, remained the same throughout the years. In this aspect of systems change, all participants indicated that there was little difference between the AFDC and TANF eras. The following quotes illustrate this finding:

*Study participant 12:* “….I think our goals have always been, and (co-worker) could correct me if I am wrong, bridging the gap between welfare and work for the clients. And for people who aren’t on the program but need help from working poor to people who can take care of themselves. I don’t think that has changed at all…."

*Study participant 14:* “….The focus remains pretty much the same, providing necessary training opportunities for individuals to be self-sufficiency…”

When AFDC was in effect, study participants said that the regulations provided
them with a wider range of flexibility and options when providing services to Bridge Program clients. The participants claimed that long-term educational and employment training were encouraged and emphasized more in the AFDC era.

Participants suggested that since the end of AFDC, the Bridge Program participants have continued to support people in getting jobs and becoming more self-sufficient. However, participants also claimed that, even though the operational principles of the Bridge Program retained the goal of self-efficiency under TANF, the policy rationale was significantly changed. The participants reported that the rationale of the policy shifted in focus from education/career development under AFDC to quick job acquisition under TANF. The findings were supported by the two following sample quotes:

*Study participant 24:* “…When TANF came in, it was, we don’t want to hear it, we don’t want to know it, we should get them out and get them a job…. The focus is changed even though the name remains the same. But the focus changed. There is such a big focus on numbers, employment, and the emphasis of education is just totally taken right out of it…yet we were unable to use the academic piece…”

*Study participant 30:* “…in the EOCs (AFDC time), education opportunity centers, we keep a student at least a year, sometimes a year and half because we really try to give them a solid academic and vocational skills. Under the JOBS program, we are still able to do that. Under the TANF rules, you can't keep a person in education and training that long…”

According to participants, this shift in underlying goals had repercussions. For
example, the participants pointed out that the Bridge Program service delivery choices and strategies were affected. These changes and their impacts will be discussed in greater detail in the sections below.

**Family 2: Changes in individual’s roles, responsibilities, and orientations**

Participants indicated that the shift in policy under TANF created challenges for the agencies. They were facing significant challenges at all organizational levels. The study participants said that the mandate of an inflexible participation rate continued to be a primary challenge for those at the *leadership level*. More than two-thirds of the Bridge Program’s top level leaders (eight out of eleven) noted that professionals were able to exercise some discretion in providing services as long as they stayed within the qualifying list of countable activities allowed by the federal government. However, the participants indicated that the allowed “*countable*” versus “*non-countable*” eligible services were narrowly defined by the federal government. Therefore, they indicated that mandates curtailed the range of options that could actually be counted toward the mandated participation rate. The following quotes illustrate the finding:

*Study participant 1:* “…So a lot less flexibility or discretion of what we can do. We do have a little bit and we do it case by case basis. But I think we were very restricted now because of the regulations...”

*Study participant 30:* “…. We have room for activities. If the law allows 10 activities, we have room to decide which activities and you have an agreement with the local DSSs to put the activities that you are going to do. So you have flexibility there but you don’t have the flexibility to define what those activities
are, what those 10 initial activities are. The federal government does that for you...”

Twelve middle managers offered complaints about the lack of flexibility in services. For example, they struggled with funding reductions that led to not enough staffing in the organization. They noted the changeable policy environment and the need for constant adjustment to meet policy expectations and demands. In addition, they encountered difficulties in coordinating different service agencies in the community. The following quotes illustrate the identified challenges:

Study participant 2: “…from the hierarchy, you got this participation requirement. You have this participation requirement and you have individuals who feel the heat as far as making sure that they have enough individuals engaging in working as possible. … But from a philosophy stand point, we need to keep everyone happy with regard to the Bridge Program. So there is a lot of communication going on with the Bridge staff. To make sure that they are meeting the needs with the front line worker and the needs with the supervisors…”

Study participant 7: “… We encourage them to get proper medical documentation and to get them coded unemployable. But once we do that, they are already counted against us. So sometimes, you have to make that kind of decision. The client or the numbers. So it’s a hard decision to make, if we make them medical exemption, they automatically count against us…”

Study participant 27: “..It takes a lot of resources... They leave it short for the
people who serve the public and they shouldn’t do that because people get hurt, people don’t get fed, and shelter on time because we don’t have enough workers to get things done on time. If they are going to cut things, it’s not going to be resources, human resources, to the clients. This is a needy population and they need the resources…”

Caught between the leaders and the front-line workers, middle managers had the difficult role of translating and “re-translating” for front-line participants the TANF mandates received from top organizational leaders. Middle managers’ roles also called for them to communicate the consequences for non-compliance and penalties to the front-line participants.

Seven of the *front-line participants* participating in the study claimed that challenges appeared to occur more during times when they encountered clients’ with personal issues in addition to their job skills. During AFDC, front-line professionals were more like mentors for clients. With this mentoring role, they were able to devote a longer period of time with each client to resolve not only learning and job search activities, but also personal issues. In the words of two study participants who expressed:

*Study participant 7:* “…When I first started, we used to be so much giving. We have so much to give, more leeway, more friendly, more caring, more sympathetic, we used to do more hand-holding, takes our time, baby steps, more on someone to make sure that they really hit the goal, and close their case, and stay closed…”

*Study participant 11:* “…There was a lot of loving and hand-holding, and crying, and we tried to spend a lot of time to made them feel comfortable and to build the
In contrast, under TANF, front-line professionals’ primary role changed from “mentoring” to “case management.” Professionals said that they essentially became enforcers of regulations.

Thirteen study participants at all levels indicated that the stringent employment focus of TANF also made the workers to provide the service in a less person-centered fashion than seen under AFDC. They expressed concern about the shift in focus accompanying TANF. This shift, in their view, made it even more difficult to deal with the “recidivist” population. This population tended to have multiple and complicated personal issues that impeded the establishment of a successful employment history.

Where this population was concerned, the study participants claimed that the barriers could not be overcome within the federally regulated six-week job readiness training period, making it difficult to reach an appropriate level of employability.

Moreover, front-line professionals were responsible for relaying the message that TANF support was a “temporary assistance” to families who have been on the welfare rolls for generations. These changes were major ones for both the front-line professionals and the clients. The sample quotes below demonstrate this finding:

*Study participant 12:* “…How we do it is ever-changing. …We are becoming more by needs of customer oriented, both with the clients and with the agencies that we are interacting with. We have to change almost the roles at the times because the regulations change, the demands change…The structure of the
regulation and the participation that is on us, several of them I would like to be more individually focused…”

Study participant 24: “…The human element is gone. The title “case manager” is wrong. … That means that you are an advocate for the clients. And you do what is necessary and try to work the system so that it’s toward that person’s benefits, not to the agency. But now, a case manager is nothing but a number counter, paperwork, making sure the calendars are done, making sure they get to social services on time, and all of those things.

Study participant 5: “…I think getting these clients to understand that … It’s not like it used to be, TANF is not a right, not a lifelong thing. To get them understand that they change the thing from public assistance to temporary assistance. … So trying to really get the message across. You start to see it a little bit, but there is still a long way to go to get that message across…”

Furthermore, study participants indicated that professionals at all levels shouldered the responsibility of extra administrative duties. They were responsible for filling out each client’s weekly time sheet, aggregating the information, and reporting the information back to the agency and state managers. According to the participants, these duties in TANF created an enormous amount of extra work for the professionals at all levels. The following quotes support the finding:

Study participant 6 (leader): “…Oh, God. Yes. I’ve never done more reports than I’ve ever done this year. … It’s unbelievable. I have never had more reviews and
audit, things like that…”

Study participant 23 (middle manager): “...I wasn’t hire to do the clerical administration. But that’s basically what I am doing 50% of my job now. ... I work for Bridge but I also got to do (Program) paperwork, all the registration, I enter all the students’ information into the system. Then I got to do paperwork for (service agency)…”

Study participant 12 (front-line professionals): “...Since our conversation the paperwork and record keeping demands have only multiplied and we find ourselves less and less able to spend the valuable case management and problem solving time with the clients...”

When all of the study participants were asked about top resources would be needed to succeed, the majority identified the following four priorities. :

1. More funding for supporting the programs:

Nineteen out of thirty study participants (ten out of eleven from the leadership level, four out of twelve from the middle manager level, and five out of seven from the front-line level) identified this priority. The following quote illustrates the point:

Study participant 4: “…Financially, it would be good. Right now we have a program that is cut, a lot of money from the state, cut us 3 million dollars for the state. And we restored 2 million, we are short 1 million. But we could use a lot more. We run programs here basically with salary, nothing else. They’ve got program and we have no room for it because financially we don’t have any money…”

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2. *More flexibility in regulations that would allow professionals to help the clients more effectively:*

Fourteen out of thirty study participants (six out of eleven from the leadership level, two out of twelve out from the middle manager level, six out of seven from the front-line level) identified this priority. The following sample quote illustrates the point:

*Study participant 24:* “But simply take the handcuff off. The thing that could make our job much more successful is the ability of being allowed to grab the resources that are necessary for each client to make it work.…”

4. *A more human-centered focus that would allow for a more individualized approach to supporting clients with personal issues:* Thirteen out of thirty study participants; (four out of eleven from the leadership level, seven out of twelve from the middle manager level, and four out of seven from the front-line level) identified this priority. The following sample quote illustrates the point:

*Study participant 21:* “…as far as in our employment system, we want to get them employed, however, they have a case chase down to child abuse and neglect and the court mandated them to do so much which interferes with the regulation that we are requiring. And I see the conflict a lot there. …On our end, we have to tell them, you are required by law to do so much. So I see a lot of time, the agencies, the government, they are just budding their heads. … are you going to lose your
money or are you going to lose your children?”

4. Additional staff that could support the increasingly demanding workload, including paperwork and extra requirements:

Ten out of thirty study participants; (six out of eleven from the leadership level, three out of twelve from the middle manager level, one out of seven from the front-line level) identified this priority. The following sample quote illustrates the point:

Study participant 10: “…I would agree that because of the challenges that we face with the clients based on the situations, it requires more supportive services so it goes to staffing. Because of funding restrictions or whatever, the staffing has decreased substantially over the time that I have been here. Yet, the needs, the students have increased. So trying to bring that back to balance, I would say staff.…”

Family 3: Organizational changes

The study participants claimed that the shift to an employment-first philosophy created ripple effects at the organizational level. They indicated that these effects were manifested in numerous organizational changes. These changes included restructuring of organizational goals, reporting systems, programs, and services. Participants also pointed out that stringent federal mandates required the agencies to comply with the TANF specified requirements. These requirements included the regulated timeframe for clients’ on job readiness and job search activities, and the type of activities that could be counted toward the federal participation rate.
All of the study participants indicated that the long-term organizational mission—client self-sufficiency—did not change with the enactment of TANF mandates. However, in thirteen interviews (out of twenty-five), participants recognized that short-term organizational goals were modified. Participants explained this modification by pointing to newly-mandated regulations focusing on client employment. The following two quotes evidence the finding:

*Study participant 4:* “…their goal used to be to get people self-sufficient and now is maybe to maintain the participation rate, to get people engaged. As a result, program activities have been re-directed to assure compliance with the aforementioned employment first mandates…”

*Study participant 13:* “…I think clearly, it’s all on the work participation rate. There’s really where it’s ratcheted up. A lot of focus on that internally, at the employment staff, the data staff, the audit staff, they are all out there. Everybody runs into chasing numbers. Sometimes we lose the sight of that. So you have to get this number and you have to run your program and keep your eyes on the real goal…”

Moreover, study participants identified changes in organizational structures. The thirteen study participants who experienced the transition of AFDC and TANF noted that in three counties, TANF directly resulted in the re-structuring of the employment services units. This re-structuring occurred in two forms: unit separation and expansion. By unit separation, participants meant that as TANF brought in more specific mandates, agency
unit that dealt with multiple tasks in AFDC time need to separate some functions into specialized units, such as childcare. By unit expansion, participants meant that the TANF mandates required more attention in accountability, such as performance monitoring and reporting. Therefore, a new level of management would be needed to split the burden and to satisfy the federal mandates. The sample quotes below illustrate this finding:

*Study participant 1:* “…It became more apparent to the local districts of the need to have a separated unit in employment focus because the program is so detail oriented…. We created employment unit to specifically focus on that…”

*Study participant 6:* “…. When the first I got into the unit, everyone was doing cases. And (co-worker) decided that we really need another line of supervision that we needed because …the counties are very spread out. We needed at least one or two people at the office to keep the daily operations flowing, ..I couldn’t be in many places at once. It really has helped…”

More concretely, participants said that employment service unit was separated from other government units; and, with this separation, the unit was charged with serving only TANF clients and their transitional needs (i.e., childcare, transportation, etc). Participants also claimed that, at the county level, more professional positions such as line supervisors and service units (e.g., job centers) were established. They explained that each of these structural modifications was designed to fulfill the goal stated in “employment first” policies. The new structured positions frequently resided under the auspices of the local DSS or Bridge Office.

In fifteen interviews, study participants indicated that *organizational operating*
processes changed as well. They suggested that this change in operating process occurred for two main reasons. The first reason is because the service focus shifted to employability. The second is due to the new data collecting, monitoring, and reporting approaches ushered in by different regulatory requirements and standards. The following quotes illustrate these points:

*Study participant 2:* “…we had to change the way we do things. We had to change what we are reporting, what type of data we are trying to obtain, what type of data we are monitoring, what type of data, we never had to monitor attendance as stringent as we are now…”

*Study participant 20:* “…Yes, it did. It changes in that regard (operational processes). Now when individual comes in and fills in application, we talk about employment. We talk about employability, is the client able to carry out an activity? What are the restrictions, is it drug and alcohol, is it medical? If not, they go to the job club. In other words, the eligibility components shift too because now we are getting a while set of activities that we ask the clients to perform, rather than just have them fill out the application…”

Study participants provided more details on these changes. According to participants, as the client participation rates of employment and the reporting requirement became more stringent, the professionals had to ensure the clients’ participation in employment activities within four/six weeks. The client could be counted as a successful participant only when this requirement was satisfied. For example, in one county, workers were hired to make daily home visits to the absentees who did not show up in
assigned activities. The study participant described the new activity:

*Study participant 5*: “…as far as what the state is requiring, everything is participation based. Our people attending their activity as they should...We have people knocking on the doors asking, why aren’t you here today? What’s keeping you from participating? So we have to get really creative on how we reach our clients to meet their requirements. Those are the things that’s been added trying to meet these regulation goals…”

Participants indicated that county participants relied heavily on these visits to obtain the required participation rate. Study participants expressed that if the county failed to meet the mandated participation rate, a financial sanction was applied to the agency. This sanction then had a significant impact on the next year’s annual budget. The sample quotes below illustrate their concern:

*Study participant 22*: “…Because there is such an emphasis on federal regulation in meeting our participation, we have the participation requirement that could affect funding if we don’t meet our participation. So that’s something that we are always concerning, making sure that we are going to meet the participation requirement so there is no penalty…”

*Study participant 2*: “... We have never been so specific with the letter of the law the way we are now because you have this financial sanction that could happen that the federal government impose on the state, obviously the state would impose
on the local districts. So I think we become an operation that runs based on regulations, rather than an operation that based on serving people...whereas maybe in the past, the regulations weren’t quite important and we just develop services for individuals, providing them more opportunities whereas I don’t think the opportunities are quite available to individuals as they have been in the past…”

According to participants, professionals struggled to free up enough time to assess a client’s personal issues and then craft a viable long-term plan for each individual. Study participants simultaneously struggled with federal governmental mandates accompanying oversight of state and local compliance with TANF requirements. Mandates included state and local governmental monthly reports of ongoing progress. In twelve interviews, the study participants reported that the demands on record keeping and paperwork under TANF were too onerous. The following quotes illustrate their concern:

*Study participant 12:* “…And another thing that we have to do now is the paperwork...Now we have to send a letter to the employer to get a signed letter from the employer to say that they were employed and then another letter at 90 days. So that’s a whole layer of tracking and record keeping for the clerical person to spend a large amount of time... That’s just a concrete example of where the pull is between the work and the people…”

*Study participant 23:* “…I wasn’t hire to do the clerical administration. But that’s basically what I am doing 50% of my job now...But after a while, I do get stressed
because I am only one person and that’s sometimes I forget things…”

As the reporting system became more elaborate, it also became too cumbersome. Participants indicated that professionals did not have enough time and resources for individualized client services and problem-solving.

**Super Family II: Intended Policies versus Implemented Policies**

Successful policy implementation of the kind associated with TANF requires fluidity and “mutual adaptation.” The adaptation allows implementers to reconcile their implementation environment at the micro level with the demands of macro level policy decisions (Berman and McLaughlin 1978; Honig 2006).

The successful implementation of a policy also requires a dynamic feedback loop for purposes of ongoing improvement/adjustment. In other words, as the planners inform practitioners of the new goals, local implementers need to tailor strategies to fit local conditions. Additionally, the implementers need to provide ongoing feedback to planners for purposes of improving the implementation process (McLaughlin 2006). As a result, the planners and implementers are able to adjust implementation activities to achieve the goals.

Thus, policy goals and implementation design must be synergistically linked and “mutually adaptable.” This specification requires organization to have the internal capacity to succeed in two ways. One is the capacity to reflect on how policy is being implemented. The other is the capacity to adjust the policy process to achieve the desired outcome imposed by program goals. The concept of “theory-of-change,” which aims to examine why and how policy initiatives work or do not work (Weiss 1995; Connell and
Klem 2000), is a useful way to organize this work (and will be employed later in Chapter 5).

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<th>Super Family</th>
<th>Primary Findings in the Family</th>
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| Intended Policies vs. Implemented Policies | - Staff’s attitude toward changes  
1) nine disagreed with the changes, four supported the changes, five felt ambivalent with the changes  
2) eight believed TANF impaired the agency, seven thought TANF improved the agency, five saw the TANF effects as “a mixed package”  
- Lipsky’s street level bureaucracy  
1) all participants claimed that they have some room for discretion, but the also are aware of the need to exercise that discretion within the “safe zone” of federal regulations  
- Principal-agent issue  
1) Regarding congruity between intended and implemented policies, thirteen study participants reported “yes”, seven reported “no.” For those who said “yes”, they saw the TANF policies implemented faithfully “at the street level” matching the TANF intentions on the “drawing board”: for those who said “no”, they felt that TANF intended policies were too strict and too unrealistic to achieve.  
2) more than half of the thirty study participants believed they provided significant feedback to the top levels of management, but were suspicious about how much their feedback actually influenced the decisions process. |

Table 4-3: Primary Findings in Intended and Implemented Policies

In addition to the aforementioned intended regulations from the federal government, the following conceptual families were also salient to the relationship between intended and implemented policies in the Bridge Program.

Family 1: Principal-agent Issues

In ten interviews, study participants said that there was a mechanism for detecting the lack of fit between intended and implemented policies in their respective organizations. They reported that the mechanism consisted of regular performance reports that were provided to top level administrators.

Study participant 18: “… And the other thing on the accountability, well, we do site visit, we go out and we review records, and that’s actually part of the review
services that they are performing. And we would make sure everybody is eligible and we will also write a report to (agency) based on our findings. So if we find it was not as it should be, we would give them corrected action plan. So that would be a part of the accountability as well…”

From the documents and the materials provided by the study participants, the findings show that current TANF activities in New York State follow the NYS Welfare Reform Act of 1996 with the instructions mainly based on two Federal Acts. These include the original Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 and the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 (104th Congress 1996; 109th Congress 2006). In addition to the two Acts, a TANF implementation rule in 1999 and two TANF reauthorization rules employed in 2006 and 2008 (DHHS 2006, 2008) were announced by the federal government, developed for the purposes of specifically defining and managing implementation at the local street level.

Based on the NYS Welfare Reform Act 1997, the following general principles guided the state’s response to federal regulatory requirements (OTDA 1997): 1) modification of existing State legislation to comply with new federal standards; 2) incorporation of the major components of federal legislation into state policy; 3) replacement of “Home Relief” with the federally defined “Safety Net” program for individuals beyond federal time limits; 4) passing down of Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirements to counties; 5) Passing down of penalties to counties failing to meet participation targets; 6) utilization of the Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) state block grant to distribute TANF funds to counties, who then determined how local funding
is allocated. The major impact of these principles on the NYS Bridge Program has been an increased focus on work participation rates for the work-eligible individuals.

The PRWORA established the work participation rate requirements through two requirements. First, it required fifty percent of single work-eligible parent head of household to participate in thirty hours of work activities per week or in twenty hours of eligible work activities plus ten hours additional activities. For families with a child or children under six, the number of hours is lowered to twenty hours of work activities. Second, PRWORA required ninety percent of two parent work eligible families to participate in thirty-five hours of work activities per week or in fifty-five hours of eligible work activities if receiving federally funded child care. The definition of “work-eligible individuals” included anyone whose participation contributed to calculation of work participation rate, specially deemed to be either an adult (or minor child head of household) receiving TANF or state assistance or a non-recipient parent living with a child receiving assistance. It excluded minors (not head of household), certain aliens, and at the option of the state, SSI recipients. The DRA re-set fiscal year 2005 as the new baseline caseload year. This meant that the caseload of 2005 became the denominator when calculating the participation rate. The major intended focus in these Acts and regulations was to reduce the welfare caseload. The core “incentives” for the state and local agencies to implement these changes included: an application of a caseload reduction credit and the leveraging of a substantial fiscal penalty for failure to meet the federally required participation rate.

In 2007, when the Commissioner of NYS OTDA gave the testimony to the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support of the House Committee on Ways
and Means, he presented the historical trend of TANF in the past decade: “The NYS TANF caseload of approximately 280,000 at the end of 2006 represented a decrease of about seventy-five percent form the historic high of 1.1 million in 1996 (OTDA 2007).” Federal intent appeared to have been implemented effectively. However, as study participants pointed out, clients now on the caseload have become increasingly in the “harder to serve” population than the TANF clients a decade ago. The requirements on participation rate which were originally set in 1996 did not seem appropriate and realistic to the local implementers.

Seven participants pointed out that although the agency leaders attempted to arrange the activities based on the regulations, these strictly regulated and highly specified requirements were still too unrealistic to attain. The following quotes illustrate this concern:

*Study participant 6:* “…Yes and no. The yes is, whatever the regs are, we try to put them in place and in general, they work. No, in terms of the realistic nature of the expectation that you are going to get everybody in an activity that is 35 hours every week, it’s just not going to happen. In my opinion, if they are capable, most of these clients to work 35 hours a week, they would already been working somewhere. So there is always going to be a period of us trying to get them to do that. And the expectations of asking us to do that all the time is just very difficult. And the answer from the federal government is that: that’s why your (required) rate is only 50%, not 100%. But I think we figure out in our county, with all of the drug and alcohol or disabled, or all of those kind of issues, those are people still our denominator in our rate. Even if all the people that are employable get
employed, the highest we could get is 50%. That would be like our 100%. So when I am in the 40 or 42, I feel, I am doing great…”

Moreover, in the interviews, participants were asked a question regarding “whether the implemented policies were the same as the intended policies.” In thirteen interviews, participants answered “yes”; and they explained their response by indicating that they had little choice but to fulfill the mandated requirements explicitly stated under TANF. The following quotes illustrate the opinion:

*Study participant 10:* “…I think it’s what I have expected and it was pretty clear right from the beginning, the emphasis of the TANF program was. We structured ourselves accordingly. And we had to modifying, switching the gear to get there. But it’s what I’ve expected…”

*Study participant 27:* “…There is some flexibility, but we try to adhere to the written words, the contracts, and the agreements that we made with SUNY to deliver the product to consumers. So we try to adhere to the regulations of the product and for most customers, it works to just leave the way it is without modification….”

In seven interviews, however, participants pointed out discrepancies between intended and the implemented policies. They expressed that the intended policies were too unrealistic to be realized.
Study participant 1: “…However, it’s 10 years after, to have the same standard for the population that’s left makes it difficult…”

Study participant 22: “…I am just thinking about the TANF regulation in terms of participation rate, what they are expecting of the counties, it’s difficult to reach if they don’t look at the specific population. A lot of people have health issues, mental health issues, drugs and alcohol issues…”

Throughout the interviews, the study participants pointed out that the stringent TANF mandates had a paradoxical and unintended effect. These mandates actually created new service needs. The participants indicated that the expansion of the new services required a more comprehensive two-way channel of communication. The two-way channel of communication would serve a major function in assuring policy compliance. In one direction, the communication would assure “policies on the drawing board” were received accurately at the “policy on the street”. In the other direction, the channel of communication could serve as a mechanism of policy feedback from the “street level” to the “drawing board level.”

Participants expressed specific concerns about the lack of congruence between policy intention and actual implementation. Seven participants saw the need to have a channel of communication relay information about the needs of the clients and the leaders. They also noted the role that front-line professionals could play in alerting top leaders of the realized policy efficiencies and inefficiencies as they were being implemented. In participants’ view, this change would help to assuage any management fears that implemented policies were not being rolled out according to guidelines.
Study participant 23: “…We should maybe have a meeting every couple months together. (Agency) used to have meetings every month, everybody would be at the table and it was very good meeting because you got to meet the agencies who are running the agencies and the problems that they are having, and you started to meet people. They stopped…”

In contrast, more than half of the thirty study participants felt that considerable feedback was already being solicited from front line professionals and provided to the top levels of management. The following quote illustrates the point:

Study participant 7: “…Yes. We meet our state representatives and we tell them what the barriers are and what’s facing us. We meet with them once a month…We bring our concerns and how it is difficult to meet our job goals. And (the representative) takes it back to those who listen…”

In fact, study participants expressed some skepticism in regard to the involvement of policy decision-making and planning, particularly at the local level. Some participants were unsure about whether the critical and cogent feedback was actually used by top level leaders in undertaking systems changes. The sample quote below illustrates this skepticism:

Study participant 6: “…Although the counties give them feedbacks, I feel that the
state’s hands are tied because a lot of these mandates are coming from the federal government... So they sympathize on us, but there is really nothing they can do for us…”

Family 2: Professional’s Attitude toward Changes

In the case of TANF changes in the Bridge Program, study participants in nine interviews disagreed with the changes accompanying TANF. They did not see TANF as a positive change in regard to the conduct of their daily business. The following quotes indicate the point:

Study participant 25: “… Do I agree with them (on the requirements)? No. But that’s what we have to do. That’s what’s given to us, you got to play by the rules…”

Study participant 12: “…in term of to meet the ultimate goal, I don’t think it’s making it easier at all or making it more in tune with what we have to do for our students. Not at all. I don’t think it’s been beneficial to meeting the long-term goal…”

In four other interviews, however, participants expressed their support for the changes accompanying TANF. They saw the changes as a good model for increasing both agency and client accountability. This view was illustrated in the words of the following two study participants:
Study participant 18: “… I think if you look at how many people have actually gone off the welfare roll, that were originally on there, yes. The people that are left are a lot of time the real hard to serve… the people are doing milking the system a lot, and now there are a lot less of the abuse. People are actually out there getting jobs, and I think it’s a great thing…”

Study participant 13: “… Yeah, I think it is (a good change). I think the focus on providing services and benefits to the people, and now they expend beyond our cash caseload. It’s all positive. I think that’s all positive…”

In the remaining five interviews, study participants reported ambivalent feelings toward the TANF changes. They perceived both the aforementioned benefits-advantages and problems-limitations. The sample quotes below illustrate these participants’ ambivalence.

Study participant 10: “…So the work-first at all cost concept, I was not supportive of. Work as the primary goal, I do support that…”

Study participant 19: “…So I can say, “yes, we support welfare reform, we just don’t like some of the state-wide policies, like the work-first, doesn’t make any sense for a human capital investment model of success and for workforce development…”

This study’s proponents of TANF indicated that the changes from TANF gave the Bridge Program more legitimacy at the agency level. They claimed that the TANF
regulations enabled them to require clients to engage in work-related activities within a short period of time. Moreover, these same, “pro-TANF” participants indicated that the mandate helped assure accountability at both the client and the government levels. They said it also required the agency to plan for the fulfillment of the participation rate requirement and to establish a specific timeframe for completion of the task. This framework, in these participants’ view, also served clients. Clients were able to understanding their obligations in order to receive the TANF benefits and also how services related to these benefits and TANF overall.

Study participants opposed to the new TANF regulations offered a contrasting perspective. These participants claimed that the new regulations constrained their ability and flexibility to serve their clients. They indicated that they felt reluctant to follow the stringent mandates because they considered these mandates to be too unrealistic and even “un-achievable.” These participants also feared the financial penalty for not complying with the requirements. However, they also recognized that the financial consequences of being sanctioned were something the organization could not afford to ignore. Therefore, the study participants constantly found themselves having to balance the dual objectives of “making the rate” and “caring for the clients’ true needs.”

Significantly, one-third of the study participants claimed that TANF actually impaired their organization. They reported being worried that the program became too “participation rate-driven.” Programs and services driven by the participation rate mandate, they observed, resulted in a loss of “the human touch” in service delivery.

These study participants complained that professionals no longer had the time to understand and care about each client’s personal issues. They felt that this lack of
adequate time for the clients often resulted in a career plan without really addressing the
fundamental causes for unemployment. The following quotes expressed this view point:

*Study participant 5:* “…I think it impaired it...Prior to me coming here, …We
would generally have the individual for 6 months. While they were there, they
were doing the employment workshop, you have more time to removing those
barriers, setting up and pulling services in place. Make sure they started their
counseling, started the drug treatment, taking care the housing issue, trying to get
them stable. So when we are focusing on the employment piece, they are not
going to solve the problem in one day, but the things are in place. But now we
have to do things simultaneously and play it into all the fall into the place… Now
all job readiness is 4 weeks. It’s just what they have…”

*Study participant 7:* “…Impaired. If I am allowed to say that. People say that and
I hear that. It has impaired, yes, because we’ve lost our personal touch…”

Not all study participants shared this view. In seven interviews, study participants
claimed that TANF improved the Bridge Program and increased the accountability placed
on the clients and agencies. This group of study participants also showed their support of
TANF’s specific goals and timeframe. They noted that the mandates prevented long-term
welfare dependency and perpetuation of inter-generational welfare cycles. In the words
of two study participants, they expressed that:

*Study participant 14:* “…the local became much more aggressive and engaging
people when they are applying to the system and if they didn’t have any type of disability or something, they are more aggressive in getting that person into activities as quickly as possible. Don’t get them too comfortable on welfare. Let’s get them into activities, but let’s get reinforced that the system is temporary and you are responsible for becoming self-sufficient…”

*Study participant 3:* “…In that, we are more direct, we have more purposes, we have a certain time frame of which to do, whatever it needs to be done. Whereas before, we have more time, which may not have to be a good thing to the clients, to have narrow it down to 4 weeks from unemployment to employment. It’s very good…”

Another five study participants viewed the TANF changes as “a mixed package.” That is, they perceived both positive and negative impacts of the changes. They also claimed that the struggle between the two perspectives of wanting to retain the “human touch” while imposing mandated “accountability” was a kind of beneficial check-and-balance mechanism. In other words, professionals helped the clients with a concrete standard, participation rate, in mind. They also had to communicate the concept of “sense of accountability” to the clients. In this case, the participants noted that the clients could still receive the necessary services without abusing the resources in the social service system. This point was illustrated in the following quotes:

*Study participant 6:* “…Improvement, I think we now are more focused on the cases. And the clients who have been notoriously don’t want to be involved, it has
certainly been improved in that aspect because they now know clearly what they are expected to do…they know “now I am not getting away with anything here.”… We are very focused on getting in our schedules, we become more organized in that fashion”… The down side is that we have less flexibility with those who maybe needed. Those who maybe want to go to school or want to try something new. It’s really going to motivate and improve their motivation. We have less flexibility with that…”

*Study participant 30:* “…Accountability is always good. Accountability is positive, I think…when you are using public dollars, you got to have a greater accountability. So I think accountability is important and is a good check. So I see that as positive. The negative is, under TANF, that we reduce the capacity to help people grow to education and training. That’s a negative because that’s going to affect the future… it affects the ability of the state to have qualified workforce. And that’s a negative…”

**Family 3: Lipsky’s Street Level Bureaucracy**

In the case of the Bridge Program, the local offices, including the local DSS and local Bridge Offices, were considered the “front-line” agents. Front-line professionals in these offices were the ones who received directions from their organizational supervisors, including directives from TANF’s federal requirements. And then these front-line agents were asked to implement the TANF mandates as they served their clients.

With this context in mind, the following finding is important. All of the study participants claimed that they enjoyed some level of discretion and even autonomy when
implementing TANF’s federal mandates. Where front-line professionals at the local DSSs were concerned, the study participants reported that discretion was most notable when assessing the clients and referring them to any necessary services. The finding is illustrated in the following quote:

Study participant 21: “…As far as discretion, we have so many places that we can send TANF. So as far as which one I choose to put them in, it’s pretty much up to me. .. But as far as if they are brand new person, first time at my desk, I can evaluate them and based on the guideline of TANF, or individual, I can place them wherever I feel that suited them…”

At local Bridge Offices, participants indicated that professionals received the referrals from the DSSs. They then used their discretionary authority to design the activities based on the identified needs of the clients. Nonetheless, despite having some flexibility in how they implemented policy, the respondents all recognized that discretionary autonomy was generally exercised within the “safe zone.” The “safe zone” also limited possible actions that could be taken through the imposition of a “list of countable activities” defined in federal government policies. The following quote is illustrative:

Study participant 8: “…Everyday, I do something different. But I see there is a need to expend more exercise, I can work on that. It’s up to myself. But as long I have those basics done, I can pass them along the next week. They only have 4
weeks in Bridge ...the basics are done. I am more flexible with everything else…”

In all the interviews, study participants recognized that the Bridge services were provided under narrowly defined guidelines, with little room for flexibility. As a result, participants in twelve interviews observed that the lack of flexibility contributed to a certain level of “inability of the current training/services” to accommodate client needs. Their concern is revealed in the quote below:

*Study participant 19:* “…So we are seeing now are people who face multiple, multiple barriers, and we are not authorized with the education and training they need. Our focus is, unless we are being paid for, is to get them a job, any job, keep them in the job for 90 days, and once you do that, you are done with your job. … that’s self-defeating for us because we realize these people need so much more…”

**Super Family III: Partnerships**

Partnerships are formed so that two or more agencies can work together to achieve mutual objectives (Fletcher 2006). With social issues and public policies becoming increasingly complex and intertwined, few complex policies are able to be carried out without the formation of a partnership. Through the establishment of the partnerships, organizations improve their ability to achieve mutual goals through a commitment to improve performance and share risks and benefits (Allen 2002).
Super Family

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<th>Partnerships</th>
<th>Primary Findings in the Family</th>
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- **Mutual recognition**
  1) all agencies shared the same mission self-sufficiency
  2) the fundamental philosophies between the educational and social services agencies are seen as being different

- **Interactions among partner agencies**
  1) major facilitator for effective coordination: regular face-to-face monthly or quarterly communication and open dialogue; major barrier impeding effective coordination: lack of policy influence at the top levels of policy making, resulting in the reluctance of communications
  2) TANF forced agencies to work together more; however, TANF also created more competition among the service providers.

- **Artifact: Shared Values, Processes, and Relationships**
  1) involved agencies professionals now have regular-scheduled meetings for joint-planning and decision-making processes; the process can also occur in an ad hoc fashion whenever multiple agency issues occur
  2) the Bridge offices and DSSs professionals do not use the same data system, but do share data with one another which at some level eliminates assessment duplication and better understands clients issues
  3) agencies have different fundamentally different philosophies, different expertise, resulting in different cultures.
  4) two-third of the participants believed they do have coordinative working relationships: harmonizing, synchronizing, and turn-taking according to both the established protocols and the “tacitness” throughout the working relationships in the past years
  5) two-thirds of participants believe that a collaborative working relationship has developed since TANF; but only one-third feel a sense of inter-dependency among partners.
  6) the agency professionals that have coordinative/collaborative relationships maintain the unity of purpose as they fulfill TANF mandates, by: a) the regular monthly or quarterly meetings, b) the regular referrals flow: Local DSSs to Bridge Programs, c) the constant channels of data sharing from DSSs and Bridge Programs
  7) for the agency professionals that share the sense of interdependency, they are mutually accountable, and strongly and voluntarily committed. Since the agencies are committed in pursuit of the same goal, they sometimes also try to mobilize agency resources across boundaries.
  8) partnership evolution:

  **Stand-alone agency** → **cooperation** → **coordination** → **collaboration**

  a. **Agency level:**
  Federal mandates initiated the need for agencies to work together → agency leaders start to build the organizational ties in order to attain the common goal → agency leaders all recognize and acknowledge the common mission, value, and working process, and the leaders feel the ownership of the relationship → agency leaders hold the sense of interdependency, and are willing to mobilize resources across agencies for successful collaborative relationships

  b. **Individual level:**
  The authoritative pressure and order from the top leaders force the inter-professional working relationships → professionals sense the urgency of reaching the goal and start to buy-in the idea → professionals trust, understand, and feel the sense of community among one another → professionals work together formally and informally with the sense of oneness (we-feeling).

| Table 4-4: Primary Findings in Partnerships |
Family 1: Mutual Recognition

All the involved agencies appeared to share the same vision of self-sufficiency for the recipients. However, the study participants reported that the underlying philosophies of the partner agencies were often different. For example, study participants complained about problem affecting their local DSS offices. Local office leaders were being told to focus on participation rates because of state and federal government mandates. In the words of two study participants:

*Study participant 4*: “...So everybody has their own goals but we all work for the clients. We are all inter-twined…”

*Study participant 24*: “…You have to do it (what you are told to do) because of the mandate but … Everybody kind does their own thing…”

The Bridge Program was initially established and endorsed with an educational mission. Therefore, the respondents from the Bridge Offices claimed that the program appeared to be continued support as for the original core values of an educational and training institution. The following two quotes illustrate the finding:

*Study participant 30*: “…But I think there needs to be more attention to allow people to have the ability to develop their skills. Because ultimately what we need is a good workforce, we can’t have good workforce until people are trained...there are people who want to work but initially want to get education, and would work.
I think you create opportunity for those people, to get them education…”

Study participant 19: “…Now we are serving 51% of TANF 200%, that means 51% of the people we have in our program are either part-time employed or employed full time coming back to get education and training, free of charge, so that they can move up the ladder and take advantage of promotional opportunities and better paying jobs…”

In theory, this fundamental difference in philosophy marked by TANF should result in diverse organizational goals for the agencies concerned. This difference should have produced negative effects in agencies’ working relationship. However, study participants reported that, due to the stringent TANF mandates, their agencies were required to work more together. In turn, this working relationship was pointed out to have encouraged dialogue and greater mutual understanding and respect among the partnering organizations. In the words of two study participants:

Study participant 2: “…we have the same goals. And I think what makes it easy here … is that we have the same staff members involved for many many years. So there is a familiarity between the agencies…”

Study participant 5: “I think it’s the staff themselves, we have respect for each other. And the willingness to share with each other and understand that we have the same goal…”

In two-thirds of the interviews, participants indicated that they believed the
partner agencies did share a common goal. The remaining one-third appeared to remain uncertain about whether there was such a common goal.

Family 2: Interactions among Partner Agencies

Participants said that working relationships among professionals representing different agencies played a key role in the successful coordination of employment related services and meeting of mandated goals. The following two quotes support the finding:

*Study participant 19:* “…Yeah, whenever somebody discovers a need or an issue, they will immediately get on the phone and call us, discuss it, and we’ll ask for recommendation: How do you think we should proceed on this? Here is what you need to do. How do you think we should proceed?...”

*Study participant 25:* “… we meet and we talk, (the partner co-worker) has my numbers, (the partner co-worker) knows what I need, we have memorandum in place…”

The study participants identified both facilitators and barriers. The facilitators enabled coordination, while the barriers impeded it. Details about these barriers and facilitators were provided by participants.

The two most commonly recognized facilitators engendering coordination were regular communication and an open dialogue. The points were revealed by the following two quotes:
Study participant 4: “…And we just talk with them, we see them, we do workshop with them. So during that time, we assess what their levels are. And when you are with somebody for so long, people just start to talk to you. They start to tell you more things so that that’s really our assessment tool…”

Study participant 20: “…I think it’s fantastic. If there is an issue, I get a phone call. If I got a problem, I make a phone call. People are always very respectful …”

The importance of open dialogue and regular communication were espoused by fifteen respondents answering this question. They noted that communication occurred both internally across management levels and externally across agencies.

In addition, participants pointed out that the advantages of open and regular communication were evidenced in multiple ways. First, the respondents considered that as helping leaders in partner agencies understand one another’s mission and goals better and in a more timely fashion. In turn, the participants noted that the fostering of a good understanding between partners was seen as further promoting working relationships creating positive working histories.

Moreover, study participants indicated that open communication across levels and agencies had a generative effect; it engendering a mutual respect among participating persons. Participants claimed that it also helped further strengthening the ongoing working relationships needed to fully implement TANF mandates.

In addition, participants indicated that another important advantage was the co-location of offices. In some instances, participants experienced the strategy of co-location bringing several partner agencies together in the same building. In the words of
the following two participants:

Study participant 3: “…I guess it’s the immediate reporting of whatever is happening with our clients, …Having them (the all case managers and supervisors) in place there and having them so close within the same facility also makes reporting a lot easier and more conducive and helpful in the end to the clients.

Study participant 25: “…we are in a perfect building. If I need (the partner co-worker), I go up to (x) floor. If I need (the partner co-worker), it’s the other side of the wall. If I need (the partner co-worker), they are (x) floor… If I can’t get someone on the phone or email, I am walking down to the office. We don’t have the barriers because we are right at where we need to be in terms of location…”

In this case, communication was easier for both the professionals and the clients. Participants from counties that did have co-located facilities all expressed their appreciation for the advantages of working under one roof.

On the other hand, as aforementioned, seven participants indicated that they had neither influence on the policy discussions nor power in the decision-making process. Therefore, participants also noted that the lack of a sense of involvement could also lead to a mindset which prevented an open dialogue flowing across different levels. This was seen as fostering negativity within the organization and across different agencies within the partnership. The following quote illustrated the concern:

Study participant 28: “… (communication barrier is) not having a consistent and
clear understanding of what we are trying to accomplish ... That’s one barrier. Not really having a strong and open dialog, with them about what’s the best way to set this program up so we are meeting the mutual needs…”

Study participants claimed that the reluctance to allow an open dialogue contributing to the lack of a consistent and clear understanding on what the partner agencies were trying to accomplish. They were concerned that it prohibited involved agencies from attaining needed information to serve the clients in the most efficient and effective ways.

In eleven interviews, study participants indicated that the stringent TANF mandates and potential financial sanctions compelled agencies to work more closely. They also claimed that their agency had good working relationships with partner agencies. However, these same individuals noted that TANF mandates also created an ironic effect among agencies who were supposed to be partnering.

In fact, TANF’s mandates had the unanticipated, unintended, and undesirable effect of creating more competition among the concerned agencies. The following quotes document this finding:

*Study participant 12:* “…We have competition is a different way. More agencies are taking a piece of what we have done for a very long time…”

*Study participant 24:* “…Because the rules have changed and everybody got territorial and it’s not possible and you can’t share the result. So mind it for yourself and you get the credit…”
Since the implementation of TANF, each agency has strived to get more referrals from DSS so that the agency was in a better position for showcasing more success stories. Therefore, even though agencies were obliged to work together more, competition between agencies is normative. Service duplication is evident, according to participants. As a result, according to participants, both duplication and competition give rise to endemic tensions.

Family 3: Artifact: Shared Values, Processes, and Relationships

Most study participants claimed that a process of regular monthly/quarterly joint-planning and decision-making with one another existed prior to TANF’s implementation. The following quotes illustrate the finding:

*Study participant 9:* “…We ran several programs that augmented or supplemented the TANF clients… develop the relationship with the county DSS to a point there is a cohesive communication between (partner agency 1) and (partner agency 2), meet with the DSS administrator and commissioner… I meet with (the liaison) every week, and we have group meetings between our TANF staff, and other agency staff, to make sure that the flow of our communication and interaction are accurate. And that relate to participation rate and accountability…”

*Study participant 14:* “…we meet with (partner agency) on a regular basis. We do co-site visits. Do reviews, have regular meetings, that sort of things…..about twice a year. But that’s formal meetings or sites visits, but as far as telephone
conversations, emails, that sort of communication almost occurs on a daily basis…”

In addition to the regular meetings, study participants reported that, if issues occurred that require immediate attention, the partner agencies were willing to get together for ad hoc meetings. Even though participants may use different assessments, data systems, and evaluation systems, study participants reported what appeared to be a norm of data-sharing.

Even though prior arrangements facilitated the development of positive working relationships, study participants reported conflicts of philosophy. Most of the time, these conflicts derived from, and centered on, different organizational functions and goals. In the words of the two study participants:

*Study participant 6:* “…It (conflict of interest) happens all the time. We try to talk it through, we take our time... Yes, we have our goals and we know what to do, but trying to be sympathetic of the other person’s responsibility. ..We try to do a lot of that and to be sensitive to each other’s need and I think that goes a long way…”

*Study participant 27:* “… try to show each side that they are having on the other side. You can go ahead and do your own thing alone, and when you do it the other side, you are doing it to the team. And the outcome is going to hurt all of us…”

All the agency leaders interviewed appeared to recognize that the establishment of
what amounted to “a win-win solution” required a concerted effort to achieve a consensus among key leaders and other members of the partner agencies. At the same time, these agency leaders all recognized the importance of coordination in working relationships among partner agencies.

Coordination involves harmonizing and synchronizing actions. It requires turn-taking that is orchestrated, usually according to established protocols. In the case of the Bridge Program, some study participants claimed that the agencies had reached the level of coordination. They indicated that although each of the partner agencies continued to work within its specific area of expertise, each of them also tried to meet TANF mandates through combined and coordinated efforts with its partners. In two-thirds of the interviews, participants acknowledged that they shared a common mission with their partners and strived to coordinate their respective efforts. In the words of two study participants:

Study participant 9: “…we spend a lot of time on meetings, problem solving, outlining what our strategies are, our goals. Some of our staff come over to the community classrooms to see what they are doing. The community director comes over here. And once a week, we have case meetings meeting with our clients…You don’t just go to bug group meetings and talk. You have to read stuff, discuss it, dialog out and maybe go to a larger group meeting…”

Study participant 19: “…I would say so …for example, I could never get the application or the MOU process without working directly with (the partner) because I design that and shape it. I will send them draft, they will react to it, give
some ideas or inputs. And I will look at it and sometimes I accept the ideas and sometimes I come up with some ideas that is new and sort of back to them. So yes, in order to come up with program and their legal agreement, we need to do are to monitoring the program throughout the year. It has to be coordinated…”

When the question went further to collaboration, which was a genuine sense of inter-dependence among partners, two-thirds of the study participants expressed that they saw the development of collaborative partnerships since the enactment of TANF. The following two quotes evidence the view:

Study participant 6: “…And we deal with it as a team. The Bridge staff will come up to the case manager and sometimes the line supervisor … would get involved, or see myself. This is what this person needs, how can we get this for them. Maybe there is domestic violence going on, maybe there is a childcare issue, there is a child abuse issue, things like that. We work as a team everyday…”

Study participant 23: “…We have excellent relationships both ways, they’ll call me for favors and vise versa. That has really helped the program. That part of it is almost like that we are the same organization. We work very close together…”

The sense of “we-feeling,” therefore, appeared to be an important artifact in the collaborative relationship. It sustained the collaborative partnership. However, the other one-third of respondents claimed that, despite the desire for collaborative partnerships, their agency could survive independently. In the words of two study participants:
Study participant 10: “…I would not say it’s collaboration…If we were to disappear tomorrow, would the (partner agency) still be able to achieve their objective? Yes, they would find another way to do that through their own thing. If the (partner agency) disappears tomorrow, would we be able to do what it’s doing? Yes…”

Study participant 19: “…They could do that. But they won’t, because that’s not “theirs”. That’s another problem with a program like this. (The agencies) do not consider this as a local social service. “so that’s not my program.” … So it’s kind like, it’s not theirs. They don’t accept that it is theirs…”

Participants’ perceptions of independent structures and operations were clear. Because various agencies had different functions and goals, they were not dependent on one another to fulfill their individualized goals. Full collaboration, therefore, was not needed.

Culture was also another important artifact influencing the formation of partnerships. In fifteen interviews, study participants expressed beliefs that cultural change has occurred as a result of TANF mandates related to more stringent employment requirements. They also noted that the culture change has introduced the various organizational changes at the organizational and individual levels, such as professionals’ responsibility. The following quotes expressed the point:

Study participant 30: “…So that’s a cultural change. Now we are asked, now (client) finished a degree, and did (client) get a job. Or did you go graduate
school… that’s not something we had to worry about. But it is something we have
to worry about now, that’s a cultural change. In a local district … initially, The
local department of social services was just responsible for and more focused on
whether you get a public assistance paycheck. Now … is not just on whether you
get your public assistance check. It more to make sure if you are on public
assistance program, whether you are in a work experience program…”

Study participant 5: “… I think slowly. I think because everybody has to meet that
goal. So it kind forces you to make those changes…”

Super Family IV: Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is an important ongoing adaptation process, one that
enables organizations to be adaptable. Learning of this kind is a practical necessity
because organizations need to monitor, respond to, and learn from the internal and
external environments in order to thrive and survive. According to Argyris and Schön
(1996), learning behaviors can be framed in two forms, single-loop and double-loop
learning. Single-loop learning usually occurs as a reaction of the changing environment.
As a more advanced step, double loop learning takes the momentum of reaction to higher
levels of continuous improvement, evolvement, and goal-seeking in the organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super Family</th>
<th>Primary Findings in the Family</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Single-loop learning</strong></td>
<td>learning is frequently reactionary to policy mandates, with organizational learning most often reflective of a single loop learning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Double-loop learning</strong></td>
<td>some double-loop learning does occur as a result of participants going through the stages of “freeze, rebalance, unfreeze” when conducting inter-agency business and communicating at an inter-participant level</td>
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Table 4-5: Primary Findings in Organizational Learning
Family 1: Single-loop Learning

The study participants pointed out that the constantly changing policy environment created a challenge for them to constantly attempt to catch up with the current requirements. They claimed that the stringently defined TANF regulations left very little room for their creativity in providing services. Moreover, they expressed that the heavy workloads left them with very little time and energy for experimentation with more preventive intervention approaches. In most cases, study participants admitted that they were rushed to fulfill the new requirements to avoid sanctions. In the words of two participants:

*Study participant 2*: “…as far as employment, it drastically changed how we do things. ... it’s driven from regulation stand point. You have to abide by these regulations, okay, how are we going to do that. We have to make changes here and there…”

*Study participant 25*: “…… make sure that we are hitting to what needs to be done in order to hit participation. If the program is not hitting participation, they don’t need me…”

Therefore, according to study participants, changes were usually made in reaction to current needs rather than long-term planning and vision.

Family 2: Double-loop Learning

Based on all the interview findings and observations, double-loop learning was
not taking place in the daily business routines. The changes in daily business routines were predominantly single-loop learning. However, from the conversations with the participants, double loop learning occurred at the personal and professional level. The following quote indicated this point:

Study participant 6: “…When we first started, we have something called team meetings. And we would have them for a while and then we do every other week. And it even got to put once a month. I think we did that over a year and half or maybe two years. It kind laid the ground work and in the past year, we still have them but we don’t have it as often because we don’t need to. The case managers, the Bridge staff, and maybe even other case managers feel comfortable now with each other from those meetings that they could just walk to each other saying, what do we do with this person and that person…”

Super Family V: Human Capital

Human capital development is a concept anchored in economics. It gives rise to a focus on workforce development, including the roles of education and training in workforce readiness. At its core, human capital theory posits “stocks” of capacities – knowledge, dispositions, health – that yield returns when applied in work or other activities. The acquisition of skills, knowledge and dispositions represents an addition to the human capital stock, akin to an investment (Schultz 1961). The concept has a considerable importance for TANF and the Bridge Program. Thus, the study has explored the question among the participants: Is human capital development an explicit priority within TANF and Bridge Program policies?
Super Family  |  Primary Findings in the Family
---|---
Human Capital  |  
- **Educational focus**
  1) education is no longer a major focus in Bridge after the TANF enactment, with little focus on the development of human capital
  2) only short-term education and training are allowed in Bridge services since TANF, focusing more on job preparation than career development
- **Employment focus**
  1) stringent mandates and an employment focus dictates most service activity offerings
- **Other human capital issues**
  1) the hard-to-serve population usually encounter multiple barriers
  2) half of the study participants recognized the importance of career development for the clients, however, the stringent employment focused regulations limit the services provided for long-term development

| Table 4-6: Primary Findings in Human Capital |

**Family 1: Educational Focus**

The Bridge Program was established under an educational institution, SUNY. Therefore, the core of the program was the philosophy of education. The participants who experienced the transition from AFDC to TANF indicated that as a creation of the AFDC era, long-term educational planning and development, such as post-secondary education, remained a viable option for clients. However, according to the study participants, the opportunities of long-term educational development became very limited since TANF was enacted. In the words of the following two study participants:

*Study participant 1:* “…Probably the biggest change is just that we couldn’t approve education. Education is sort secondary. And even vocational training has to be accomplished within a 12 month period of time…”

*Study participant 2:* “…I think under AFDC, Bridge is more of an educational program. They have their own requirement to place people and get people to self-sufficiency through employment…Whereas in TANF, we don’t necessarily have
to engage a Bridge participant in an educational activity, they go straight to a job placement or readiness activity…”

Throughout the interviews, study participants indicated that short-term training was the main indicator of the education component of TANF. They claimed that such training allowed the clients to find a job within a relatively short period of time. They also identified what, for them, was an unfortunate aspect of this training—namely, that little to no emphasis was being placed on long-term employability or career advancement.

**Family 2: Employment Focus**

With TANF’s implementation, the study participants reported that the focus on employment dominated Bridge Program activities. For example, the Bridge Program formerly maintained firm ties with clients for at least a year, sometimes a year and half, to make sure they had solid academic and vocational skills. However, all study participants expressed a common awareness that a philosophical shift occurred from an education focus to an employment focus after the enactment of TANF. The following two quotes demonstrate the concern:

*Study participant 28:* “…With TANF, there is definitely a shift toward job retention as the requirement. It didn’t matter what types of program and services were provided, the focus is: as long as we are able to help the individual retain the employment for 90 days, that’s the goal…”

*Study participant 30:* “…Under TANF, you are really trying to get a person into a job, didn't matter what the job was… in the jobs program, people have the better
ability to become self-sufficient. In the TANF program, we ended up putting people in a job, but we weren't creating the ability to become self-sufficiency…”

Participants also recognized the negative financial consequences of non-compliance to the TANF mandates. For example, they were required them to adopt an employment-first philosophy. They understood that their role had to focus on getting the clients jobs rather than providing nurturing and beneficial long-term services and opportunities.

Family 3: Other Human Capital Issues

The study participants indicated that the TANF population left on the welfare roll was harder-to-serve. Most of these TANF families had multiple barriers in obtaining jobs, such as deficit in skills, domestic violence, mental illness, etc. Half of the study participants (two-thirds of whom were from Bridge Program Offices) recognized the concept of career ladder and deemed the concept as an important stepping stone for the clients. In the words of two study participants:

Study participant 6: “…we have less flexibility with those who maybe needed. Those who maybe want to go to school or want to try something new. It’s really going to motivate and improve their motivation. We have less flexibility with that. I’ve always felt that education is the answer but people only a year of their life time to attend school when they are welfare clients…”

Study participant 19: “…the impact that TANF brought to our program and services was essentially from the shift from the human capital investment model,
away from developing the person as a person… prior TANF in AFDC, the focus
was primarily education and training… When TANF came, the shift was no
longer on letting the individual to take what they need in order to advance their
personal goal and career goal, but to put a person dressed. Only those barriers that
are preventing the person from getting a job, any job… you basically disregard
what education and training that person needs not only to get that job, but to retain
that job, and also take advantage of the promotional opportunities for higher job
title and salary increase, and move away from poverty.

Nevertheless, with the program focused so strongly on employment, study
participants pointed out that there was very little flexibility for professionals to provide
clients with long-term skill building/job planning services. Under TANF, for example, a
client could only receive twelve months of education/training over a lifetime. In contrast,
under AFDC, clients could earn a full college degree in pursuit of “a career”, not just
“any job.”

Because of the job-first philosophy, study participants felt that the recidivism rate
under TANF was also problematic. They worried that the services provided have become
a “revolving door.” In other words, the clients repeated the cycle of: referring into the
program, obtaining job readiness training, searching a job, getting a job, losing the job,
and then back to the program again. Fourteen study participants recognized the inability
of current services which could hardly help clients become self-sufficient in the long term.
In the words of the two study participants below:
Study participant 3: “…Not that I know of because what we have is that we have repeat clients. In other words, they’ve been in the program, they’ve done other possible program they could outside of whatever we have available for them and they return to Bridge again…”

Study participant 7: “…When I first started, we used to be so much giving…we used to do more hand-holding ... to make sure that they really hit the goal, and close their case, and stay closed. Now I feel we are rushing … and everything falls apart, and then they are back. I feel that we are recycling a whole lot more. I would really love to see that we close someone and stay closed which I can’t say we don’t, but we recycle…”

Only two interviewed and experienced professionals raised the concern of “the neglect of children in the picture of TANF reform” during interviews. They have served in the welfare system long enough to witness the repetitive generational cycle among the welfare families. The professionals understood that if the parents do not spend enough time with their children, it would be a vicious cycle for the entire family and the welfare system. However, the federal mandates regarding participation rates tended to move the attention even further away from the needs of children and family units. Many professionals worried that the neglect would continue to repeat the same social-economic cycles for the future generations.

Study Participant 20: “…I think it’s more cautious about spending. I think it’s all dollar driven. Because basically if you look at the picture, they would want this
population to spend more time with their children to help raise better children, rather than just spend more time in the work place, not to give them excuses to absences, make more difficult for them to get daycare. What good does it do for us to say, we are requiring this population to work 40 hours a week, which really equals 50 or 60 hours a week. Their children are going to be raised in poverty because the wage they make is low income wages, with no training, skills, or education, and what’s going to happen for the next generation. Basically, what you are really doing is that you are raising a second generation to fit into this mode which may be even worse…”

Study Participant 13: “…But you only get the children’s services once the family has hit the wall and they have had a child protect report. Or this teenager gets teen’s petition, or their JD or whatever, they don’t a lot of the preventing work and a lot of those work up front…”

Many participants felt that they had a lot less to offer to the clients than the AFDC time. They were disappointed that the concepts of long-term human capital development and career ladder were difficult to apply and implement in the current TANF regulations. They were also concerned that the inter-generational intervention piece was taken away in the TANF provision. They had to always focus on the TANF- mandated timeframe and constantly monitor the participation rate.

**Summarized Matrix for Research Findings**

A matrix of aggregated research findings can be found at the end of the
dissertation (Appendix 5). The matrix is organized based on the aforementioned discussed families and presents a complete picture of the research findings. It identifies the patterns of thoughts and themes that are explained theoretically in the next chapter.
Chapter Five Theoretical Interpretation and Discussion

In this chapter, the research findings presented in the previous chapter will be framed and interpreted with reference to relevant theory. The theoretical model guiding this study’s design is presented again below.

Figure 5-1: Different Stages and Levels of Analysis

The progression for this chapter is as follows. First, the analytical strategy is presented. This strategy entailed disaggregation of complex systems change into three main components. The components are: the shift from AFDC to TANF; policy stages in the Bridge program; and the dynamics of policy change and implementation in the
“policy black box.”

Three major sections of the chapter are organized accordingly. Each of the three above-mentioned categories is presented and analyzed in greater detail. More specifically, each section begins with a brief account of the relevant theoretical framework. Then primary findings are presented. Each section concludes with a brief theoretical interpretation of the findings.

In the concluding section of the chapter, the intended (espoused) logic model and theory-of-change model are contrasted with the findings concerned with actual implementation. Such a comparative analysis enabled the researcher to contrast the policies setting out the original Bridge Program “on the drawing board” with the policies implemented. Lipsky’s (1980) framework for street level bureaucracy facilitates this contrast.

A Three-Component Analytical Strategy

To analyze the interview data, the researcher began by disaggregating the theoretical model presented above. This disaggregation entailed separating the model’s primary conceptual components into three main levels: Systems change, policy change, and the policy black box. Figure 5.2 (below) depicted this disaggregation.
Figure 5-2: Disaggregating the Levels of Analysis

The three-component analytical approach enabled more precise analyses. The disaggregation facilitated a more detailed examination of the complex constructs related to the Bridge Program’s structure and operations. For example, analyses of the shift from AFDC to TANF focused on Bridge program professionals’ struggles, both explicit and implicit, with the implications for human capital development. More concretely, the disaggregated analytical approach illuminated professionals’ struggles with the relationship between education and employment as TANF was implemented. Similarly, the disaggregation facilitated analyses of policy change. For example, it illuminated important discrepancies between the intended and implemented TANF policy. More precise analyses enabled the causes and correlates of these discrepancies to be identified. Further, disaggregated analyses of “the policy black box” also yielded important findings. For example, the dynamics of organizational learning and partnerships were identified and described, and their relationships with the overall policy process and its outcomes were depicted.

An organizational framework, shown below as Table 1, was developed to facilitate theoretical interpretation of the findings and also to enhance the articulation of
theory. This framework at once retains the complexity of systems change and makes interpretation manageable.

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<tr>
<th>Level of Analysis</th>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Primary Findings</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Systems Change</td>
<td>■ Systems Change</td>
<td>■ Program primary goal and operational principle</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>■ Changes in individual roles, responsibilities, and orientation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Organizational change</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Human Capital</td>
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<td>■ Employment focus</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>■ Other human capital issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Stages</td>
<td>■ Intended vs. Implemented Policies</td>
<td>■ Staff’s attitude toward changes</td>
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<td>■ Lipsky’s street level bureaucracy</td>
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<td>■ Principal-agent issues</td>
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<td>Policy Black Box</td>
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<td>■ Interactions among partner agencies</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>■ Mutual recognition</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>■ Artifact: shared values, processes, and relationships</td>
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<td>■ Organizational Learning</td>
<td>■ Single-loop learning</td>
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<td>■ Double-loop learning</td>
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Table 5-1: Level of Analysis and Theoretical Framework

The First Analytical Level: Systems Change—From AFDC to TANF

The First Analytical Level: Systems Change—From AFDC to TANF

Figure 5-3 Systems Change
1-1 Human Capital

A Theoretical Reminder about Human Capital

The concept of human capital focuses attention on workforce development, most specifically on the role of education and training in the development of skills, knowledge, and dispositions for the workplace. At its core, human capital theory posits the development of “stocks” of these kinds of capacities, embodied in individuals and geared to improve performance (productivity) on the job. Notwithstanding some differences in the extant literature, the association between relatively lower levels of educational and skill attainment and subsequent labor force participation rates, employment rates, earnings, and productivity has been broadly supported by several decades of research (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2002). The effects have been found in the initial post-education/post-training phase, and also to carry over the life cycle of an individual who has acquired additional skills, knowledge, and dispositions. These effects not only give rise to benefits for the individuals concerned, but generate returns (via more efficient ways to organize economic activities) for enterprises and for the economy as a whole (McMahon 2009; Edin and Lein 1997; Mincer 1961).

Understandably, therefore, strategies to increase welfare recipients’ human capital, and thereby improve employment, are commonly-held policy goals. The literature supports the position that TANF clients generally lack human capital stocks -- skills, knowledge, and dispositions – that are valued on the labor market, and lack access to opportunities to develop those stocks (Holzer 2008; Loprest 2003). Debate continues on the forms of human capital development – among which, formal education or more specific employment training – that offer the more effective strategy for attaining and
maintaining improved employment and job performance for this group. In other words, while analysts agree that human capital development is a key to successful policy implementation and goal achievement, they disagree over the strategic means for attaining this goal.

Human capital refers to other stocks of embodied attributes that also affect employment and workplace performance as well as activities outside of the workplace (McMahon 2009; Becker 1993; Wolfe and Haveman 2002; Cochrane 1979; Grossman 1972; Michael 1972; OECD 2001). Good health, or health capital, is a good example. Direct benefits to individuals accrue outside of the market; indirect benefits may flow to enterprises and the society as a whole. Of particular relevance for the examination of a human capital approach, relatively low stocks of these attributes may weaken the effectiveness of workforce policies.

Notwithstanding the recognition of the role of human capital – specifically, workforce development -- in regional and national economic development strategies, and the debate on the best forms of human capital for the TANF population, TANF has emphasized employment as a federal policy and thereby served to limit the scope for local initiative to give greater weight to a human capital approach.
1-1.1 Educational Refocus under TANF:

Finding and Theorizing

Finding:

Even though the Bridge Program continued to reside under an educational institution, the State University of New York (SUNY), the program complied with the TANF mandate of incorporating an employment-first philosophy. According to interviewed professionals, one of the greatest adjustments was the loss of the educational component. Ostensibly, education and training were still part of the TANF training, but the remaining educational programs were designed to be “one size fit all” programs. In other words, these educational programs neither were customized to clients’ personal interests and wishes, nor did they give support for long-term higher education opportunities. According to many respondents, these changes marked a dramatic shift of welfare policy.

This dramatic switch in policy upset workers at the local Bridge offices. The interview findings revealed overwhelming continued support for the important role of
education. Professionals considered education to be vital because it enabled Bridge clients to enhance their knowledge and skills. They perceived education-delivered knowledge and skills as critical stepping stones to helping the clients to leave welfare and remain self-sufficient in the long-term.

These professionals’ belief in the power of education as an intervention derived from their “front-line” experiences in working directly with clients. Despite the recognized positive outcomes associated with educational support services, TANF mandates that limited long-term educational services were implemented.

Professionals who experienced the transition from AFDC to TANF indicated that they had to accept and adjust to the mandated shift from an education and training orientation to an employment-first policy. Most of them noted that previously, under the AFDC model, leaders were able to “empower” their workers and allow them more flexibility in carrying out their duties. In turn, these front line professionals were able to provide their clients with the education and training opportunities needed for developing the long-term skills giving rise to human capital. Many of the professionals expressed their desires that education, as a viable intervention, would be reinstated under TANF. They saw the lack of educational opportunity as adversely affecting self-sufficiency, thereby encouraging a norm of cyclical client entry and re-entry into the system.

Application of Theories to Finding in Educational Refocus:

Theoretically these findings indicate a negative realignment has occurred within the welfare system as a result of compliance with TANF mandates. As will be explored in greater detail in subsequent sections, compliance with an employment-first philosophy has denied recipients of the educational training needed to increase human capital skills.
1-1.2 Employment Focus under TANF:

Encourage short-term job skill training
Focus on immediate job search and placement services

Figure 5-5 Human Capital: Employment

Finding and Theorizing

Finding:

Most of the interviewed professionals reported the inability of many Bridge clients to acquire jobs immediately. Professionals saw this arising from the lack of transitional support that would help clients overcome barriers in their personal lives. Despite these shortcomings, there were still professionals who preferred an employment-first approach. For these professionals, accountability was the primary concern. They tended to focus on the fact that Bridge related agencies utilized the public tax dollars. Accountability as a desired goal was reinforced by their recognition that TANF imposed significant limits on the time in which recipients could receive assistance (60 months over a lifetime).

Professionals who supported an employment-first philosophy did so for two reasons. Work-first corresponded to their personal beliefs. And they perceived that this approach enabled them to meet federal mandates.
These employment-first professionals in Bridge Program indicated that their philosophy would place the agency in a “secure position. Their reasoning was as follows. Since TANF regulations only allowed short-term (usually four to six weeks) training for the clients, professionals saw their role as preparing the clients for jobs within the mandated time period. Otherwise, they believed, the failure of job placement would jeopardize clients’ participation rate in workforce. The failure to reach the participation rate would result in a series of negative consequences. Therefore, setting the agency goal as employment-focused also served to “safeguard” the agency’s leaders both financially and politically.

Application of Theories to Finding in Employment-First Argument:

Bridge professionals have not been alone in their belief in an employment-first philosophy. Some researchers have argued that “work must be the cornerstone of welfare reform, because there is no better way to earn dignity than to work (Shaw 2004).” Others have shown that previous working experience is a powerful explanatory variable of who is able to obtain employment later (Bane and Ellwood 1994).

In the same vein, Mincer (1961) argues that, even though schooling is an important approach to accumulating human capital, it is neither an exclusive nor a sufficient means to reach the goal of a well-qualified labor force. He suggests that “on the job training” is a more effective approach for the accumulation of human capital. He envisions training as including formal and informal training programs as well as knowledge gained through “learning from experience.” Even though it might be a low-paying job in the beginning for a worker, from a long-term perspective, the worker gains experience and potentially a better pay. Moreover, Holcomb et al. (1998) propose that
the best way to succeed in the labor market is to join it. He and his colleagues see job advancement and higher wages as ensuing from the experience of working and having more utility than the education-acquired knowledge and skills.

1-1.3 Other Human Capital Issues under TANF:

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5-6: Human Capital: Other Issues**

Finding and Theorizing

**Finding:**

One of the observable phenomena among the TANF clients has been their constant “in and out” cycling through the welfare system. The Bridge professionals who participated in this study acknowledged this phenomenon. Many of them indicated that they attempted to help the clients break the cycle using a career development approach, also known as a “career ladder” intervention approach. Reflecting their professional training and experience, professionals expressed a belief that clients should be given the options of well-planned career paths and well-trained career positions. They saw success as dependent upon planning and working toward a defined career path, which leads to a desired career outcome. They believed such interventions as motivating the clients to
pursue job interests and increasing their ambition for successful employment.

More importantly, the structure of the beneficial work experiences gained in a career ladder approach provided clients with solid and valuable skill training. In turn, the training prepared clients for better opportunities and made them more competitive in future job-searching opportunities.

Nonetheless, the professionals recognized that the sustainability of client progress using a career ladder approach depended on several preconditions. For example, it depended on addressing clients’ health and personal-social issues. These issues, for some clients, were not easy to address. Many professionals reported that the clients currently being left on the welfare roll were what they called the “harder-to-serve” population.

In professionals’ views, these harder to serve clients experienced more complex barriers than the ones that had successfully exited the welfare system early in the implementation of TANF reform. Professionals believed that by removing these barriers, clients were better positioned to advance their knowledge and skills. After overcoming these barriers, the clients were more likely to attend work activities on a regular basis.

In addition, the professionals discussed the difficulties they encountered in bringing about positive change for the recipients during the TANF’s mandated timeframe. Professionals indicated that it usually took much more time than TANF’s guidelines permitted to overcome the clients’ personal, family, and health issues.

Application of Theories to Finding in Other Human Capital Challenges among the TANF Population:

Welfare clients in general have suffered from what scholars have termed the “welfare cycling spell (Carnavale and Reich 2002; Harris 1996).” Freely translated, this
recycling spell occurs due to varies impotencies caused by a deficit of human capital, such as a lack of educational training, poor physical and mental health, etc. (Harris 1996; Ellwood 1986; McLanahan and Garfinkel 1989). Because they have recycled through the system and have not obtained the knowledge and skills needed for advancement. As a result, these long-term clients may have stayed in the low socioeconomic status for generations (Carnavale & Reich 2002).

Prior traditional research related to the concept of human capital covers a full inventory of knowledge and skills (Becker 1993; Schultz 1961). More recently, human capital theorists tend to emphasize the overall well-being of the person, such as physical health, mental health, family health, etc. (Haveman 1994; Kahn and Polakow 2004; Kates 2004). For example, in “welfare-to-work” research at Urban Institute, barriers to successful long-term employment is seen as arising from inadequate credentials and lack of formal education and employment, as well as personal barriers related to physical and mental health conditions, family issues, etc. (Loprest and Martinson 2008).

Research also shows that the percentage of those who report having physical and mental problems has increased, even while the overall TANF caseload has decreased (Loprest and Zedlewski 2006). These clients then become the “harder-to-serve.” For these harder-to-serve, the likelihood that they become unemployed and/or remain in poverty level has actually deepened, even after they leave welfare (Loprest and Zedlewski 2006). As a result, the statistics are mixed. On the one hand, the caseload number from the government shows statistical decreases in unemployment from the beginning. On the other hand, many of the welfare recipients who have left the system become recidivists due to insufficient transitional time and support (Zedlewski 2003).
1-2 Systems Change

A Theoretical Reminder about Systems Change

Systems change in organizations refers to a series of adaptations, which occur in structures, operational processes, behaviors, beliefs, climates, and cultures as a result of a policy shift (McDonnell and Elmore 1987). In the current era, systems change in public agencies is argued to be always driven by ideological and economic factors, especially in a constrained fiscal environment (Smith and Sohal 1995; Zeffane 1993).

In discussing systems change, theorists generally address legal, social, and cultural aspects of change (Lamothe and Denis 2007). From a social aspect, system change is driven by a public that demands positive outcomes when programs utilize tax monies. If social service programs fail to produce expected positive results, reform is considered.

When the public perceives a lack of accountability or policy failure, decision makers are sometimes pressured to abruptly change gears and follow a different policy/legal direction (Osborne and Brown 2005). Improved outcomes are often expected within a relatively short period of time, even if such timelines may be unrealistic. To meet the social demand for change, policy makers often follow a more legalistic approach that essentially grants them the authority to make changes in a top-down fashion (French and Raven 1959).

Changes that take place at the social and legal dimensions often result in changes occurring at the cultural level. Cultural changes affect the overall agency ethos. These changes also affect the individual professional relationships that comprise the organization.
These three kinds of changes impact agency leaders and front line professionals alike. For agency leaders, autonomy is often curtailed through the limitations placed on financial resources and imposition of sanctions. These limitations can jeopardize the survival of the program, the job security of the professionals, and the overall well-being of the clients. For professionals, the issue is often how to re-adjust their goals and business routines in order to accommodate orders received from the top level. Stated succinctly, the exogenous social and legal factors drive the relevant agencies to make changes endogenous modifications to the organizational culture.

The systems change that occurred as a result of the 1996 welfare reform was triggered by an extraordinary increase in social service expenses in the early 1990s. In keeping with the theoretical perspective of social aspect driven change, the federal government announced its intention to reduce the financial burden at the federal, state, and local levels of social service programs. It also attempted to increase the number of welfare recipients who successfully transitioned to self-sufficiency.

In turn, reactions to the legal mandates emanating from the federal government dictated “cultural” changes within the Bridge Programs. These changes required leaders of organizations to engage agency workers in new ways of perceiving, thinking, behaving, and performing their duties (Whitsett and Burling 1996). The change process forced relearning at both the individual and organizational levels, a result of efforts to bring current service structure and activities in compliance with federal requirements (Wallace 2007).

It was important to recognize that the system change efforts under TANF were not confined to the social services arena. Recognizing the issue as a “wicked problem” that
traversed the context of one single institutional system, change efforts have also focused on addressing perceived educational deficiencies. In essence, the 1996 reform aligned educational and social services agencies toward a single goal: achievement of the mandated clients’ participation rate in the workforce.

In brief, the systems changes that impacted the Bridge Programs were *cross-systems changes*. Both social services and the educational system were involved and mandated to adhere to TANF provisions. Social service-education relationships and coordination were critical to this cross-systems change agenda.

As an educational institution, the Bridge Program was held responsible for training and education of those welfare recipients referred by social services. Which of these recipients would be referred was determined by social services offices. The offices were mandated under TANF to refer clients to Bridge Program educational and training programs. Each institutional system required their agencies to make necessary adjustments organizationally to comply with federal mandates.

Utilizing the theory presented here, the following sections will discuss macro-policy, meso-organization, and micro-individual factors that led to overall systems change within the Bridge Program.
1-2.1 Macro: Program Primary Goal and Operational Principle

**Systems change**

**MACRO:** Program primary goal and operational principle

- **Same Goal:** Self-sufficient
- **Different Principle:** Temporary assistance

**Figure 5-7 Systems Change: Macro Aspect**

**Finding and Theorizing the Un-changed Primary Long-Term Goal**

**Finding:**

According to the interviewed professionals, the *long-term primary goals of self-sufficiency of the recipient* and *temporary assistance* have remained central welfare concepts over time. The goal of self-sufficiency has always been on the policy agenda as an ultimate goal. Over the decades, there has been systems change which required adaptations in many implementation aspects. The goal of self-sufficiency stayed unchanged, at least from the normative perspective of the welfare policy.

**Application of Theories to Finding in Long-term Primary Goal:**

Historically, policy leaders for the federal government argued that “self-sufficiency” should be the ultimate mission of social services programs (Bane and Ellwood 1994; Friedlander and Burtless 1995; Nathan and Gais 1999). All social assistance programs were designed with one ultimate rationale. The long-term goal was to enhance the clients’ skills and abilities for independency.
Services were provided in accordance with this goal. Professionals intended to prepare clients for future opportunities that enabled them to be self-sufficient. However, the notion of “temporary” assistance was not enforced aggressively until the 1996 welfare reform (Lurie 2002). With TANF reform, the concept of “temporary assistance” was defined in concrete terms. It also was formalized as a measurable outcome of social service programs.

Finding and Theorizing the Changes in Short-Term Operational Principles

Finding:

With the federal focus on an employment-first policy, professionals indicated that the operational principles within the Bridge Programs changed dramatically under TANF. They pointed out that the change in focus from long-term to short-term had a significant ripple effect on both the organizations and professionals. With TANF, the organizational leaders had to re-define their individual organizational goals and established new standard operating procedures to comply with federal mandated requirements of “effectiveness (get a job soon)” and “efficiency (within four to six week)” to avoid the stringent federal sanctions.

Application of Theories to Finding in Short-term Operational Principle:

The 1996 reform initiated genuine systems level change. Policy makers in the federal government felt that “new behaviors were needed but the current employed staff and existing institutions were unresponsive to demands for change (Fowler 2004).” The federal government utilized legal, economic, and political strategies (McDonnell and Elmore 1987) to reinforce and assure the two policy short-term goals: “work first” and “temporary assistance.” As a result, many specific requirements, timeframes, and
restrictions were attached to the TANF mandates. Sanctions were put in place to serve as negative incentives to achieve mandate compliance at the state and local levels (Riccucci 2005).

1-2.2 Meso: Organizational Change

![Diagram showing Systems change and its relationship to MESO: Organizational change]

**Finding and Theorizing the Changes in Short-Term Goal**

**Finding:**

According to the interviewed professionals, with the implementation of stringent requirements, “employment-first” became the dominant philosophy in the agencies. For the agency leaders, the first and immediate change was the adjustment of the organizational goals from an educational to an employment-first focus. Once implanted, the employment-first philosophy, with its financial sanctions, served to reinforce compliance with the mandated participation rate. As a result, the professionals admitted that they prioritized the short-term goal of achieving mandated participation rates to
avoid the sanctions. For the interviewed professionals, this short-term goal in many ways also supplanted the long term goal of client self-sufficiency.

Application of Theories to Finding: Changes in Short-Term Goal:

The Bridge Program was established during the time of the AFDC under an educational institution, SUNY. As such, the operations of the Bridge Program were guided by the parent organization’s educational philosophy.

In the field of education, skill building for long-term self-sufficiency has traditionally been done through the provision of education and training (Schweke 2004; Carnavale and Reich 2002; Haveman and Smeeding 2006). However, with a refocusing on employment-first under TANF, there has been a re-structuring of the activities and operations in all the social service programs (Lurie 2006; Seccombe 2007). Under TANF, the professionals’ major task was to get the recipients employed as soon as possible. Therefore, the job-related activities were designed to fix the “surface” problems and needs such as polishing resumes. The priority for enriching clients’ human capital was given short shrift.

Leaders in the relevant offices shouldered the tremendous responsibility of mandated caseload reduction requirements. One result was “goal displacement” among the relevant agencies and professionals (Lurie 2002; Kahn and Polakow 2004). Goal displacement occurs when a strategy, method, or means for achieving a desired goal replaces the original goal and becomes the goal.

Normatively speaking, all the services were offered to fulfill the goal of self-sufficient for the clients. In order to reach and sustain the outcome of self-sufficiency, human capital accumulation with long-term as well as immediate impact was vital.
However, the stringent TANF mandates resulted in the displacement of overall policy goal from reaching long-term self-sufficiency to meeting the required workforce participation rate immediately. Therefore, the ever-tightening TANF regulations drove relevant agencies with the need of immediate shift in short-term goal. The shift also led to the changes in organizational structure.

Finding and Theorizing the Changes in Organizational Structure

Finding:

According to the interviewed professionals, in order to accommodate the new mandates, leaders initiated organizational structural changes that focused on organizational activities and re-designed the inadequate existing structure. In many cases, new divisions arose, including ones that specifically dealt with employment, transportation, domestic violence, childcare, etc. Significantly, these new offices were established and separated from the major job training department. In addition to new divisions, new positions were established to meet the intensive accountability monitoring requirements imposed by the federal government.

Application of Theories to Finding: Changes in Organizational Structure:

TANF reform triggered a series of changes in the service related offices. With new mandates in effect, agency leaders had to align the organizational structure with the new mission, goals, operations, and activities. The changes in organizational structure were accompanied by redesigned organizational operations—and more specifically, work process flows (Lawson 2003; O’Looney 1996). For example, new process had to be institutionalized to meet TANF imposed monitoring requirements (Galbraith 2002). In order to meet the goal of mandated caseload reduction, the agency leaders sought to
redirect professionals in regard to their new responsibilities (Wallace 2007). For example, the front-line professionals were originally positioned to mainly conduct the eligibility determination. With the organizational structural re-design and change, professionals were in charge of a new set of professional assignments, such as system reporting, client home visit, etc. The structural change redirected professionals’ attention and required a great deal of new learning and adjustment by them.

**Finding and Theorizing the Changes in Reporting System**

**Finding:**

A new and mandated *reporting system* fundamentally changed how the interviewed professions conducted work business. The newly-enacted reporting requirement became another heavy burden for the professionals. This burden added to their already-intensive daily schedule. Many of the professionals complained about the numbers of the reports and the amount of time they had to spend on fulfilling this requirement.

Nevertheless, some of interviewed professionals saw the reporting mechanism as a positive tool in achieving the TANF mandates. They considered the reporting system to provide a vital feedback mechanism to the federal/state government regarding local activity. At the same time, they believed that the system also played an important transformative role in developing data-sharing and partnerships among the Bridge relevant agencies.

**Application of Theories to Finding: Changes in Reporting System:**

Achieving the participation rate became the major performance indicator to be utilized in determining funding distribution amounts. Therefore, over the past decade of
TANF enactment, the federal government established a requirement of monthly reporting to monitor the trend of the caseloads closely (104th Congress 1996; 109th Congress 2006). More importantly, it was introduced as the tool to assure compliance of localities/states. For many scholars, the monthly reporting requirement served as a direct accountability mechanism (Nathan and Ragan 2001). With the help of the mechanism, the federal government was then able to monitor the performance of the state in meeting mandated outcomes (Wu 2004; Rosenstreich 1998). Moreover, the reporting mechanism also was in place to avoid a crucial issue under the federalist system, information asymmetry. (More details will be discussed in the later section of principal-agent issues.)

Finding and Theorizing the Changes in Organizational Culture and Climate

Finding:

Interviewed professionals noted cultural and climate changes that had occurred as a result of TANF and its mandates. Agency leaders reported having to make difficult trade-offs. For example, changes to behavioral patterns, such as serving with a strongly employment-oriented mind, needed to be adapted. For these leaders, there were two competing objectives: the need to balance concerns relating to program survival and concerns related to meeting clients’ needs.

Interviewees observed that the values and actions taken by the professionals at different levels of the organizations for which they worked changed due to TANF’s different policy focus and orientation (i.e., work-first policies). As a result of the decisions that were made and new directions taken to comply with TANF, a new organizational culture emerged. The agency adopted “a culture of work-first”, and it marked a shift from the culture that operated during the AFDC era with its focus on
service, education, and training to the clients.

*Application of Theories to Finding: Changes in Organizational Culture and Climate:*

Although these changes were externally-induced initially, over time they were institutionalized and sustained. More specifically, the “tangible” changes in organizational goals, structure, and reporting requirements imposed initially by new TANF policies eventually altered the “intangible” AFDC organizational culture over time (Osborne and Brown 2005). *New organizational cultures* emerge in such an evolitional process. These cultures are originally initiated by the new policies imposed from higher authorities, but later they are perpetuated by professional socialization, including training, ethics and values (Doppler and Lauterburg 2001; Veenswijk and Hakvoort 2002).

In the case of TANF, the cultural and climate changes were overwhelmingly dominated by the top level (Lurie and Riccucci 2003). The top level leaders were the first forced to change. And then they had to put in place mechanisms whereby others would be “encouraged” to change in accordance with their new perspectives. As the mechanism was institutionalized, the new agency culture and climate would be established along with the new implementation.

Theory helps explain how and why the reconfiguration of organizational goals, structures, operations, and cultures under the new TANF policy were instrumental in creating a new paradigm. Under the new paradigm, “temporary” assistance was reinstated as a primary goal of social welfare. For some professionals, this change in policy was considered beneficial since it broke the cycle of recidivism. For others, it was seen as problematic because it curtailed career planning and educational planning for those with significant impediments to employment. The next section discusses how this
change in organizational culture affected individual roles, responsibilities, and worker orientation toward welfare recipients.

1-2.3 Micro Changes in Individual’s Roles, Responsibilities, and Orientations

![Figure 5-9 Systems Change: Micro Aspect](image)

Changes in professional behaviors serve as key indicators of systems change (Hsia and Beyer 2000). Generally, these changes reflect worker efforts to balance federal directives with the demands of service “front-line” decision making and client processing (Levin 2007). Achieving a balance often proves to be challenging for leaders, middle managers, and front-line workers, often creating a lack of alignment across the three levels of professional staff in how they view TANF, their clients, and their primary responsibilities.

Finding and Theorizing at the Leaders’ Level

Finding:

Although interviewed Bridge professionals indicated their compliance with the mandates, leaders at the state and local levels felt they no longer had the flexibility and creativity to serve the clients well. The organizational short-term goal of employment gained primacy over client determined needs. In many cases, the leaders expressed that
they faced a dilemma. They confronted the undesirable choice between assuring program survival and sustaining the original service mission of the organization. So-called “double binds” like this one are endemic in complex systems change.

**Application of Theories to Finding at the Top Leader’ Level:**

Political leadership at the federal, state and local levels accounts for much of any success realized in implementing new policies (Behn 1991). Politicians plan the intended policies, while public servants carry out the implemented activities. Coordination between the two sets of players is required in setting the agenda and putting the changes into practice at all the service provision levels (Thomas 2007; Johnston 2008). Based on this research, it can be argued that sharing leadership in the systems changes would require the professionals at several levels in the bureaucracy to re-define their roles, responsibilities, orientations, interactions, and business routines to align with federal mandates and, as important, to align with each other at three levels: Top level leaders, middle managers, and front-line professionals

Middle managers are especially important because they work in boundary position. Zones of discretion and negotiation accompany middle management. In this position, they routinely mediate and moderate interactions between agency leaders and front-line professionals, albeit in some cases imperceptibly. Middle managers’ orientations and decision-making have a considerable effect on systems alignment, policy implementation, and the outcomes achieved.

**Finding and Theorizing at the Middle Managers’ Level**

**Finding:**

The middle managers observed that the challenges for them came principally
from two directions: leaders and front-line workers. Leaders felt obligated to fulfill the orders that were delegated to them. Even if they did not agree with the order and could foresee the resistance at the front-line level, they were required to adhere to the policy line.

Middle managers tended to understand front-line workers’ frustrations and pressures. Therefore, they often sympathized with the front-line workers, especially with front-line workers’ limited resources and lack of flexibility in service delivery options. Nonetheless, the middle managers also reported feeling that they had to present the policy to front-line workers. Middle managers experienced predictable tensions and even conflicts in their boundary role.

For example, some middle managers described their self-defined need to be sympathetic and supportive when front-line workers encountered obstacles at the street level implementation of TANF. However, they also expressed that implementation fidelity of TANF regulations was one of their primary responsibilities. No wonder, then, that many Bridge middle managers indicated they were caught in between conflicting values. They had to balance their professional obligation of “reaching the participation rate for the top level” and the ethical struggle of having to “serve the clients with the limited resources and strict regulations.”

Application of Theories to Finding at the Middle Managers’ Level:

Gilley (2005) observed that middle managers play the role of liaisons. They perform the function of aligning organizational mission, strategies, individual goals and passion with federal mandates. As such, middle managers are the key players in “moving from the old to the new (Livian 1997).” They serve as “buffers” to “reduce the shock of
systems change” filtering down from the top to the front-line staff. At the same time, middle managers also serve as the “bridges” to communicate the challenges and differences between the leaders and the front-line workers (Whichard and Kees 2006; Frohman and Johnson 1993).

Finding and Theorizing the Changes at Front-Line Workers’ Level

Finding:

According to the interviewed front-line professionals, two primary issues were contentious. First was the loss of focus on the human element under TANF. Second was their loss of freedom to create individualized service plans under TANF.

Front-line professionals’ prior role as a mentor to the client was no longer “appropriate” under TANF’s employment-first policy. The professionals at this level thus encountered a conflict-as-dilemma of their own. They had to choose between TANF’s “participation rate” and their “clients’ needs.” This conflict-as-dilemma exacted personal tolls. For example, professionals indicated that the conflicts they experienced were emotionally stressful and also strained their professional values. For example, they realized the clients’ difficulties because of their direct contact with their clients. On the other hand, they felt constrained due to their lack of discretionary authority under the TANF mandates and the lack of sufficient resources to offer.

Resource sufficiency also provided stress and strain. Many front-line workers felt frustrated by the lack of adequate resources to serve their clients. This was especially true for those who worked under both AFDC and TANF.

Application of Theories to Finding at the Front-Line’s Level:

According to Lipsky (1980), front-line professionals occupy a unique position in
the process of policy making. They have a “relatively high degrees of discretion and autonomy from organizational authority (Lipsky 1980; Vinzant and Crothers 1998).” However, in TANF, the stringent regulations, the “notorious” financial sanctions, and the sophisticated computer reporting system have created a rigid system in which TANF mandates dominated over individual discretionary authority (Lurie 2006). These front-line workers remained aware of the issue of “goal displacement” in the TANF model. They were trained to be social service front-line workers with the belief in assisting the needy and support the weak (Ricucci 2005). Unfortunately, with the stringent TANF employment-first provision, they are all forced to readjust their professional beliefs and change their administrative behaviors.

In the next section of this chapter, the issue of principal-agent and Lipsky’s front-line bureaucrats’ model, as manifested in the Bridge Program, will be explored. Utilizing the Bridge program as a case study, discussions will focus on how “intended” TANF provisions are actually being implemented at the state and local levels.

The Second Analytical Level: Policy Stages—From Intention to Implementation

![Figure 5-10: Policy Stages](image-url)
A Theoretical Reminder about Intended Policy verses Implemented Policy:

Many factors influence the process of moving from intended to implemented policies. In the case of TANF, implementation is significantly affected by two dimensions. The first dimension is the American federalist system. The federalist system tends to make the relationships among the federal, state, and local governments adversarial in nature (Nathan 2008; Nathan and Gais 1998). This is even more evident under TANF than in the AFDC era. The second influential dimension is the strict regulatory mandates from the federal level. The mandates redefine the roles and responsibilities of professionals serving welfare recipients (Lurie 2006).

This section begins with a discussion of the changes between professionals that occurred as a result of TANF. The discussion focuses on the following three aspects: 1) the staff’s attitudes toward the TANF changes; 2) the front-line workers’ actual implementation of the TANF, utilizing the conceptual framework of Lipsky’s street level bureaucrats; and 3) the issues that occurs between different levels of professionals, using the principal agent literature.

2-1.1 Professionals’ attitude toward changes

Figure 5-11 Intended vs. Implemented Policies: Staff Attitude toward Changes
Implementation outcomes are significant indicators for the degree of “implementation fidelity” at the state and local levels. At these two levels, the attitude of the professional toward change directly affects the actual implementation of macro level policies. Resistance to macro level policies often surfaces, greatly impacting efforts at implementation of a national policy.

Finding and Theorizing Resistance to TANF’s Changes

Finding:

Classic social theory emphasizes the agency of individuals and groups, including their capacity to resist and alter top-down policy changes imposed on them (Lipsky 1980; Barnard 1968; Giddens and Pierson 1998). In the case of the Bridge Program, professionals’ demonstrated their agency and resisted. Their resistance appeared to occur as a result of two factors.

First, the professionals expressed the fear of being incapable of delivering the mandated outcomes. They felt that the mandates were too unrealistic to be reached. Many professionals also expressed concerns that the TANF mandates have increasingly become onerous over time.

Second, professionals expressed a lack of confidence in the reasons given for reform in welfare policy. Many workers did not agree with a TANF approach, which they perceived “insufficient” for providing needed long-term career planning for clients. The professionals felt that the approach failed to provide enough flexibility in making service decisions to serve the needy population. Therefore, professionals no longer had the authority to provide the services to help the clients become self-sufficient.

Professionals’ uncertainties and fear eventually led to their doubts about the
mandates, manifesting as resistance to the original policy. Moreover, the professionals expressed concerns about work related stress, sense of insecurity, and the ethical struggle between the professionals’ own preference and the mandates. However, they appeared reluctant to show their doubts and resistance to top management. They were afraid that these “actions of resistance” would result in the obvious negative consequences. Perhaps the most serious among these consequences was the potential loss of their job due to “disobedience.”

**Application of Theories to Finding in Resistance to Change:**

*Resistance* is a very common phenomenon in the process of policy restructuring. Resistance generally happens as a result one or more of the following reasons (Doppler 2004; Lewin 1947; Thornhill et al. 2000). First, the professionals do not have enough information to successfully achieve policy goals. Second, they may have adequate information to adjust their behaviors, but they do not see the reasons for taking action or endorsing the new policy goal. Third, professionals may have the information and see the reasons behind the changes; however, the person who delivers the message is not well trusted and respected. Fourth, the professionals fear they may not be able to meet the mandates and so they choose to “ignore” the new actions.

In the case of the Bridge Program, the second reason was the major cause of the resistance. Many of the professionals still believed in the models of education-first and career ladder. They did not see the quick fix in job search and job readiness could be beneficial to the clients in the long term. The fourth reason also contributes partially to the discrepancies between the intended and implemented policies. Many professionals expressed the challenges in carrying out the unrealistic stringent mandates due to the
difficult reality in the current situation of social services.

More specifically, if the professionals do not endorse the policy changes, the actual implementation most likely will not match the original planning. The actual implementation usually goes through an “invisible” calculation by the professionals. Torenvlied (1996b) describes the calculation as seeking the balance between two ends. One is to carry out the policies with the agency’s original designed function and normative mission (preference). Another is to weigh the mandates from the top policy makers and satisfy them by meeting the requirements (reputation). During the calculation, the professionals attempt to minimize the total of “preference loss and reputation loss.” If the professionals feel that the loss becomes too great to bear, resistance occurs (Barnard 1968; Crozier and Friedberg 1980).

Finding and Theorizing the Acceptance to the TANF Changes

Finding:

Some professionals considered TANF as having impaired their agencies. Others supported the changes imposed by TANF. These other professionals considered TANF-related changes as positive progress in the field of social services.

Professionals supporting TANF viewed the changes as an opportunity. From the organizational perspective, changes helped the organizations to get rid of some historical inadequacies in agency operations. Supporting professionals applauded the idea of holding both agencies and clients more accountable for their actions. They believed that the TANF reform was a better philosophy in social services because it offered a more responsible strategy for spending tax dollars. In addition, the proponents also viewed the changes in TANF as a great opportunity for re-structuring the agencies. Agencies
involved could enhance the operational efficiency and re-create effective division of responsibilities among various administrative levels. These professionals also saw the TANF changes as a vehicle to improve the agency’s efficiency and effectiveness.

From these professionals’ vantage points, TANF’s changes served as a catalyst to for much needed review of the agency mission. Moreover, these changes enriched the relationship between professionals within the organization. For the professionals who were in favor of the changes, personal preference and the governmental mandates were aligned. As a result, they were willing to follow the regulations that were delegated by the federal government.

*Application of Theories to Finding in Acceptance of Changes:*

For many bureaucrats, accountability is the focal reference for making service decisions and carrying out professional activities. As Behn (2001) describes, accountability of fairness and accountability of performance are important for the bureaucrats. From the fairness point of view, bureaucrats need to treat every citizen and client fairly in order to be faithful gate-keepers in maintaining the social equity. This is one of the major functions of government (Moore 1994). From the performance point of view, bureaucrats have to assure the expected outcomes are being met since they utilize the public tax dollars (Elmore, Abelmann, and Fuhrman 1996).

*Finding and Theorizing Ambivalence, Acceptance, and Rejection*

*Finding:*

Some professionals saw many of the changes imposed by TANF as positive, while others were seen as negative. Yet others saw it as a “mixed-package” with both favorable and unfavorable components. Professionals who considered the changes a “mixed
package” expressed ambivalent feelings. For these ambivalent professionals the major
challenge was to balance between the positive and negative effects of the policy. They
hoped the trade-offs and compromises between the mandates and client needs could be at
least satisfying, if not optimal.

Application of Theories to Finding in Ambivalent feeling to the Changes:

As Behn (2001) points out, accountability in fairness and performance are
important for bureaucrats. However, there is always an accountability dilemma between
fairness and performance. As bureaucrats attempt to reach fairness among the clients,
performance is usually thwarted. In other words, the balance between fairness and
performance is difficult to achieve, especially when the policy climate is unstable and the
changes are complex.

Volker and Winter (1994) and Light (1997) also address the difficult balance. If
bureaucrats only focus on the rules, regulations, and procedures, then fairness is not a
problem. However, following rules and regulations, sacrificing innovation and flexibility,
often means that performance standards are not met. These trade-offs and dilemmas
between performance and fairness accountability make some of the Bridge professionals
feel ambivalent regarding TANF.
2-1.2 Lipsky’s street level bureaucracy

Finding and Theorizing Street-Level Workers as the “Limited” Discretionary Experts

Finding:

In contrast with much of the literature on front-line professionals in public sector bureaucracies, the interviewed Bridge professionals expressed concern about the limited discretion they enjoyed when making service decisions. They claimed some discretion and flexibility in choosing services. However, they also indicated that their choices were heavily constrained because they were compelled to select services from the “already finely-defined” list delineated by the federal government.

Front-line professionals’ agency remained. That is, most felt they could still “work around” the federal requirement if necessary. However, the requirement did not allow them to be as creative in helping the clients as they used to be under AFDC. These professionals, in order words, enjoyed some discretionary power and authority, but they lacked the kind of autonomy many wanted.
Application of Theories to Finding in “Limited Discretionary Experts”:

Lipsky (1980) acknowledges the important roles of front-line workers and their impact on policy outcomes. He observed that street-level bureaucrats should be viewed as one of the major components in the policy implementation process. They have a direct impact on clients’ lives and witness the reactions of clients as the public policy changes (Hill 2003). Since front-line workers directly interact with clients, they have a perspective of the street level that allows them to understand the inadequacies of any given policy.

Front-line workers are also viewed as being highly trained experts in the field of job preparation and employment (Keiser 2003). Highly trusted under ideal circumstances, they are seen as capable of utilizing a level of discretionary authority that is seen as critically important for effective policy implementation (Ricucci 2005; Vinzant and Crothers 1998). Front-line workers are sometimes able to compensate for the lack of skill displaced by policy makers. They are able to foresee and plan for all the policy scenarios that are encountered on the front lines of service provision, often compensating for ill-defined policy (Ricucci 2005).

Front-line professionals tend to interact with clients and other stakeholders in two ways. One is to serve the client’s interests; another is to choose the action of least disruption to their standardized and preferred routines (Page and Jenkins 2005; Sandfort 1999). Sometimes these two ways conflict.

Research indicates that there is usually slippage between policy flowing from the top and the implementation at the street-level (Simon 1976; Page and Jenkins 2005). Even though the policy flows top-down, actual implementation at the street level
generally is based on the worker’s self-interest and self-preference.

For example, Barnard (1968) explains how top leaders often fail to issue policy directives because the directives are not in alignment with the interests and the preferences of their subordinates. Most of the time, bureaucratic behavior is determined by the personal beliefs and preferences of the street level workers (Torenvlied 1996b; Barnard 1968). The behavior may be the result of altruism, a series of complicated political negotiations, or from pure self-interest to meet performance requirements. Therefore, how well street level workers adhere to authoritative orders is determined by how they endorse those mandates as being a preferable behavioral option for them to follow (Barnard 1968; Lipsky 1980).

Finding and Theorizing Street-Level Workers as the Duty-bound “Bureaucrats”

Finding:

As argued by the Bridge Professionals, the federal government chose to apply serious financial sanctions to the state if desired outcomes were not achieved. The professionals appeared to recognize that once the sanctions were in effect at the state level, local leaders would quickly come to recognize the impact of the new policies on their discretionary authority. Especially in periods of economic constraint, professionals at both the state and the local governments were not willing to risk program security by ignoring federal sanctions. According to the street-level professionals, they still in many ways enjoyed some level of discretion and autonomy. However, the primary organizational goal of “achieving the clients’ participation rate in the workforce” was “engraved” in their minds and greatly affected the service decisions they made.
Application of Theories to Finding in Duty-Bound Bureaucrats:

At the street level, front-line workers are in many ways “duty-bound” to carry out policy provisions coming from the top level of authority (Page and Jenkins 2005). Their behaviors are generally seen as being directed and driven by policy directives (Huber and Shipan 2002). Weber’s “ideal type of bureaucracy (Weber 1946)” posits that professionals’ position and job description are narrowly defined by rules and regulations. Therefore, the more specific and detailed the regulations are, the less discretion the street-level bureaucrats have in which to maneuver (Huber and Shipan 2002). Standardization of regulations and well-defined directives establish strict protocols for how to conduct professional business. This process removes personal choices and discretionary authority. These specifications in policy are seen by policy-makers at the top level as a means by which to ensure the intended policy outcomes.

In addition to specific regulatory directives, policy makers at the top level utilize sanctions, mostly financially, to force the acceptance of the orders (Gais and Weaver 2002). The exercise of sanction makes it less likely for street-level workers to break away from top-down policy directives. Sanctions generally prevent dramatic divergence from occurring between top-down policy directives and the policies that are implemented at the street-level.

The mandates of TANF were seen as being coercive by street level workers. The fear of reduced financial resources and loss of the Bridge Program clouded and dampened their calls for autonomy and discretion. Their fears made it difficult for the researcher to classify their comments with assurance. It was difficult to discern whether the actual implemented policies were the final product of a successful top-down coercive
model or whether they reflected the preferences of the street-level bureaucrats. As a result, Lipsky’s concepts relating to street level bureaucrats and their use of discretionary authority are partially salient.

2-1.3 Principal-agent issues

![Diagram of Intended vs. Implemented Policies: Principal Agent Issues](image)

**Finding and Theorizing The Goal Discrepancy between the Principal and the Agent**

*Finding:*

The interviewed Bridge professionals indicated that the stringent nature of federal oversight resulted in an alteration of their discretionary authority. In a nutshell, their discretionary authority was significantly curtailed and kept to a minimum. This limitation-as-constraint appears to be one reason why espoused and enacted TANF policy were aligned in important ways—at least in the minds of selected respondents.

More than one-third of the professionals interviewed suggested that there was little difference between TANF intended and implemented policies. Professionals who made this claim were mostly at the state level. Local level professionals had a different
One-fourth of the street-level professionals interviewed took an opposite view. Many professionals at the county level pointed out that they did not see the intent underlying the federal policy as being met by the localities. Rather, these professionals expressed opinions that the intent of federal policy makers and the needs at the street level were too different to ensure local alignment with the national goals.

With the doubt in the alignment between the intended and the implemented policies, a typical issue within the hierarchical structure would occur. This perceived discrepancy, which is one root cause of system alignment problems, can be traced to a classic problem. In the literature, this problem is called information asymmetry. The problem of information asymmetry becomes more apparent when there is a “goal discrepancy” among various bureaucratic levels.

Information asymmetry was manifest in professionals’ responses. Professionals at the top/state level perceived TANF mandates as limiting local level discretion. Therefore, they would assume that TANF would be implemented with fidelity. They operated with the assumption that middle managers and front-line professionals had access to all of the knowledge, resources, and social supports they needed to implement TANF policy.

Policy receivers at the county level had a different view. As they confronted the reality of dealing directly with the clients, they became aware of incomplete information, insufficient resources and supports, and unrealistic demands accompanying TANF’s regulations and timelines. They recognized that demands often could not be met under the circumstances.

Here, then, is a classic problem of information asymmetry. Information
asymmetry between top level, state leaders and county-level middle managers and front-line professionals helps to account for the discrepancies between espoused and enacted policy. Front-line professionals’ and middle managers’ agency, especially their capacity to resist and negotiate top-down mandates, also is instrumental in this gap between espoused and enacted policy.

**Application of Theories to Finding in the Discrepancies between the Principal and the Agent:**

As a block grant, TANF was structured to enable states and localities to have more flexibility and discretion in matching services to consumer needs. In terms of the principal/agent literature, the federal is the “principal” that holds the power of delegation. The state and localities are the “agents” that are empowered by the federal to carry out the mandates and services. Here, it is important to note that the detailed federal regulations promulgate for PRWORA—all two hundred and fifty pages of them—contain specific behavioral, activity, and performance requirements for the service agencies and the clients (Nathan and Gais 1998).

Concerns arise when discrepancies arise between the principal’s goals and the agent’s goals (Loeb and McEwan 2006; Crozier and Friedberg 1980). If these two goals do not line up as a single vision, the problem of information asymmetry in principal-agent relationships could occur (DiIulio 1994). There is still little subversion of the original intent of the legislation as a result of stringent regulatory oversight.

**Finding and Theorizing The Problem of Information Asymmetry**

**Finding:**

Because of the strong emphasis on complying with regulatory mandates, the
interviewed Bridge professionals felt their activities were significantly directed and bound by stringently-imposed regulatory oversight. Specifically, they reported that supervisory professionals sought to assure regulatory compliance and the avoidance of appearing as if against TANF as a policy. During supervisory visits at local offices, audits and other examinational activities were conducted. Interviewees explained that if concerns were raised or mistakes were discovered, a “correction of action” plan for the specific local office was issued. Such corrective actions were seen as a way to bring activities and performance up to national standards within a designated period of time.

Application of Theories to Finding in Information Asymmetry:

The informational asymmetry between the principal and the agent is always a struggle in the federalist system due to the hierarchical bureaucratic structure (DiIulio 1994; Moe 1984). On the one hand, the federal government delegates partial decision power to the states and localities. As a result, the state and localities are able to customize services based on the local needs and cultures. However, in the American federalist system, policy implementation problems often arise from the “devolution” of policy as it flows downward through all three-levels government (Nathan and Gais 1998; Ragan 2003).

Oversight in the Bridge Program was done primarily through using the “legislative capacity (Huber and Shipan 2002).” Specifically speaking, it was to issue regulations and protocols that severely circumscribed the range of discretionary actions available to local agency professionals. One of the major functions of administering the oversight activities was to minimize the concern of information asymmetry throughout the process of implementation.
In TANF, the relational layers that add complexity to the implementation process include the federal government and the state government; the state government and the local government; the local government and the street level bureaucrats. The risk of information asymmetry is even higher with the multiple layered government (Moe 1984). Moreover, the concern over “implementation fidelity” is typically is raised primarily at the principals’ level (Dusenbury et al. 2003; DiIulio 1994).

The issue of information asymmetry takes place in two directions: top-down and bottom-up. In order to bridge the gap between the policy provision at the top and the reality at the street level, the street-level professionals generally are required to play dual roles as negotiators and bureaucratic entrepreneurs (Nakamura and Smallwood 1980). As the role of negotiators, even if they agree with policy provision from the top, they are obligated to address the realities while carrying out the services at the street-level implementation. At the same time, they have to propose feasible means to achieve policy directives from the top. Within their role as entrepreneurs, street-level professionals need to persuade the policy makers at the top level to endorse a different vision. In addition to proposing the different vision, they also are seen as key players in developing strategies for implementing the vision. In other words, information exchange, negotiations, and the use of persuasion between the principals and agents are seen as a two-way, balanced-power, and equal-termed communication strategy (Ingram 1977; Nakamura and Smallwood 1980).

Furthermore, in order to assure “implementation fidelity (Dusenbury et al. 2003; Fixsen et al. 2005)” and address the concern of information asymmetry, the federal government requires each organization to develop and implement a reporting mechanism
within the organizational structure (Ragan 2003). The purpose of the mechanism is to
document policy process and achieved outcomes (Ragan 2002; Maxwell 1999). In the
policy reality, it is not possible to manually keep track of all the decisions and outcomes
at the state and local levels. Therefore, the federal government utilizes the mechanism to
monitor the implementation of the state and local efforts. The monitoring mechanism is
an attempt to hold agencies accountable by imposing severe penalties for the
effectiveness and efficiency of services.

Finding and Theorizing The Need for Backward-Mapping

Finding:

Most interviewed Bridge professionals claimed to support policy makers’ mission
of long-term, client self-sufficiency. However, they expressed discontent that they were
never offered the opportunities to provide actual recommendations. Nor were they
allowed to take part in the decision-making process. Even though they could sometimes
work around regulations within their circumscribed scope of flexibility, their voice was
not heard and the opinions were not given any legitimacy by top level managers.
Therefore, policy discrepancies still remained under this forward-mapping/top-down
model approach.

Application of Theories to Finding in the Need of Backward Mapping:

The traditional model of public policy making has been top-down. It is focused
on how to impose a top-down mandate on street level practice (Honig 2003). Many
researchers argue that the progress of policy making ought to be re-examined and re-
established from the direction of forward-mapping to backward-mapping (McLaughlin
2005; Elmore 1980; Recesso 1999). The approach of the traditional forward-mapping
deepens the problem of information asymmetry between the principals and the agents.

The model of forward-mapping starts from the policy makers at the top level. It establishes a policy blueprint for implementation based on the expectations and objectives from the top decision makers. The model is criticized for its unquestioned assumption of authority and rightness in the intents from top policy makers, regardless of the actual needs for support and flexibility at the street level.

Limitations in forward-mapping models have been instrumental in the development of alternatives. One is a backward mapping model. This model focuses specifically at the street level (Elmore 1980). According to Elmore (1980), backward-mapping ought to begin at the street level where specific undesired behavior and phenomenon are observed. In order to prevent and intervene with these undesired behaviors and phenomena, policy interventions need to be generated initially from the street level. Here, policy-making is bottom-up, not top-down. And the claim is that bottom-up policy making that proceeds with backward mapping strategies is superior because it is grounded in the realities, work orientations, and de facto conditions of front-line practice. Implementation problems are reduced and prevented because policy is grounded in implementation.

Thus, it is not surprising that street-level professionals play an important role in the backward-mapping process. They provide the first-hand reality and feedback to the decision-makers at the top level from the actual street level (Hill and Hupe 2009). Utilizing a conceptual model offered by Nakamura and Smallwood (1980), front-line workers appear to reflect differing images of the relationships between the principals (policy makers) and the agents (implementers).
One is “instructed delegation.” In this relationship, the policy makers and the implementers have the same goal. However, they lack agreement on the “means” or mechanisms to achieve the goal.

Another is “bargaining.” Here, the two players have to bargain with one another. They negotiate to reach a common platform for understanding/implementing both the policy goal and the most appropriate strategy.

The hierarchical structure of bureaucracy and the federalism system, in combination with different orientations of key actors, both structures and reinforces discrepancies between principals and agents. The Bridge services stand as an example. Discrepancies among multiple agencies also complicate the relationships and communication among the federal, state, and local governments. The following discussions explain the complicated relationship among relevant individuals and agencies.

**The Third Analytical Level: Policy Black Box**

![Figure 5-14: Policy Black Box](image-url)
The Third Analytical Level: Partnership:

**A Theoretical Reminder about Partnership**

The federalist system in the U.S. allows some autonomy to individual programs at the state or local level. Moreover, it creates opportunities for interactions and negotiations in programs that are *intergovernmental* in nature (Agranoff and McGuire 2004). These interactions and negotiations among the multiple levels of governmental agencies often reflect a process of mutual adaptation and even competition between the agencies (McLaughlin 1987; Agranoff 2001). The process of negotiation is usually complicated and political, often accompanied by complex solutions addressing complex wicked problems. Some such the complexity is implicated in the problem of the “policy black box (Hill and Hupe, 2002). This policy black box is conceptually rich in theory, but often lacks theoretical clarity.

The theoretical problem also is an opportunity—to offer theoretical clarity and transparency from an opaque policy black box. Three constructs enable this transformation. They are: layered hierarchical political structure, the process between policy formations, *intended policies*, policy outcomes, and *implemented policies*.

In the “policy black box”, the involved agencies have *interactions and relationships at various levels*. The interactions include relationships among *individual* professionals, among *sub-groups* within each agency, and *across multiple agency boundaries* at different levels. The relationships are not simply depicted connotatively as a “layered cake.” They are characterized as a “marble cake” in which different expertise and interests are included (Grodzins 1960; Nathan 2008).” In addition, according to Scharpf (1978), “policy formulation and policy implementation are inevitably the result
of interactions among a plurality of separate actors with separate interests, goals and
strategies.” The complicated politics and relationships among these different players
influence two aspects: 1) the effectiveness of intergovernmental interactions and; 2) the
efficiency of intergovernmental implementation or programs.

The following discussions will address three dimensions in this “black box.” The
first is about the exogenous factors. These exogenous factors include the actual
interactions and the mutual recognition among partnered agencies.

The second is about the endogenous factors. These factors include the shared
organizational values, processes, and relationships. They play as important roles to
enhance and advance the inter-organizational partnerships.

The third is about the organizational learning process that each agency has to
adopt and adjust in the constantly changing environment. Organizational learning is
important. It not only ensures organizational renewal, but also secures the organizational
survival in the complex and dynamic policy environment.

3-1.1 Mutual Recognition

Figure 5-15 Partnership: Mutual Recognition
Finding and Theorizing the Mutual Recognition among Agency Professionals

Finding:

The interviewed professionals agreed that TANF requirements helped in the unification of agencies’ missions. Even though social services and educational agencies both held quite different philosophies, the professionals admitted that TANF resulted in more opportunities for inter-agency and inter-professional partnerships. This occurred, in part, because of state OTDA and SUNY-Bridge attempts to define the TANF requirements in mutually recognized terms and definitions for the Bridge Program.

Significantly, the professionals expressed that, by having a commonly defined language and shared policy definitions, the two state agencies were able to impose common operational definitions on agencies at the local level. Another core belief followed suit. They believed that, with the local agency professionals’ understanding on the commonly defined languages and definitions, mutual respect was also established.

The DSS and Bridge offices started with different service and philosophical orientations. In the Bridge offices it was education. In DSS offices it was employment. Nevertheless, in order to meet the TANF mandates, they were willing to communicate, negotiate, and work through their differences.

Application of Theories to Finding in Mutual Recognition among Agency Professionals:

Belonging to different agencies tends to limit access to common information and inhibits mutual understanding among the relevant agencies’ professionals (Robinson and Cottrell 2005; Kerson 2002). Effective communications can result in increased success of partnership collaborations because of sharing of similar norms and values among the involved players. The cultivation of the trust within and across partner agencies
promotes certain behaviors and relationships (Healey et al. 2003; Pardo, Gil-Garcia, and Burke 2006). Trust eventually results in successful working partnerships among relevant agencies and professionals (Smylie and Evans 2006).

Another important requirement for the formation of an effective working partnership also rests on the extent to which leaders of the constituent agencies recognized mutual interests and shared mission. Ultimately, when relevant agency professionals are able to understand that they share a common mission, they are able to recognize the value of the joint effort and partnership (Schein 2004).

3-1.2 Interactions among Partnered Agencies

Finding and Theorizing the Vertical Interactions

*Finding:*

Interviewed Bridge Professionals agreed overwhelmingly that the TANF Bridge model reflected a *traditional top-down* model at work. In contrast to AFDC which
provided both the state and local governments with some discretionary decision-making power, TANF’s federal mandates were always the ultimate reference for service decisions.

A good example was provided by the front-line workers at the local level. Originally willing to express their opinions and challenges in regular weekly or monthly staff meetings, they felt comfortable voicing their concerns to their managers and leaders. They believed that their dilemmas were understood and their suggestions were taken seriously by the top level at the agency.

One step further up the hierarchy, the agencies’ top level leaders and managers indicated that they also strived hard to overcome TANF’s new challenges. They attempted to balance the trade-offs that arose from resolving dilemmas that affected their employees. In order to gain potential extra financial and administrative supports from the state, agency leaders took the opportunities to present these challenges and dilemmas to the state managers and leaders in quarterly regular meetings. However, many local leaders expressed that usually state leaders would only show their sympathetic understanding without truly altering any rules or granting more resources to the local. Inability to provide for meaningful change from the leaders’ level was understandable. The reason was generally attributed to the federal government’s imposition of stringent TANF regulations to assure state and local compliance with the policy.

As a result, the Bridge local professionals were unsure about how much influence they could have on the policy substance and implementation process. State level professionals envisioned little room for negotiation with the federal government. Over time, some of the state and local professionals chose to keep silent and work around the regulations as much as they could within their own “silos.”
Application of Theories to Finding in Vertical Interactions:

Under a vertical framework, federal, state, and local agency relationships are “top-down” with hierarchical accountability. The state and the local governments are supervised by the executive, legislature, courts, and other interest groups and agencies (Carnevale 2003).

Although during the re-inventing government movement in the 1990s, the concept of “small government” was proposed and later widely accepted (Osborne and Gaebler 1993).

However, as the government experienced the fiscal constraints later, the concept of “new federalism” was advocated and implemented (Nathan and Gais 1998). The model of new federalism gave the state and local certain degree of discretion in providing services to the clients. However, the final outcomes were strictly regulated and standardized. Since then, activities by state and local governments tend to be severely constrained by explicit regulations and tacitly held institutional norms (Hill and Hupe 2009). As a result, the discretionary power at the state and local levels is also mitigated.

Finding and Theorizing the Horizontal Interactions

Overall Finding in Horizontal Interactions:

The interviewed Bridge professionals observed that the Bridge-related programs and agencies at the state and local levels banded together to facilitate their compliance with federal mandates. They believed that the Bridge Program had been able to demonstrate its ability to become an effective provider. As evidence, they noted the ability to connect all the relevant service agencies horizontally under a single Bridge network. They argued that they were able to restructure their own programs to accommodate DSS referred clients. Comments made by professionals illustrated how
well partnered agency leaders worked well with one another and how well they coordinated their program activities.

*Application of Theories to Finding in Overall Horizontal Interactions:*

The horizontal dimension of policy implementation is as important as the vertical one. Horizontally, some professionals across different service agencies play the role as boundary spanners. They do so inter-professionally and inter-organizationally. Professionals acting as boundary spanners must possess the depth and the breadth of knowledge, which enables them to understand the regulations and the system (Kerson 2002; Boyd and Crowson 2001).

When professionals possess a comprehensive understanding of the field, they are able to develop two competencies. First, they are able to effectively plan their roles and strategize how to attain their individual goals. Second, they are able to cooperate and consolidate cross-boundary resources.

When professionals develop these two competencies, they are able to derive three important benefits. They are able to better serve clients. At the same time, they are able to comply with the federal regulations by spanning their individual boundaries to reach a common goal. Third, the professionals are able to establish a partnership and come to understand one another through their frequent and iterative interactions (Helfat et al. 2007).

*The Import of Communication in Horizontal Interactions*

In addition, interviewed Bridge professionals indicated that the *regularity and openness of communications* offered opportunities to understand each other’s dilemmas. The positive communications also elicited mutual respect among the partners across time.
The channel of communications was considered as a major facilitator in the nurturance of relationships among professionals in the relevant agencies.

*Application of Theories to Finding in Communication:*

As observed in numerous research studies, good communications facilitate the information flow. Good communications also positively influence individual and collective behaviors and interactions. As the channels of communications are positively recognized professionals, they also become more respectful and open to one another (Linden 2002). These positive interactions eventually lead to successful working relationship (Hartley and Rashman 2007; Smylie and Evans 2006; Osborne and Brown 2005).

*Co-location in Horizontal Interactions*

Co-location occurs when professionals from two or more agencies move to the same facility. Two of the interviewed Bridge county professionals shared locations: one within the same building and the other on one floor. Interviewed professionals from these two counties felt strongly that *co-location* improved the efficiency and effectiveness of their organization’s performance. Most importantly, co-location fostered their professional bonding.

*Application of Theories to Finding in Co-location:*

Co-location of partnered agencies has the potential to contribute to positive communications and open channels of communications. It helps “facilitate team development” and makes it easier to include “all team members in service planning and other meetings (Robinson and Cottrell 2005).” At the same time, co-location has the potential to promote professional working relationships and mutual understanding among
all the professionals. Just as Hultberg, Lonnroth, and Allebeck (2003) observe, the agencies and professionals’ differences are able to mutually adapt throughout the close and continuous working relationship.

**Competition in Horizontal Interactions**

Cross- or inter-system work inevitably brings unintended and undesirable consequences. One such consequence was evident in the Bridge program. Ironically, competition was fostered in an initiative originally structured to facilitate cooperation and even collaboration.

Bridge Program professionals described this unintended and undesirable competition. They attributed it to a scarcity of resources. In other words, insufficient resources encouraged *competition* among the service agencies.

Seven professionals (six out of seven at the Bridge offices) interviewed particularly believed that the competitions threatened collaboration across Bridge Program service providers. As the overall TANF population decreased and service providers increased, there were fewer applicants referred by the local DSS. The professionals explained that service providers had to compete for referrals so that they could have enough clients to legitimize the existence of their program. They admitted that the increased competition jeopardized cooperative partnerships among the agencies.

**Application of Theories to Finding in Competition:**

As TANF acquires a national focus, many relevant services are launched and provided by different agencies and organizations. There is always the paradox of “I and Thou” since the forms and services of organizations and agencies are getting much more dynamic and complicated (Hoebekke 2004). The “I and Thou” paradox, simply defined, is
the ambivalent attitude and tension between the positive partnerships and the negative competitions.

The effects of this paradox are two-fold: although the services by different agencies and organizations might serve to compliment with one another, duplication of services becomes more common (Sanger 2003). The duplication then leads to competitions. And as financial support from the federal government declines, resources available to state and local governments also shrink. The declination in resources negatively affects the capacity of agencies to provide services to an increasingly difficult population to serve.

Limited resources result in an increased occurrence of competition and growth in the numbers of service providers—a phenomenon described by population ecology theorists (Hannan and Freeman 1977; Durand 2006). Per theory, the decline in clients threatens the existence of service agencies and organizations. Every service provider struggles to attain performance standards required by the TANF mandates. At the same time, the proliferation of service providers triggers even more competitions, that eventually results in the contraction of service providers (Durand 2006).

The tension between the “I and Thou” paradox gets more intensive as resources are more restricted. As resource dependency theorists pinpoint, organizations are depended and controlled by the environments, the available power and resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Thompson 1967). The need of resources becomes both the focal point and the vulnerability of organizations (Hatch 1997). Having abundant resources not only secures the smooth operations in organizations, but also better positions the organization in obtaining further continuous support and resources (Scott 1998). As a
result, agency leaders have to constantly work on the equilibrium between the “I and Thou” paradox.

3-1.3 Organizational Artifact

Traditional bureaucracy is usually based on specialization according to regulatory job descriptions (Weber 1946). In other words, the structural design is intended to separate agencies according to their specialization and defined professional role. This also allows each agency to focus narrowly on its own area of expertise. As a result of the specialization of each agency, cross agency working relationships can become either advantages or challenges (Linden 2002). For those who are willing to expand the working relationship, the relationship becomes the stepping stone for new opportunities and improvement. For those who are reluctant to do so, the working relationship is just another extra burden in addition to the daily routines (Sandfort 1999). As a result, the establishment of common organizational artifact becomes an important factor in successful partnerships. The following section will discuss further on the values, the processes, and the relationships among the Bridge related agencies.

Figure 5-17 Partnerships: Artifact
Finding and Theorizing the Purposely Established Artifacts

Finding:

Artifacts are “relevant to a rich and diverse set of organizational processes within and across multiple levels of analysis (Rafaeli and Pratt 2006)”. They exist in the forms of organizational protocols, procedures, conversations, assessments, names, symbols, and relationships. In the Bridge Program, the professionals agreed that artifacts were purposely established for the intention of attaining the policy mandates. For example, the two major players, OTDA/local DSSs and SUNY-Bridge/local Bridge, reflected different but complementing orientations: the major goal of the OTDA/local DSS was job placement; with SUNY-Bridge/local Bridge programs, it was education and training. Interviewees noted the “marriage” between the educational and social services agencies was not a voluntary one in the beginning. Indeed, the organizations were quite territorial when mandates were first imposed. However, the two agencies came to realize that they could not afford the luxury of working in isolation given their limited resources.

Application of Theories to Findings about Established Artifact:

Artifacts play the role of identities in organizations. In each organization/group, there are some unique artifacts evident within a specific working relationship. The artifacts are presented in tangible standardized procedures, protocols, assessments, channels of communications, and intangible cultural characteristics such as “tacitness,” sense of we-feeling, and strong participant and personal relationships (Lurie and Riccucci 2003). More discussions on the tangible and intangible artifacts are presented in the following sections.
**Finding: Sharing Data and Decision-Making**

The Bridge professionals indicated that stringent TANF mandates served two advantages in service improvement. First, it helped pull together all the relevant agencies to work together. Second, it also brought in different standards and ideas about organizational decision-making.

Professionals’ service decisions came to be driven by the necessity to attain required job participation rates. Many of the interviewed professionals showed a firm belief in providing education and training for the clients at the beginning of the program. Eventually, they came to recognize the need to walk a *balancing act between education versus employment as a preferred strategy and cultural norm*. Learning to share data and make decisions jointly with partner agencies served as evidence of how professionals reached compromises regarding differing goals. Although professionals held differing perspectives regarding educational services for recipients, they realized that working alone was no longer beneficial.

**Application of Theories to Findings About Data Sharing and Decision Making:**

In order to comply with federal mandates, TANF educational and social services agencies have to share resources. More than resource sharing, they eventually have to learn how to share data and make joint decisions. Overcoming the natural hesitancy of the agencies to accept *data-sharing and joint decision-making* as an organizational norm has not been an easy task.

*Normatively speaking*, working together is seen as theoretically necessary in a modern political environment. It is considered to be advantageous in at least three ways.
It integrates different kinds of expertise into “collaborative problem identifying. It enables strategic brokering. And it enriches problem-solving activities (Drucker 1998; Agranoff 2007).

Normative theorizing and everyday realities often are at odds. In reality, collaboration is not a natural practice that can easily be accepted by partner agencies. For example, the sharing of data in many ways is considered to be a sacrifice of power and loss of in one’s competitive advantage (Osborne and Brown 2005; Morgan 1998). The quest for joint decision-making and data-sharing involves interests at all levels, including individual, organizational, cross-organizational, and collective ones (Galaskiewicz and Zaheer 1999; Linden 2002). This kind of complexity indicates needs for an organizational and policy learning process, one that requires new mental models or mind-sets about nearly every aspect of the system, starting with the decision-making process (Senge 1990; Sterman 2000). For example, it takes a mind transformation from a “decision-making silo” to an open joint “decision-making partnership”(Innes and Booher 1999).

Finding: The Culture of Win-Win

In the interviews, professionals identified an important development. They indicated that they had a new a sense of a “we-feeling”; and also that the cultivation of “tacitness” brought the two major players closer as “one team.” As a result, some professionals claimed could face the challenges that were posed by TANF mandates. The professionals recognized that without this “we-feeling,” the working relationship would be vulnerable. Without the “we-feeling,” the relationship was seen as not likely to evolve into a firm, sustainable partnership with effective working relationships across
organizational boundaries.

Application of Theories to the Finding in Culture of Win-Win

A “joined up thinking” approach has been discussed by Power (2001). This scholar cogently posits that the “fragmentation of provision makes it difficult for policy makers and service providers to perceive the multiple effects of their policies on whole persons and households.” She promotes the Giddens’ (1998) concept of developing the synergy across different welfare agencies and sectors.

Scholars and practitioners in the field recognize that involved agencies should not slice problems into separated packages (Giddens 1998; Power 2001). The “joined up” actions and relationships become necessary in successfully serving the clients. The agencies and stakeholders are required to not only think as one team, but also work as one team (Hornby and Atkins 2000). With pressure to work as “one team”, all the available resources and individual interests need to be brought to the table for the purpose of resolving cross agency differences. Therefore, the recognition and activity toward developing the inter-agency partnership are seen as promoting a win-win situation for all the stakeholders (Agranoff 2007).

Finding: Organizational and Individual Working Relationships

The evolutinal process of partnership building was evidenced in differing artifacts at the agency and also in individual professionals. However, the Bridge professionals interviewed indicated that collaboration was not omnipresent.

As defined in chapter two, agency leaders were put into the unit of “agency” rather than “individual” for analysis. They presented the view of the overall agency. At the agency level, agency leaders admitted that TANF “forced” to work together because
that was one of the major approaches assuring the agency compliance in the policy provision. Though the cooperative working relationship make agency leaders felt that they were “supported” by others, they did not always see the “need” for the support. For example, they shared information among one another, not because they favored the approach of information-sharing. It was due to the mandatory reporting system from the top, federal and state, levels. Moreover, some Bridge interviewed professionals believed that they could still survive with their original business routines without any extra outside cooperation and interventions.

On the other hand, the leaders from the co-location counties addressed overwhelmingly and positively in regard to the interdependence working relationships among their relevant agencies. They felt that they were all within one team and everything they did would have impacts on the others. Based on Figure 2-3 in Chapter Two, these agency leaders acted jointly as: “it’s our business.” Nevertheless, not all interviewed agency leaders expressed that relevant agencies have reached a state of collaboration marked by a sense of interdependency according to the interviewed data.

At the individual level, agency professionals expressed that they were “ordered” to work with professionals in other agencies by the leaders. For those who expressed the achievement of collaboration, they felt that as they work more together with one another, they began to perceive the effectiveness of the cooperative relationship. They also appreciate the different expertise that was brought into the relationships by other professionals. Overtime, they were also persuaded that they could not be successful without one another.

On the other hand, for those who did not express the appearance of collaboration,
they considered themselves and other professionals “doing their own business to meet the participation rate”. They might perceive the benefit of working together; however, they have not developed enough mutual trust among one another to buy-in the sense of “we-feeling” in the working relationship.

Application of Theories to Finding in Organizational and Individual Working Relationships

At Agency Level:

The 1996 TANF mandates actually created a need for establishing agency partnerships. Therefore, the “working alone” mindset had to be altered (stand alone to cooperation) (Riley and Brophy-Baermann 2006; Kerson 2002; Alter and Hage 1993; Eilers 2002). As meeting the TANF mandates became the common goal among the agencies, the organizational ties started to be formed gradually (cooperation to coordination) (Honig 2006; Sandfort 1999).

Later partnerships developed to the level where the agency leaders recognized and acknowledged their common missions, values, and common working processes. At this point, leaders took ownership of the mission. At the same time, the leaders recognized the increasing depth of the inter-agency relationship as it transitioned from coordination to collaboration (Beyerlein et al. 2003; Fletcher 2006; Cresswell et al. 2005; Harris 2003; Schein 2004). As agency leaders recognized their interdependency, they were willing to mobilize resources across agencies to attain common goals and achieve successful partnerships (collaborations) (Longogia 2005; Claiborne and Lawson 2005; Crosby and Bryson 2005a).

As inter-organizational partnerships developed closer, coordination efforts come
together and show the following characters. In a coordinative partnership, harmonizing, synchronizing, and turn-taking are normative. These characters also tend to take place according to both the established protocols and the tacit acceptance of goals and shared values among the partner agencies (Lawson 2003; Power 2001).

**At Individual Level:**

At the level of the individual professional in the Bridge Program, the building of new, joint relationships was reported to have begun as an order for professionals at different levels to work together (*stand alone to cooperation*) (Claiborne and Lawson 2005; Zucker et al. 1996; Kerson 2002). When professionals described their buying-in to the idea of working together (*cooperation to coordination*) (Gardner 2003; Hall 1999), they reported a growing understanding of each other, trust, and a sense of community as they worked together (*coordination to collaboration*) (Zucker et al. 1996; Kumar, Fenema, and Glinow 2004; Schein 2004). As the sense of community united the professionals, the increased “we-feeling” appeared to create a more congenial work environment for the professionals. For the professionals with the advantage of co-location, half of them expressed the inter-dependent relationships among one another (*collaboration*) (Harris 2003; Huxham and Vangen 2000). The other half professionals interviewed did not indicate the characters of collaboration at the time this study was conducted.

In the Bridge Program under TANF, as coordination developed, the seeds were sown for the development of common purposes and, more specifically, a shared organizational goal. Common purposes, shared goals, and trust were facilitated by routine interactions, especially among co-located professionals. These interactions, in the
context of co-located professionals, created the conditions for growing awareness of inter-professional interdependence.

In brief, conditions conducive to the development of collaboration were in place. While genuine, pervasive collaboration was not evident, an evolutionary process that might eventually produce it was. This evolutionary process is not finished in all the studied agencies, and it is possible that the observed sense of interdependency among people ultimately may result in a formal collaborative partnership (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Etzioni 1975).

3-2 Organizational Learning:

A Theoretical Reminder about Organizational Learning

The ideal learning situation is to have the agencies respond and implement services more proactively with new strategies that respond to identified problems (Honig 2006; Argyris and Schon 1996). The learning process should allow the establishment of an *exogenous feedback mechanism* in organizations. Such a mechanism then enables the early adaptation and adjustment of the changing environment (Turniansky and Hare 1998; Sterman 2000). According to Sterman (2000), “to learn, we must use the limited and imperfect information available to us to understand the effects of our own decisions, so we can adjust our decisions to align the state of the system with our goals (*single-loop*) and so we can revise our mental models and redesign the system itself (*double-loop*).”

Over the years, the public sector has characterized as one preoccupied with single loop learning. It has been criticized by its inability to carry out “double loop” learning. Double loop learning that allows for long-term vision and proactive action taking for the prevention or amelioration of social issues has been especially elusive in the field of
public policy.

3-2.1 Single-Loop Learning

![Organizational Learning Diagram]

**Finding and Theorizing in Single-Loop Learning**

**Finding:**

In the case of the Bridge Program, professionals (both within the Bridge Program Offices and DSS) were cast in the role of the order receivers. These agency professionals spoke of the stressfulness in trying to simultaneously correct long-term social problems. Moreover, they had to reach the federal mandates without having adequate time and flexibility to plan and implement long-term strategies. They were concerned that, figuratively, their hands were tied because of the stringent federally-defined requirements that curtailed their options for dealing with TANF clients. The professionals commented with deep worry that many TANF clients were not able to transform training into lifelong living style changes.

Based on the interviews, single-loop organizational learning appeared to dominate in their agencies. TANF’s regulations were instrumental in this kind of learning. For
example, TANF’s fiscal sanctions were instrumental in single loop learning’s “quick fix”. It is significant that the interviewed professionals did not consider the quick fix approach via single loop learning as an adequate policy and organizational learning mechanism for meeting the long term needs of this population.

Application of Theories to Finding in Single-Loop Learning:

The major rationale underlying TANF is to ease the social and financial burden of the government burdened by increasing welfare expenditures. Using the terminology offered by some scholars, it starts as a “corrective” policy (Argyris 1993; Argyris and Schon 1996). Then involved agencies initiate interventions to make corrective actions. Unfortunately, outcomes of interventions are usually short-lived due to the lack of long-term sustainable provision.

Generally speaking, the policy appears to have been illustrative of single-loop learning and a narrow focus on finding the most efficient and direct approach for attaining an economic goal. Single loop learning has instrumental value with some kinds of discrete, technical problems. However, single-loop learning is inadequate for improving complex social issues in the long term (Sterman 2000; Senge and Sterman 1992). Although single-loop learning results in the formation of interventions that brings temporary relief, in terms of solving the underlying issues leading to welfare dependency, it falls short.
Finding and Theorizing in Double-Loop Learning

Finding:

In the Bridge Program, leaders of the involved agencies did not appear to reach the stage of double-loop learning. On the other hand, data indicated that, “invisible” double learning was developing among the professionals across levels and agencies. This invisible learning process occurred in the process of partnership development and collaborative relationship building among professionals. The professionals continued to learn from one another as they communicated, worked, and negotiated throughout the process. As indicated in the interviews, the Bridge Program professionals received new guidelines and requests from OTDA and the local DSSs on a fairly frequent basis. After they received the orders, the professionals were mandated to carry out the changes—which generally required them to work and negotiate with their colleagues. As a result, the professionals worked together, in essence undergoing the freeze, rebalance, and unfreeze stages delineated in a double loop learning process.

Based on the interviews, it was apparent that study participants understood that
the policy process presented a unique situation. It was a situation in which the outcome appeared to be a product of single loop learning at the organizational level. As will be discussed below, however, at the micro-level it appeared illustrative of double loop learning.

**Application of Theories to Finding in Double-Loop Learning:**

Argyris and Schön define double-loop learning as involving “changes in values and frames” using a process of systematic feedback loops. Whereas single-loop learning entails changes in strategies to achieve goals, double-loop learning presents opportunities for changes in goals and strategies for achieving them. Double-loop learning thus is more complex than single loop learning, and it has the power to transform agencies and inter-agency relationships.

Double-loop learning depends on people’s competence for “for reflective inquiry that cuts across incongruent frames (Argyris and Schon 1996).” It entails a change in organizational learning structures and strategies. Moreover, it entails a change in the fundamental thinking and decision-making framework used by the agency.

Double-loop learning’s benefits include helping individuals or organizations to grow and improve through its reliance on continuous and advanced goal-seeking mechanisms. It begins with a process of “freezing,” which is initially figuring out the consequences of the changes. It then becomes a process of “rebalancing,” which helps readapt and reorganize the entity. It ends with a process of “unfreezing” which moves the agency toward continuous change and improvement through self-organization and self-renewal thinking and decision-making models (Weick and Quinn 2004; Cumming 2004). Double-loop learning agents constantly look into their own underlying assumptions and
values as they attempt to alter their outcomes (Hatch 1997). Evidence of these early indicators of double loop learning derived from participants’ responses.

During the process of double-loop learning, agencies also developed the “negotiated orders” to cope with the policy changes. Negotiated orders are organizational interactions in a negotiation process while the exogenous environment changes. They are the rules that govern the changing process among different agents and organizations in their daily practices and strategies (Nathan and Mitroff 1991). The negotiated orders are “fluid, readily subject to changes as new events occur or new parties becomes involved (Day and Day 1977).”

Therefore, as TANF was enacted and actions was needed to be re-arranged, the Bridge relevant agencies had to negotiate among one another to establish new orders and cultures for the working relationships (Bennington, Shetler, and Shaw 2003). The adjustments of organizational structure, business process, and policy interpretation ought to be agreed upon one another to reach the new equilibrium of partnerships. The Bridge related leaders and professionals were acting in the approach of double-loop learning to accommodate the new ways of interactions and to establish the new means of orders.

**Intended Logic Model/Theory-of-Change versus Implemented Logic Model/Theory-of-Change**

Based on the data and relevant theory, logic model presented in the first chapter, and again in Table 5-2, can be revisited and compared/contrasted with a new logic model. Table 5-2 and Table 5-3 present the differences between the original intended theory of change (espoused policy) and the actual way in which Bridge Program activities were implemented (enacted policy). These models illuminate gaps discussed above between
the intended and the implemented policies are depicted. Moreover, a new Theory-of-Change model, which is presented as Figure 5-14, provides additional theoretical clarity. These contrasts between the intended Theory-of-Change model and the actual implemented Theory-of-Change model were completed after the analyses of interview data. The data show several “spill-over” effects comparing with the original designated policy intentions. First, the TANF mandates prompted the Bridge agencies to work together more. However, inter-agency competition deepened the defensive mindsets of involved agencies.

Moreover, agency statistics continued to show caseload reduction. However, at the same time, the upward trend in the recidivism rate became more worrisome. Particularly during times of recession, people without adequate skills struggle to find and keep employment. It was even more difficult to consider career advancement for this ill-equipped population.

Third, based on the Bridge provision, youth and children programs and interventions are addressed and become part of the policy intervention to prevent the generational cycling in the welfare system. Unfortunately, given the employment first mandate, there were not enough resources to successfully implement youth and children strategies. As such, the intervention for the youth and children was a marginalized interest within the service agencies.

More details will be presented in the following tables 5-2 and 5-3 and figure 5-20.
Table 5-2:
Logic Model—Intended (Espoused) Theory: New York State Bridge Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Assumptions</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities/Interventions</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| • Job training will result in greater employability of the welfare recipient, thereby breaking the dependency cycle | Federal:  
• Approved NYS TANF Implementation Plan, containing Bridge Program requirements  
• TANF budget constraints (federal block grant) | • Educational programs for “at risk” youth  
• Job-training programs  
• Job-search programs  
• Job-support programs  
• The implementation of the partnership model to handle “cross boundary” implementation barriers |
| • Educational and behavioral interventions for identified at-risk youth while in school will help to break the generational welfare dependency cycle | State:  
• TANF budget constraints (state)  
• Requirements in Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SUNY-Bridge and OTDA | |
| | Local:  
• Localized service agencies/organizations | |

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Chapter Six Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 introduced sweeping changes in social welfare policy in the United States. At that time, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which had been the traditional centerpiece of American social welfare policy since 1935, was replaced by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. With the implementation of TANF, policies changed, and so did the practice of welfare policy in state, county, and local systems. At the practice level, working relationships among leaders, middle managers, front-line workers, and welfare clients were significantly impacted by new TANF-related policies. These new policies revamped how educational and job readiness services were delivered.

Despite the significant changes that occurred because of TANF, relatively few studies have probed for the systems changes that ensued from its implementation. Notwithstanding expected differences between intended policy and enacted policy, empirical analyses structured to open up in the “black box” of welfare policy have been in short supply.

The present study was structured in response to the need to look inside the “black box” of welfare policy. It was designed with an eye toward gaining knowledge about New York State’s TANF policy: its programs, the social services agencies, and educational institutions. In addition to the descriptive-explanatory knowledge gained from the study, the analysis utilized action-oriented knowledge generation to increase understanding of organizational learning, enhanced systems change, and policy-related improvements that occurred as a result of TANF.

More specifically, this study focused on identifying changes in roles,
responsibilities and relationships at several related and interacting levels: individual, team, and organization. Figure 6-1 below provided a conceptual point of departure for this complex, multi-level analysis.

![Diagram of Systems Change Policy Stages](image)

Figure 6-1: Different Stages and Levels of Analysis

To achieve its primary purpose, this dissertation study examined three main research questions.

1. *Ten years following enactment of TANF, what systems changes have occurred as a result of the implementation of TANF-related, Bridge Program goals and strategies?*

2. *Has the Bridge Program developed new systems capacities to achieve the TANF expected outcomes?*

3. *To what extent has the economic idea of human capital development (and human*
capital theories in general) influenced TANF’s implementation and systems change mechanisms?

The qualitative research design used for this analysis included three components. Component one consisted of face-to-face interviews with Bridge Program related agencies’ professionals. The second component was document analysis of TANF regulations and the relevant documents provided by interviewed professionals.

The last component of the analysis was to solicit comments from twenty-one interviewees who were asked to review an executive summary of the preliminary findings for their accuracy. Fourteen out of twenty-one interviewed participants responded to the researcher’s request. The researcher incorporated their feedback in the final presentation of the research findings.

A Synthesis of the Main Findings

The Concept of Human Capital:

“From the interviewed Bridge professionals: The human capital focus has been changed dramatically from education and training to job-search and job readiness. The concept of career ladder for advancement is still in the professionals’ minds, but the stringent federal mandate in participation rate discourages an emphasis on human capital development for the longer term, including career ladder building.”

Human capital development is a concept anchored in economics. It gives rise to a focus on workforce development, including the roles of education and training in workforce readiness. The concept – as applied to workforce development – potentially has considerable importance for TANF and the Bridge Program. Is human capital development an explicit priority or implicit driver determining the direction of TANF and the Bridge Program policies? This research addressed this question.
Interviewees indicated that the populations entering the Bridge Program under TANF often were “carry-overs” from AFDC. Moreover, many were mainstays on the TANF rolls; they recycle in and out of the program. Consequently, in the eyes of Bridge professionals, the current TANF clients tend to be harder-to serve recidivists, or younger clients who have multiple barriers in obtaining jobs (such as deficit in skills, health, domestic violence, mental illness, etc).

Half of the professionals interviewed recognized the concept of a “career ladder.” However, with the program focused so strongly on employment, professionals believed that there was very little flexibility for professionals to pursue career planning. They noted their inability to provide clients with long-term skill building/job planning services. According to the professionals, under TANF, a client could only receive twelve months of education/training over a lifetime. Under AFDC, clients could get approved to earn a full college degree in pursuit of “a career”, not just “any job.”

The Impact of the Systems Changes in TANF:

“From the interviewed Bridge professionals: Systems changes in TANF redefined the short-term goal of the Bridge relevant agencies. Although the long-term mission is still self-sufficiency, the short-term goal has become one of attaining the federal mandated client workforce participation rate. In turn, the alteration of Bridge Program short-term goals affects the overall operational principles at the organizational and individual professional levels.”

TANF mandates quickly changed the overall Bridge Program’s short-term goal. It forced the organization to move from an educational and training orientation to a strict focus on employment. As demonstrated in the interviewee data, the changes imposed at the organizational level by TANF mandates spilled over into all aspects of the organizational culture and organizational structure. In essence, the concept of
“temporary assistance” led to changes in the way “welfare” work is organized and carried out.

In fifteen interviews, professionals indicated that they believed that TANF contributed to changes in how they did business. These changes also affected their organizational culture and climate. They experienced the dilemma of adjusting their focus and adapting the culture of “clients’ workforce participation rate first” rather than “clients’ individual needs first.”

In thirteen interviews, professionals identified specific changes in organizational structures. A good example of organizational structure change following TANF’s enactment was the re-organization of the employment services unit. In some counties, the employment service unit was actually separated from other government units and charged to serve only TANF clients and their transitional needs, such as childcare, transportation, etc.

Another organizational change was the co-location of offices. This action brought several partner agencies located in the same building. According to respondents, communication became easier for both the professionals and the clients. Moreover, mutual understanding and trust were established overtime.

In addition to organizational changes, the reform added to changes at individual level. Changes in job descriptions, job roles, and job goals were defined by respondents from the local Bridge offices. For example, the description of a “typical” job goal moved from a goal of job preparation to a stringent work orientation (i.e., getting the client a job, no matter what the job is).

In terms of job descriptions, professionals indicated they had to perform more
routine case management activities and complete many more reports for the administration than before under AFDC. This had the effect of limiting the amount of time they could spend on clients’ individual issues. In terms of job roles, during AFDC, professionals worked more like mentors, devoting a longer period of time with each client on learning and job search activities. In contrast, under TANF a professional’s role as a case manager was constrained by service time limitations imposed by federal regulatory policy. Bridge Program workers strived to make clients search for jobs, become job readiness, get a job, and be sure they could keep the job for ninety days—all within four to six weeks as required under federal service completion requirements.

**The Development of Partnerships**

"From the interviewed Bridge professionals: The TANF mandates have forced more inter-professional and inter-agency partnerships among the Bridge relevant agencies. Even though the Bridge and the DSS agencies have different fundamental philosophies, they recognized the need to establish partnerships for attaining the TANF mandates. However, even though the partnership among relevant agencies has developed further to either coordination or collaboration, competition increased due to service duplications and fewer clients."

Although all the involved agencies appeared to share the same mission of self-sufficiency for the recipient, the underlying philosophies of the agencies participating in the Bridge Program remained different in many cases. For example, local DSS offices were forced to focus more on participation rates. Yet, the Bridge Programs still adhered to the original core values of an educational and training institution. This fundamental philosophical difference resulted in different short-term organizational goals for relevant agencies.

Adequate levels of coordination could be reached when agencies perceived that they shared a common mission. In two-thirds of the interviews, professionals
acknowledged that they shared a common mission with their partners and strove to coordinate their respective efforts. Although each of the involved agencies continued to work within its specific area of expertise, each of them also tried to meet TANF mandates through coordinated joint efforts with its partners.

When the question went further to collaboration, defined in this study as genuine inter-dependence among partners, two-thirds of the professionals expressed views that they saw increased development of collaborative partnerships as a result of the enactment of TANF. However, the other one-third of respondents believed that, despite the desire for partnerships, their agency could still survive independently without collaborative partnerships. Their reasoning was clear: the various agencies had different functions and goals and therefore, partnerships were unnecessary to achieve individual agency goals.

With this “perceived ability” to survive independently, competition among agencies occurred. This paradox—competition under the umbrella of a program designed to encourage cooperation, coordination, and collaboration—was unexpected and unanticipated. It stemmed in large part from resource needs. It also stemmed from duplicative services such as GED programs and job training programs, which were often offered in more than one agency. Moreover, each agency strived to get more referrals from DSS so that the agency was in a better position for showcasing more success stories. Therefore, even though agencies were obligated to work together, tensions and competition between agencies arose.

The “Goodness of Fit” between Intended and Implemented Policies

“From the interviewed Bridge professionals: The TANF mandates are considered “unrealistic” by many Bridge professionals. Many professionals admit that it is not possible to match the original intended and actual implemented policies. Therefore, they constantly struggle between “making the participation rate” and “meeting the clients’
actual needs.” Moreover, the feedback mechanism in the Bridge relevant programs leads to an “information gap” between the top leaders and the front-line workers. Some front-line professionals expressed that they are not provided with adequate opportunities to be involved in the discussion and decision-making processes at the top level.”

The greatest difficulty encountered by the service providers was meeting the strictly-mandated participation rate. Even though the professionals in the agencies could exercise some discretion within the qualifying list of services approved by the federal government, TANF regulations had figuratively “tied the hands” of professionals. They struggled between choosing among services to be offered to clients since only certain activities could be counted toward the participation rate. There was little or no flexibility within the ranges of countable versus non-countable eligible services.

Even if the mandates were stringent, there were professionals who supported TANF changes. Supporters believed that the changes from TANF gave the Bridge Program more legitimacy and helped to assure accountability on both the client side and the government side.

TANF’s specific goals and timeframe were designed to prevent long-term welfare dependency and perpetuation of inter-generational welfare cycles. However, those persons opposed to the changes from TANF claimed that the new regulations constrained their ability and flexibility to serve their clients. These professionals felt reluctant to follow the stringent mandates. They believed that the mandates were too unrealistic to achieve. Nevertheless, they noted the financial penalty for not complying with the requirements, and they recognized that the mandates were something the organization could not afford to ignore.

Still others viewed the TANF changes as “a mixed package.” They saw both the
aforementioned positive and negative impacts of the changes. They also claimed that the struggle between the two perspectives of wanting to retain the “human touch” while imposing mandated “accountability” was a kind of beneficial check-and-balance mechanism. Therefore, critics of the TANF constantly found themselves balancing between “making the rate” and “caring for the clients’ true needs.” This balancing struggle was more prevalent at the local level, affecting front line service providers more than top level leaders and middle managers.

**Single-loop Learning in Policy Adoption; Double-loop Learning in Partnership Building**

“From the researcher’s observation and analysis from the interviews: The agency professionals appear to usually adopt a “quick fix” approach when responding to policy changes. Somewhat counter-intuitively, however, the researcher noted that partnerships developed as a result of double-loop learning processes, which occurred despite the short-term focus of workers.”

Research indicates that in the regular practice of public policy, the approach of “quick fix” is usually the most commonly adopted policy solution. The Bridge Program was no exception. The Bridge professionals complained that sometimes the new policy filtered down just days before the actual implementation date. All they could do to respond to the new policy was to reset the business processes and redesign services within the mandated timeframe. Pressed for time and expected to comply, they had little time and few supports for pervasive, learning-related, reflection-in-action. As a result, single-loop learning dominated the policy adoption process.

However, during the process of inter-professional partnership building, the professionals learned from one another. It appeared that they also re-adjusted their behaviors and mindsets as they communicated, worked, and negotiated with one another on an ongoing basis. To a greater extent, the inter-professional partnership building
occurred within a feedback loop which also had impacts on the inter-agency partnership. The development of inter-agency partnership took place as agencies had to assure the compliance of TANF provision from the federal/state levels. In short, an invisible or implicit kind of double-loop learning was underway, and it benefited both the inter-agency and inter-professionals partnerships in this study.

The Primary Difficulty and Most Needed Supports Encountered by Service Providers:

“From the interviewed Bridge professionals: The primary difficulty encountered by the service professionals is in meeting the strictly-mandated participation rate. The top four needed supports identified by the professionals were: 1) additional funding; 2) increased “human-centered” services for clients; 3) more staff; 4) increased flexibility in carrying out services.”

Based on the professionals, the primary difficulty encountered by the service providers was in meeting the mandated participation rate. The professionals in the agencies could exercise some discretion as long as they stayed within the qualifying list of services preapproved by the federal government. However, TANF regulations figuratively “tied the hands” of professionals’ by allowing only those listed services as counting toward meeting the participation rate. There was little or no flexibility that allowed for the use of non-countable eligible services.

Professionals were asked “if you could have other three extra resources to help you succeed, what would they be?” Professionals’ responses were categorized by the researcher.

First, the professionals indicated that they would ask for more funding to support all the expending service needs (22 out of 30). Second, they would ask for a more “human-centered” focus, i.e., one that would support clients with their individual difficulties and issues. They expressed deep concerns that current services are driven
mostly by federal required clients’ workforce participation rate (18 out of 30). Third, they indicated a need for more administrative staff to deal with particularly the growing federal requirements in data reporting (16 out of 30). Fourth, they expressed a desire for more flexibility in which services would count toward the federal mandates (15 out of 30).

Conclusions

A single study, conducted by one researcher, of an initiative as complex as the New York State Bridge Program has inherent advantages and unavoidable limitations. Both the advantages and the limitations need to be taken into account when this study’s conclusions are presented. Eight conclusions appear to be warranted, given this study’s findings.

1. Systems change is evident in the New York State Bridge Program, and it can be attributed to the implementation of TANF-related policy. Examples of systems changes include: Changes in organizational structure, changes in organizational culture and climate, changes in organizational short-term goals, changes in reporting systems, and changes in professionals’ service attitudes and behaviors.

2. Systems change in this state has proceeded with a traditional, top-down policy implementation process characterized by single-loop learning mechanisms. The mechanism includes a hierarchical chain of command and firm policy mandates that facilitate implementation fidelity. This conventional implementation approach has proven to be an efficient and effective approach in initiating predetermined systems change. Negative sanctions, such as funding reduction, and other mandates, such as mandated monthly reporting system, ordered by the federal government also facilitate this kind of TANF-related, systems change.
3. *Human capital development with a long term view, via formal education connected to career ladders in anticipation of evolving demands from the economy, appears to be a casualty of TANF’s implementation in the New York State Bridge Program.* A “work-first philosophy”, which is consistent with TANF’s mandated timeframe, appears to have trumped work readiness via formal schooling and vocational training. To the extent that this conclusion is warranted, the implications for workforce development and the overall life chances of TANF clients are profound, especially in today’s global economy and its requirements for postsecondary education. Further, it raises questions about the contributions of TANF to overall economic development imperatives driven by the same forces.

4. *Implementation fidelity of TANF with its’ predetermined systems change imperatives and requirements have occurred at the expense of front-line workers’ discretionary power, perhaps affecting service delivery and, in turn, long-term client outcomes.* With strong incentives to comply with the regulated systems change, professionals attempt to perform their duties as intended by the federal government. Such compliance brings mixed results. On the positive side, it ensures more program stability and job security. However, the lack of flexibility in regulations and job performance requirements tends to constrain professionals’ ability to meet multiple client needs. Coupled with the shift from “education first” to “jobs first”, a lack of flexibility and discretionary authority at the frontline level may jeopardize TANF’s primary aim of encouraging clients’ long-term self-sufficiency.
5. *TANF’s implementation has resulted in inter-agency partnerships and new working relationships among Bridge professionals.* The co-location arrangements identified and described in this study are especially important. They are conductive to successful partnerships among agencies and new working relationships among professionals.

6. *However, genuine partnerships among agencies and authentic collaboration among professionals are not fully in evidence at the time this study was conducted because they cannot be coerced and also because TANF’s implementation has not created conducive conditions and attendant capacities.* For example, resource dependencies and service duplication arrangements have produced inter-agency competition. Such an ironic effect is among the unintended consequences of policy implementation, and it signals important difference between espoused and enacted policy.

7. *Single-loop policy learning mechanisms accompany TANF’s implementation and, consistent with the research literature, these mechanisms limit learning, knowledge generation, and overall improvement mechanisms.* Double-loop learning mechanisms, especially ones that proceed with backward-mapping and bottom-up learning and improvement priorities, were not in evident as formal policy instruments at the time this study was completed. Although the researcher identified mechanisms for what amounts to “invisible” double-loop learning, their potential has not been realized at the time this study was completed.

8. When research investigations embrace the complexity of initiatives such as the NYS Bridge Program, and they are designed to focus on two or more units of
analysis, multiple theories and theoretical frameworks are needed for data interpretation and theory articulation. *Because these theories and theoretical frameworks derive from two or more disciplines, research on complex change is inherently an interdisciplinary exercise.*

**Lessons Learned and Implications for Future Research**

The enactment of TANF has raised many complicated issues. The complexity may be under-estimated because it became most apparent during the process of policy implementation. The same lesson learned accompanied this study: It entailed more complexity than anticipated initially.

This research, like the Bridge program’s policy implementation, required continuous learning and improvement mechanisms. For example, the research became a multi-disciplined study which required a vast amount of effort to understand and integrate the relevant theories. As a matter of fact, this multi-disciplined effort was an important contribution to the field.

On the other hand, the complicated and inter-twined relationships in theories and practices posed great challenges to the researcher. Challenges were evident in data collection, data analyses, data interpretations, and theory articulation. Some such challenges were too formidable to address in one study proceeding with a single researcher. In this fundamental respect, this study raises as many questions as it answers.

Lessons learned about data collection are especially relevant to other researchers. The researcher had to be able to identify, describe, explain, and theorize inter-personal and inter-agency relationships, thus necessitating an interview protocol that was lengthy and required a long time. In some cases, due to time restriction, interviewed
professionals had to cut the interviews short. In these cases, the interview questions were not completed.

Although the lengthy but detailed interviews offered rich data, they also increased the level of difficulty in data analysis. The greatest challenge was to explore and analyze the data under different units of analysis employed for the various policy stages (Figure 6-1). Since units of analysis were nested in one another, the theoretical boundaries of data interpretation became hard to define and maintain.

Other lessons learned from this study will facilitate future research. One major suggestion for researchers conducting similar research in the field would be to start with a single aspect of systems change (e.g., the shift from education for jobs to work first). The approach might seem slow but could save the researcher a great deal of struggle throughout the research process. Moreover, the deeper understanding in each aspect would facilitate data analysis and interpretation.

That said, a single issue approach threatens to over-simplify a genuinely complex change process. So, what a researcher gains in research facilitation is accompanied by losses in ecological validity. Trade-offs like these are endemic in research on complex change. These intractable trade-offs are instrumental in recommendations for teams of researchers for investigations of complex change initiatives.

Lessons Learned and Implications for Policy and Practice

The researcher attempted to understand and delineate an important systems change in public policy—the implementation of the NYS Bridge Program during a period of welfare reform—using five major theoretical perspectives. The five perspectives included human capital, systems change, intended verses implemented policies,
Lessons Learned and Implications for Policy

Human Capital:

1. Re-focusing human capital to encompass the overall well-being of the family:

   The concept of human capital covers the overall well-being of a person, including physical, mental, emotional, and family health, and knowledge. The finding of “the neglect of children in the picture of TANF reform” raises the issue of the overall well-being of a family. According to the research finding, not only are the needs of children not being addressed, it does not appear that the Bridge youth program in the Bridge receive much attention.

   In the book, “Whatever it takes,” Paul Tough (2008) argues cogently that the development of human capital starts from childhood. If the parents do not spend time and receive enough training and knowledge in parenting, the chance that is given to the children to break the welfare generational cycle is minimal. Therefore, in order to intervene effectively to break the generational cycle, a required first step will be to re-examine the current TANF mandates and re-focus the interventions to increase human capital development to a broader but more fundamental unit, the family.

2. Re-instituting “career ladder” building as an intervention—

   Many interviewed professionals expressed their concern regarding “the inability of short-term job search and readiness” activities to meet the needs of clients in the current economic milieu. Even though the clients are generally able to find employment within 4-6 weeks, the available job opportunities are mostly
so-called “dead-end jobs.” These jobs tend to be part-time, paid by hour, and have no fringe benefits. Even though the programs offer post-employment training for those who already hold jobs, it is not an easy task to have them come back in the evenings for extra training. This is due to various factors, such as childcare, transportation, etc.

Because TANF is perceived in terms of mandated participation rates, the professionals felt the Bridge Program has became another “revolving door” for the clients who have already experienced long-term employment. In order to stop the phenomenon of “welfare revolving door,” many professionals suggest planning and long-term career ladder services be reinstituted. They argued that working with the clients on a long-term plan for training acquisition based on the current job market and the clients’ personal wishes could motivate the client to learn and succeed.

3. Establishing a safe and positive community for the families—

Good values and behaviors are contagious, but so are bad ones (Tough 2008). It is believed that the community environment could have a great impact on the residents’ behaviors and values, especially for children, if there are more resources invested in establishing a safe and positive community. This belief is premised on an underlying assumption that the community as a whole can come to recognize and acknowledge the impact that positive behaviors and values can have on advancing level of human capital in a community. Investment and the creation of a positive, safe community create a positive cycle that can be sustained.
Systems Change:

1. **Re-structuring the system to encourage the use of long-term “client-centered” interventions; monitoring and evaluating the interventions periodically; and setting the stage for both single-loop and double-loop organizational learning**—

   Systems change under TANF was mainly manifested in the adoption of short-term interventions to meet the mandated federal participation rate. Some professionals noted the struggles they faced when making service decisions: “well, it’s not going to count (as participation rate), but this is good for the client.” On the one hand, they really wanted to see the client succeed in the long-term; however, on the other hand, they always had to be aware of achieving the rate.

   In order to truly help the clients as well as attend to the mission of self-sufficiency, some immediate and continuous interventions should be provided for treating the specific problem. At the same time, the agency professionals need to closely monitor and evaluate the interventions periodically to assure that standards of quality and effective progress are being met. The monitoring and evaluation procedures should not be terminated until the issues are fully addressed and problems are completely recovered.

2. **Re-examining current TANF mandates**—

   Many professionals reported that in the initial stage of TANF, their caseload decline was dramatic. In short, the organizational and individual changes seemed to work in the beginning of the TANF years. However, there was some evidence that after more than a decade of TANF enactment, caseloads began to rise again.
The federal government needs to re-examine and re-evaluate current TANF mandates. If there are still the same people recycling in and out of the welfare system, the government is obligated to ask a policy learning question: “Who has not been successful over the years and why?” Answers to this question would help in crafting a new strategy that is more effective in addressing recidivism and the needs of the current population.

3. *Allowing the clients to accumulate personal wealth*—

One of the restrictions in the welfare system has been the limitation in how much personal wealth can be accumulated. Several professionals at the leadership level expressed this particular concern. The TANF welfare system creates “disincentives” for the clients. It introduces barriers to the accumulation of personal wealth by not allowing clients to have a savings account over a certain amount. The logic is clear: Once savings go over the allowable amount, the client’s welfare check gets reduced.

Therefore, professionals saw as important the need to create a policy that encourages clients to create and accumulate wealth. In turn, this incentive would create more incentives and motivation to conduct working activities. As noted by professionals, society eventually gains their return on investment because these clients become productive members of the society—not only contributing to the workforce but also paying taxes in the long-term.

4. *Reconfiguring service philosophies, delivery systems, and job descriptions to enable more “human-centered” services for clients and providing more flexibility to front-line workers, in carrying out services in this economic difficult time*—
All the additional resources identified above are seen by professionals as vital in helping the program to become more successful. However, these requested resources need to be prioritized if current client population’s needs are to be addressed realistically in times of economic recession. Since more staff and funding increases do not seem feasible in the current economic climate, easing stringent TANF mandates would grant the Bridge professionals more flexibility and autonomy in providing much needed supports for the clients. Such a change in the discretion afforded workers would include more flexibility in performing job searches and readiness activities, which also would allow professionals to focus more on clients’ needs and building human capital skill sets. Once the overall economic environment recovers, the clients would be equipped adequately with marketable skills. Such a human capital investment could increase the possibility of getting the clients off welfare and becoming self-sufficient in the long term.

Lessons Learned and Implications for Practice

Partnerships

1. Co-locating relevant service agencies is advantageous in several respects—

   Two of the three counties selected for interviews co-located the major Bridge programs in the same building. This organizational arrangement not only proved to be more convenient for the clients who then did not have to worry about transportation, but also enhanced the agencies communications and working relationships. It gave workers more opportunities to know and understand one another in regard to professionals and personal aspects. More professional and
personal contacts were preconditions for establishing trust among agency professionals and nurturing the working relationships in the long-term. At the same time, information flow within the same building became more timely, efficient, and effective, which also helped to improve the quality and accuracy of the services.

Another intended benefit for the clients in regard to co-location was: co-location of service agencies removed the barrier of transportation. Once they were able to come to the main building, all needed services, such as childcare, job search and readiness classes, office equipments, could be accessed freely. This arrangement also eliminated one of the most commonly used excuses among clients—that of service access—and professionals indicated that it cultivated a stronger sense of client responsibility.

2. *Eliminating service duplication is not an automatic outcome of coordinative working relationships and inter-agency partnerships*—

As many interviewed professionals indicated, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration were not automatic outcomes. Because there is usually more than one agency/organization providing the same service to the clients, duplication of services is normative. Because services require resources, and resources are in increasingly short supply, competition for resources often trumps cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. This ironic finding is important for policy and practice.

The researcher proposes that the state leading agencies, SUNY Bridge and OTDA, need to re-examine and re-evaluate the current provided service structure.
The opportunity exists for powerful double-loop organizational learning focused on two priorities.

*First,* it is important to periodically review the outcomes and necessity of services so that services can be updated to meet the current workforce and societal needs. *Second,* it would be helpful to establish a unique niche for each type of service agency so that they could focus on a single area only and be the expert in that area. These changes would not only reduce the negativity of excessive competition, it would engender a feeling that everyone is in the same network working toward the same goal but building on different strengths. This would help to eliminate the waste of resources and service duplication.

**Intended verses Implemented Policies**

1. **Listening to the voices of street level workers to gain new knowledge for single- and double-loop policy learning and improvement mechanisms—**

   Many professionals expressed discontent that the TANF mandates were too unrealistic and could not be achieved. Those providing services at the local level, however, were either not able or willing to openly voice those concerns to the top state and federal administrators. They feared reprisals, including job loss. Findings like these are indicative of defensive behavior and passive-defensive organizational climates, both of which are enemies of powerful, positive organizational learning (Argyris and Schön 1974; Argyris and Schon 1996).

   In order to bring the gap between the intended and implemented policies closer, it is important to hear from the front-line workers who deal with the clients daily at the street level. Having regular periodic meetings that include
professionals at all levels would help bridge the gap. It would not only help the building of relationship among the professionals but also the development of mutual trust. Maintaining a greater sense of mutual trust would encourage street level professionals to open up and share their preferences, opinions, and dilemmas to leaders at the top level.

Organizational Learning:

1. Having a liaison for communications and negotiations between the federal and the state levels would comprise a facilitate policy implementation bridging and learning mechanism—

   It is a common practice to have a liaison between the local and state levels in many public service agencies. However, there is usually no liaison in place for the communications and negotiations between the federal and the state governments. If there could be a liaison between the federal and the state levels, the feedback mechanism in the actual policy implementation would be more timely and accurate.

   Such a liaison arrangement promises to address a main problem identified in this dissertation. The problem of information asymmetry may be lessened and the information gap between the principal and the agent may be brought closer. As a result, the federal government would be able to become more responsive to the actual policy needs at the street level. This would also help the policy implementation advance in double-loop learning that would facilitate the correction of the policy problems on an ongoing basis and the resolution of social issues in the long-term.
Possible Future Research Directions

The study was conducted qualitatively with face-to-face interviews and document analyses. Therefore, the scale of the data collection was limited due to the limitation on time and research personnel. Possible future research could be conducted in three phases. The first phase would still be qualitative; the second phase would be quantitative; and the third phase would be for international comparison across different countries and cultures.

The first phase would be another follow-up interview with the thirty professionals in this study. The purpose of this phase is to understand more of the organizational on personal impacts from the TANF systems change. The research would encompass the following aspects.

1) Research could be done to further investigate the attitudes toward TANF changes between professionals who were already serving in the social service field before TANF time and the ones who came into the field after the enactment of TANF.

2) Research could be extended to explain and investigate in more depth the impact of the safety net on the professionals’ decision-making in services. In New York State, the safety net is always available after the TANF clients run out of their TANF supports. The availability of the safety net may play an important role as professionals weigh the different criteria and options for the clients.

3) Research could be done to further examine the role of middle managers in implementation of TANF. The current existing literature either focuses on the leader or front-line levels. Middle managers play roles, “the buffer” and “the bridge” between the two levels. However, there has not much research done that
addresses the roles and the impacts of middle managers on the overall change of welfare reform.

4) Research could further investigate organizational learning on the issue of welfare reform. There is little existing research and literature in the field that specifically attends to this important cycle/pattern of process.

5) Research could be initiated on clients’ perspectives on the system, the overarching policy, and needed improvement mechanisms and priorities.

After the first phase is completed, a second phase of quantitative research data collection could be advanced. Since the current study only includes three Bridge Programs in three New York State Counties, the quantitative research would like to approach all the thirty-five Bridge Programs within the state. Based on the primary findings from the three counties, a survey could be designed to confirm the current findings and explore other variables that affect the TANF systems changes, implementation, partnerships, and organizational learning in the Bridge relevant agencies. Surveys may be sent out to Bridge relevant program personnel at different levels (leader, middle manager, front-line worker). Moreover, as the survey data collection finishes, data analysis would include controls. Of interest in this analysis would be differences between counties based on size, service delivery structures, etc. The findings would allow more detailed understanding of commonalities, similarities and differences among counties.

And finally, the third phase of the research would take the results from this mixed-method research approach to examine the different societal and cultural aspects of
welfare policy. The research could be designed based on the structure and findings from this specific U.S. system. In order to accomplish this phase, more research and literature need to be addressed on the aspects of culture, society, and the different political systems.
Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

Probing Questions:
- What do you mean by…
- Can you give a specific example?
- That sounds interesting, can you say more about it?
- Why do you think that this is the case?
- What are your reactions to these things?
- Then what happened?
- (How) So….

The Overarching Research Questions
1. Ten years following the enactment of TANF, to what degree has the implementation of the New York State Bridge Program adhered to the original TANF vision?
2. What changes have occurred in the Bridge Program as TANF has been implemented?
3. Are there inter-organizational changes occurred?
   - If yes, how have these changes facilitated the implementation of the Bridge Program?
   - If no, how are collaborative practices and inter-agency relationships developed and maintained?

The enactment of TANF has changed many practices in the social service agencies. The purpose of this study is to understand the development of the systems capacities and organizational relationships which accompany the policy changes in relevant agencies. In order to better understanding the matter from different aspects in the organization, some background knowledge will need to be obtained at the individual level. My first question is:

General Questions regarding Individual’s Experience in the Bridge Program
1. How long have you worked in the Bridge Program?
2. Could you describe your working history (including job title and job description) in the Bridge Program
   (Prompt: the role in the program, what do/did you do)

Retrospective Perspective
In the next section, I will be focusing on the changes in the Bridge Program after TANF in the intra-agency setting at the organizational level.
First I will ask you about changes in your organization. Then I will ask you about changes in your organization’s relationships with other organizations involved in the Bridge Program.

Intra-agency Situation
A. Organizational Aspects—
1. What were the Bridge Program goals before TANF?
   (prompt: function, objective)
2. What were the dominating principles of the Bridge Program before TANF?
3. What are the Bridge Program goals after TANF?
4. Has the service structure in your organization changed since TANF in comparison to pre-TANF?
   (prompt: academic orientation, job training orientation, job search orientation)

5. Has the case planning and administration process changed since TANF in comparison to pre-TANF?
   (prompt: paperwork flow, students’ applications)
6. (Skip Q) Are the Bridge goals determined by the TANF mandates only? Or are there other Bridge important program missions in addition to the TANF mandates? (For yes) If there are, what are they?

Please help me understand how the transition from AFDC to TANF has affected you and your job.

B. Individual Aspects—
1. Did TANF change your job in any ways? If yes, how? Please explain.
   (prompt: change service programs, structures, goals, procedures)
2. Did the new mandates require your job goals to be changed?
   (prompt: job description, title change)
3. (Skip if no) If yes, what are the changes?
4. How does TANF affect the Bridge Program for those who are at your level?
5. Post-TANF, which parts of your job are the most difficult to perform? Why?
6. How do you address the difficulties?
7. Post-TANF, which parts of your job are the easiest to perform? Why?
8. Do you need additional supports and resources to be successful in your job? Please explain.
   (prompt: political support, financial support)

In the following section, I would like to understand your individual experience about the inter-agency relationships among the Bridge associated programs.

Inter-agency Arrangements and Their Impact on Individuals and Their Jobs:

A. Organizational Aspects—
   (In the Pre-TANF stage)
1. Pre-TANF, did the Bridge Program require you to work with other people in other agencies?
2. (If yes) Was there a formal inter-agency working team for carrying out the Bridge Program’s goals? If yes, how was the team formed? Who served on it? How was membership determined?
3. (If no) How did individuals located in different agencies work together? Were they effective without a true team?
4. (If no) How did individual agencies fulfill their organizational goals?

   (During the Transition of TANF)
5. Post-TANF, have these inter-agency working relationships changed? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. How would you evaluate your agency’s working relationships with these other agencies before TANF? Specifically, were these Pre-TANF relationships successful and effective? Please explain.
7. Now compare the Pre-TANF arrangements with the Post-TANF arrangements, which seems better for you? Please explain.
The next set of questions focuses specifically on the Post-TANF implementation of the Bridge Program.

(After TANF enacted)
8. What specific goals does your agency address?
9. What goals do other agencies address? (Please identify the agencies and the goals)
10. Does your agency’s ability to achieve its goals depend on other agencies’ ability to achieve theirs? In other words, can your agency be successful if the others are not?
11. Are there formal protocols (such as names, rules, organizational structure/chart, channels of communications, etc.) for these Bridge associated agency players?
12. Is there a common vision among these associated players? (If yes) Does everyone recognize it?

(The interactions among the Bridge associated agency players)
13. How are the working relationships and experiences among these Bridge associated players?
14. What are the incentives for working together?
   (prompt: need, efficiency, pressure)
15. What are the barriers in working together?
   (prompt: competition, past relationship)

The following section is designed to understand the interactions among associated agency players and how individuals work together pre-TANF and after TANF.

B. Individual Aspects—
1. How would you characterize your working relationships with members in the Bridge associated agencies? Pre-TANF and after TANF?
2. Would you depend on other members to achieve your job goals? In other words, can your job in the Bridge Program be successful without them? Pre-TANF and after TANF?
3. Would you communicate and exchange information regularly with members in relevant agencies? Pre-TANF and after TANF?
   (prompt: news, updates)
4. Would you share data regularly with members in other agencies? Pre-TANF and after TANF?
   (prompt: students’ information)
5. Would you have shared standard/criteria in making decisions with members in relevant agencies? Pre-TANF and after TANF?
   (prompt: rules, regulations (internal or external))
6. Would you plan things together with members in relevant agencies? Pre-TANF and after TANF?
   (prompt: draw the whole picture together, lay out the overall services together)
7. Would you work toward the same vision with members in relevant agencies? What is that vision? Pre-TANF and after TANF?
8. How was/is the working atmosphere among the Bridge associated players? Competitive or inter-dependent?
9. Did/ do conflicts occur among one another? (If yes) how were/are they solved?
10. How would decisions be made within the team? Pre-TANF and after TANF?

Please provide next information about social services designs in the Bridge program, both pre-TANF and post-TANF.
Issues in Human Capital:
(Pre-TANF and After TANF)
4. (Pre) How was the concept of education integrated into the Bridge Program services?
2. (Post) How is the concept of education integrated into the Bridge Program services?

3. (Pre) How was the concept of employment integrated into the Bridge Program services?

4. (Post) How is the concept of employment integrated into the Bridge Program services?

5. (Pre) Were the educational and employment components integrated with one another? If yes, how? If no, why?

6. (Post) Are the educational and employment components integrated with one another? If yes, how? If no, why?

7. (Pre) Was education or employment more focused and preferred by the Bridge Program professionals? Why?

8. (Post) For education or employment, what is more focused and preferred by the Bridge Program professionals? Why?


How about the distribution of accountability and responsibility in the Bridge Program?

Issues in Federalism:
(Pre-TANF and After TANF)

1. How were/ are accountabilities shared in the Bridge Program?

2. How were/ are responsibility shared in the Bridge Program?

3. How were/ are the Bridge services designed? Was/ Is there a unified reference for the Bridge Program professionals to design the services (such as State JOBS? TANF Plan, etc.)?

For a person who is in your seat, can you compare and contrast the Bridge Program pre-TANF and After TANF? Could you also think about the impacts on your position once TANF is enacted?

Issues in Bureaucratic Discretion vs. Intended and Implemented Policies:

1. Leadership:
   a. When TANF first came out, did you understand completely the NYS approach to it? Please explain
   (prompt: very different from the previous plans, very similar to the previous plan)
   b. Did you see how the NYS TANF Plan fit into the Bridge Program services?
   c. Did the TANF Plan integrate easily with the Bridge services or did the two programs have different agendas?
   d. What is the relationship between the two programs (TANF and Bridge) today?
   e. How did you introduce the TANF mandates into the Bridge Program?
   f. How did you communicate those changes to your staff?
   (prompt: through meetings, emails, personal communications)
   g. Have these initial changes been maintained? Please explain.

2. Leadership vs. Middle Managers:
   a. How did you (and other leaders) convey the changing TANF mandates to middle managers?
   b. Did you (middle managers) see the value of the NYS TANF Plan as a consistent complimentary plan with the Bridge Program goals? If yes, why? If no, why not?
   c. Have these initial changes (Bridge from pre-TANF to post-TANF) been maintained? Please explain.

3. Middle Managers vs. Front-line Workers:
   a. How did you (middle managers) communicate the changes to your front-line
workers?

b. How did you (middle managers) see your roles in this TANF-related transition period?
   (prompt: planner, inter-mediator, implementer)

c. (Middle managers only) Middle managers like you are caught in the middle between leaders and front-line workers. Did you encounter any special challenges because of your position “in between” these two kinds of workers?

4. Front-line Workers:
   a. How did you initially understand the NYS TANF Plan? Have your perceptions changed?
   b. In your view, was the NYS TANF Plan easy to integrate with the Bridge Program’s existing goals and requirements? Did you see the value of the NYS TANF Plan as a consistent complimentary plan with the Bridge Program goals? If yes, why? If no, why not?
   c. Have these initial changes (Bridge from pre-TANF to post-TANF) been maintained? Please explain.
   d. Think back to when you first implemented the NYS TANF plan. Were you challenged as you began to implement it? Please explain. Were there challenges in carrying out the NYS TANF Plan initiated in your position? If yes, in what aspects?
   e. (If yes) How did you overcome the challenges? Were you successful? Please explain.
   f. Are those challenges still there today? Please explain.
   g. Are there enough resources and flexibility allowing you to implement the new TANF mandates in the Bridge Program at your level? Please explain.

5. Implementation Dynamics:
   a. Compare the original TANF policy with today’s Bridge Program and its services. Has the original TANF policy been implemented completely in the Bridge Program? Explain. Do you see the Bridge overall services correspond to the original TANF policy intentions? If not, in what aspects and why not?
   b. When intended policies do not correspond to actual practices in the Bridge Program, are there mechanisms for detecting these mis-matches? Are there mechanisms for correcting these mis-matches? Explain.
   c. Are there any bonuses for policy matches between the intended policies and the implemented policies? If yes, what are they?
   d. Are there negative sanctions when policies are not implemented effectively?
   e. Are those penalties (or bonuses) working in promoting policy matches between the intended policies and the implemented policies? If yes, how? If no, why?
   f. No researcher is able to anticipate everything about a complex initiative like the Bridge Program in the post-TANF era. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the Bridge Program, Post-TANF, that I should know about?
Appendix 2: Consent Form for Participating in the Study

Dear Ms./Mr.______

You are invited to participate in research focused on the NYS Bridge Program’s Approach to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The primary aim of this study is to understand the systems change between intended policies—also called “policies on the drawing board” and enacted policies, i.e., the actual policies implemented. The secondary aim is to identify, describe, and explain the factors and forces associated with this systems change.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed by Yi-jung Wu, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, University at Albany. The interview consists of the relationships at the intra-, inter-agency, and individual levels. It is expected to take about one hour or less of your time. Your knowledge of the Bridge Program and expertise in the policy development and implementation process will contribute to this research.

This research involves minimum risk. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. The researcher will not release the names of interviewees. All identifiable personal information will be excluded from the research writing. The collected data will be used only for the research purpose.

Your participation is totally voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any question. Moreover, you are free to withdraw from the research at any point.

Your interviews will be recorded and transcribed. However, if you do not feel comfortable being recorded during the interview (or at any point of the interview), you can always say “no” at which time the interviewer will turn off the recorder. All the interview files and transcripts will be saved in a password-protected personal computer to assure the confidentiality of the data. All the collected data will be destroyed by May 31, 2011, three year after successfully defending the dissertation.

The knowledge gained from this research will be presented at conferences and published in one or more academic journals. Additionally, I will provide you, on request, an executive summary of my research findings so that you and your agency will benefit.

The final products of the research will be a doctoral dissertation submitted to School of Education, University at Albany, SUNY, academic conference presentations, and academic journal articles. Again, the aforementioned confidential rules will be applied to all the final products in the research.

Thank you very much for your attention. If you have further question or concern,
please feel free to contact me at: 518-788-8148 or yijungwu@hotmail.com, yw4429@albany.edu. If you would like to learn more regarding your right of being a participant, please contact the Compliance Office, Institutional Review Board, University at Albany at 518-437-4569.

Again, thank you very much for your time and consideration. I am looking forward to hearing from you and choosing to be a part of the study.

Sincerely,

Yi-jung Wu
yw4429@albany.edu; yijungwu@hotmail.com
518-788-8148
Doctoral Student, Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies
School of Education, University at Albany, State University of New York

(Note: A hard copy of the consent form will be provided to you for your record and reference)

I, ___________________(Print name, please), hereby

☐ Agree
☐ Do not agree

to participate in the research titled: “A Case Study of Intended Policies and Implemented Policies in the New York State Bridge Program for the TANF Population” which is conducted by Yi-jung Wu.

☐ I agree to tape-record the interview
☐ I do not agree to tape-record the interview

Participant’s signature_____________________________ Date:__________
Appendix 3: Coding Scheme

G.INFO: GENERAL INFORMATION
G.INFO-W.HIS: Interviewees’ working history
-Post-TANF experience only
-Pre- and post-TANF experience

G.INFO-PG&OP: Program primary goal and operational principle
-Bridge primary goals and operational principle-AFDC
-Bridge primary goals and operational principle-TANF

G.INFO-WISH: Wish list
-Additional supports for the position-more time for job development
-Additional supports for the position-form more partnerships within the community
-Additional supports for the position-better assessments for clients
-Additional supports for the position-cases of best practice for the professional
-Additional supports for the position-childcare
-Additional supports for the position-funding
-Additional supports for the position-more channels of communication to the top
-Additional supports for the position-more flexibility
-Additional supports for the position-more human-centered element
-Additional supports for the position-more political support
-Additional supports for the position-more professional training for the staff
-Additional supports for the position-more stable policy environment
-Additional supports for the position-more training in regulations from the state
-Additional supports for the position-more transitional services
-Additional supports for the position-staffing
-Additional supports for the position-technology
-Additional supports for the position-transportation

HC: HUMAN CAPITAL
HC-EDU: Educational focus
-Education

HC-EPLY: Employment focus
-Employment

HC-OTHER: Other Human Capital Issues
-Career ladder
-Harder-to-serve due to lack of human capital

INT & IMP: INTENDED and IMPLEMENTED
INT & IMP-LIP: Lipsky’s street level bureaucracy
-Flexible services under AFDC
- Flexible services under TANF
- Inability of the current training/service
- Lack of flexibility
- Staff discretion and autonomy under AFDC
- Staff discretion and autonomy under TANF
- Tightly specified services under AFDC
- Tightly specified services under TANF

**INT & IMP-P.A.: Principal-agent issues**
- Approach for staff feedback
- Detection of mis-match-no
- Detection of mis-match-yes
- Drawing board to implementation-same
- Drawing board to implementation-different
- Reward good performance
- Sanction bad performance

**ORG-LER: ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING**
**ORG-GER-DOU-L: Double loop learning**
- Double loop learning

**ORG-LER-SIN-L: Single loop learning**
- Single loop learning

**PART: PARTNERSHIPS**
**PART-AGN.INTACT: Partnered agencies interactions**
- Agencies not work well together
- Agencies work well together
- Barriers for communication and coordination
- Facilitator for communication and coordination
- Integrated service on education and employment
- Involved agencies
- Lack of we-feeling
- More competition among agencies due to TANF
- Need in inter-agency coordination
- Need-initiated communications/services
- TANF forced working together more
- Top-level not work/communicate well
- Top-level work/communicate well

**PART-DIF.DEVS: Roles at Different Levels**
- Front-line workers’ involvement in decision-making
- Front-line workers’ means of suggestions
- Leaders’ approach to communicate the mandates
- Middle manager’s challenge
PART-IND.ART: Individual artifacts
-Data-sharing
-Definition in collaboration-no
-Definition in collaboration-yes
-Definition in coordination-no
-Definition in coordination-yes
-Mutually recognized goals-no
-Mutually recognized goals-yes
-Operating assessment-Different
-Operating assessment-Same
-Regular communication and coordination

PART-MUT.REC: Mutual recognition
-Mutually recognized goals-no
-Mutually recognized goals-yes
-Mutually recognized mission-no
-Mutually recognized mission-yes

PART-ORG.ART: Organizational artifacts
-Agency joint-decision-making
-Agency joint-planning
-Approach for address difficulties
-Approach to coordinate inter-agency relationship
-Approach to staff conflict resolution
-Data-sharing
-Identity crisis
-Mutually recognized mission-no
-Mutually recognized mission-yes
-Operating data system-different
-Operating data system-same
-Operating evaluation system-different
-Operating evaluation system-same
-Regular communication and coordination

SCH: SYSTEMS CHANGE
SCH-ATT.CHG: Staff’s attitude toward changes
-Staff disagree with the change
-Staff support for the change

SCH-DIR.CHG: Direction of changes
-Bottom-up
-Outside-in
-Top-down

SCH-IND.CHG: Individual position-related change
-Job description change after TANF
- Job goals change after TANF
- Job role change after TANF
- Post-TANF job description
- Pre-TANF job description
- The easiest to perform in the position
- The most difficult to perform in the position

**SCH-ORG.CHG:** Organizational changes
- Good fit between TANF and Bridge
- Inability of the current training/service
- Lack of long-term development for clients
- Not good fit between TANF and Bridge
- Operating process change due to TANF
- Organizational goal change due to TANF
- Organizational mission change due to TANF
- Organizational structure change due to TANF
- Overall major change from AFDC to TANF
- Program and service change due to TANF
- TANF bettered the agency
- TANF impaired the agency
- TANF forced working together more

**OTHERS:** Others
- Murphy’s Law
- Others
- Things that would want to be done differently
Appendix 4: Executive Summary

To: ______________________

From: Yi-jung Wu, Doctoral Candidate,
Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies,
School of Education, University at Albany,
State University of New York

Date: October 3, 2008

Purpose: Review of the Executive Summary of Findings: Research on the Bridge Program

Dear ____________:

Thank you for your support and participation in my research study entitled “Exploring Systems Changes Associated with the Implementation of TANF in the New York State Bridge Program.” As promised during the interview, I am providing you with a brief five-page executive summary of the findings having now completed twenty-five interviews with thirty professionals in the field.

In order to ensure the validity of my research, I am asking you to give feedback on my findings. As you read through the document, please feel free to note your concerns or provide your comments about the accuracy of my findings in the margin and/or in a separate document. You can send your comments to me via an email, letter, or phone call (listed as the footnote on this page). As promised during your interview, your comments will be kept anonymous and confidential.

If you would take a few moments to offer your feedback, it would be truly appreciated. If I do not hear back from you in two weeks (by Friday, October 17, 2008), I will try to follow up with you to learn about your reactions. Once again, thank you for your support and participation.

Sincerely,

Yi-jung Wu

24 Stonehenge Lane, Apt. 21D
Albany, NY 12203
518-788-8148

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yijungwu@hotmail.com
Exploring Systems Changes Associated with the Implementation of TANF in the New York State Bridge Program  
Yi-jung Wu

Introduction

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 introduced revolutionary changes in social welfare policy in the U.S. At that time, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which had been the traditional centerpiece of American social welfare policy since 1935, was replaced by the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. With the implementation of TANF, policies and practices in state, county, and local systems changed, in turn affecting the working relationships among leaders, practitioners, state departments, and service organizations.

Despite the significant changes that occurred because of TANF, relatively few studies have explored the systems changes that ensued from its implementation. Often depicted as “a black box” by policy analysts, the causes for change are not transparent, easily understood, or studied. This lack of transparency has been unfortunate given that knowledge gained from understanding why and how changes occurred would offer important contributions to policy development and learning—as well as to inform our efforts to build overall capacity in support of positive systems change.

The present study was structured in response to this need to look inside the “black box” of policy and with an eye toward gaining practical knowledge of New York State’s social welfare policy and its program leaders, including the social services agencies and educational institutions. The purpose was to identify, describe and, where possible, explain the systems changes occurring in the NYS Bridge Program as a result of TANF’s implementation. More specifically, this study focused on identifying changes in roles, responsibilities and relationships at several related and interacting levels: individual, team, and organization. Figure 1 below depicts this complex, multi-level analysis.
The Main Research Questions

1. Ten years following enactment of TANF, what systems changes have occurred as a result of the implementation of the Bridge Program goals and strategies?
2. Has the Bridge Program developed the new systems capacities to achieve the TANF expected outcomes?
3. To what extent has the economic idea of human capital development (and human capital theories in general) influenced TANF’s implementation and system change mechanisms?

A Snapshot of the Main Findings

The following findings derive from twenty-five interviews conducted with thirty professionals—with three interviews involving two or more persons. These findings are categorized and edited by Atlas.ti, which is a qualitative research analysis software.

1. The Impact of TANF Changes:
   TANF regulations quickly changed the Bridge Program’s main goal, forcing the organization to move from an educational and training orientation to an employment focus. This change led to other changes, especially in job descriptions, job roles, and job goals at the level of local Bridge Office. For example, the description of a “typical” job goal quickly changed in response to the TANF mandate; it moved from a goal of job preparation to a stringent work orientation (i.e., getting the client a job, no matter what the job is). In addition, professionals now indicate they have to perform more routine
case management activities and complete many more reports for the administration than before under AFDC. This has had the effect of limiting the amount of time they can spend on clients’ individual issues.

During AFDC, professionals worked more like mentors, devoting a longer period of time with each client on learning and job search activities. In contrast, under TANF a professional’s role as a case manager is constrained by service time limitations imposed by federal regulatory policy. Bridge Program workers now strive to equip clients with basic skills, get them a job, and attempt to make sure they can keep the job for ninety days—all within six weeks as required under federal service completion requirements.

In addition, the concept of “temporary assistance” has led to changes in the ways work is organized and carried out. In fifteen interviews, interviewees believe that TANF has contributed to changes in how they do business and has affected their organizational culture. In thirteen interviews, interviewees identified specific changes in organizational structures. A good example of organizational structure change following TANF’s enactment has been the re-organization of the employment services unit. In some counties, the employment service unit has actually been separated from other government units and charged to serve only TANF clients and their transitional needs, such as childcare, transportation, etc. Another organizational change has been the co-location of offices, bringing several partner agencies located in the same building so that communication is easier for both the professionals and the clients.

2. The Difference in Fundamental Philosophies:

Conflict of interests and philosophies can occur when agency leaders work together without having a commonly recognized goal. Ideally, agency leaders will communicate and negotiate openly, thereby creating a reciprocal and sustainable partnership despite conflict. However, for those working without a common goal, communications often are constrained, and it is difficult to develop norms and protocols for inter-agency reciprocity.

Although all the involved agencies appear to share the same vision of self-sufficiency for the recipient, the underlying philosophies of the agencies participating in the Bridge Program remain different in many cases. For example, local DSS offices are forced to focus on participation rates. Yet, the Bridge Programs still adhere to the original core values of an educational and training institution. This fundamental philosophy difference logically should result in different organizational goals for agencies concerned. However, in two-thirds of the interviews, professionals believe the partnering agencies share a common goal. The remaining one-third is uncertain about whether there is such a common goal.

3. Coordination vs. Collaboration

Adequate levels of coordination can be reached while agencies perceive they share a common mission. Coordination involves harmonizing and synchronizing actions; it requires turn-taking that is orchestrated, usually according to established protocols. In two-thirds of the interviews, professionals acknowledged that they share a common mission with their partners and strive to coordinate their respective efforts. Although each of the involved agencies continue to work within its specific area of expertise, each of them also tried to meet TANF mandates through coordinated joint efforts with its
partners.

When the question goes further to *collaboration*, which is a genuine sense of inter-dependence among partners, two-thirds of the interviewees expressed views that they have seen the development of collaborative partnerships since the enactment of TANF. However, the other one-third of respondents believe that, despite the desire for partnerships, their agency could still survive independently without collaborative partnerships. Their reasoning was clear: The various agencies have different functions and goals.

4. When Agencies Were Forced to Have More Interactions, this also Produced Competition

In contrast to AFDC, the stringent TANF mandates and potential financial sanctions compel agencies to work together. Most interviewees indicated that their agency has good working relationships with their partner agencies. However, TANF mandates also create more competition among the agencies concerned. For example, similar services such as GED programs and job training programs are offered in more than one agency. Each agency strives to get more referrals from DSS so that the agency is in a better position for showcasing more success stories. Therefore, even though agencies are obliged to work together, tensions and competition between agencies do arise and there is some duplication in program and services being offered.

5. Feedback Mechanisms for Policy and Program Learning and Improvement

Stringent TANF mandates have created new service needs. As a result of these developing service needs, interviewees see a need for a feedback mechanism to provide information to the top level of management. This information will help them to devise more effective policies to monitor, understand, revise, and redefine front-line needs.

More than half of the thirty interviewees believe considerable feedback is already elicited and provided to the top levels of management. However, as indicated in interviews, front line workers appear not to be extensively involved in these feedback loops. Nor are they involved to a great extent in overall and continuous quality improvement efforts. In fact, this research identified skepticism among respondents regarding the extent to which critical, cogent feedback was actually used by top level leaders in undertaking systems changes.

6. Attitude toward TANF Changes:

In nine interviews, professionals disagreed with the changes accompanying TANF. In four other interviews, professionals expressed their support for TANF’s changes. In the other five interviews, interviewees showed ambivalent feelings toward the TANF changes.

Supporters believe that the changes from TANF have given the Bridge Program more legitimacy and have helped to assure accountability on both the client and the government side. Those opposed to the changes from TANF claim the new regulations have constrained their ability and flexibility to serve their clients. These professionals feel reluctant to follow the stringent mandates because they believe that the mandates are too unrealistic to achieve. However, noting the financial penalty for not complying with the requirements, they recognize that the mandates are something the organization cannot
afford to ignore. Therefore, critics of the changes from TANF are constantly finding themselves balancing between “making the rate” and “caring for the clients’ true needs.”

7. The Goodness of Fit between TANF and Bridge:

Around one-third of the interviewees do not see a good fit between TANF and the Bridge Program. These interviewees offer as reservations about the lack of long-term skill development and the loss of human-centered elements in TANF-based services. These concerns and the challenges, they suggest, are most prevalent at the local level.

Significantly, one-third of the interviewees believe that TANF has actually impaired their agency. They worry that the program has become too “participation rate-driven.” Programs and services driven by the participation rate, they observe, lose “the human touch” in service delivery. They also believe that professionals no longer have the time to care about each individual’s personal issues and often result in a career plan to improve their employability without really addressing the causes for their unemployment.

Not all interviewees share this view. In seven interviews, interviewees claim that TANF has improved the Bridge Program and increased the accountability placed on the clients and agencies. TANF’s specific goals and timeframe, respondents claim, prevents long-term welfare dependency and perpetuation of inter-generational welfare cycles.

Another five interviewees view the TANF changes as “a mixed package.” They see both the aforementioned positive and negative impacts of the changes. They also claim that the struggle between the two perspectives of wanting to retain the “human touch” while imposing mandated “accountability” is a kind of beneficial check-and-balance mechanism.

8. The Primary Difficulty Encountered by Service Providers:

The #1 difficulty encountered by the service providers is meeting the strictly-mandated participation rate. Even though the professionals in the agencies can exercise some discretion within the qualifying list providing by the federal government, TANF regulations have figuratively “tied the hands” of professionals’ as they choose among services to be offered to clients since only certain activities can be counted toward the participation rate. There is little or no flexibility within the ranges of countable versus non-countable eligible services.

The reduction of funding is another major challenge. The mandates require more services to be provided in order to fulfill the requirements, but the funding reduction does not allow too much room for an extension of services.

Other difficulties include substantial paperwork that results in job overload, also, not enough referrals from DSS, competition among agencies offering duplicative/similar services, ever-changing regulatory policies, difficulties in coordinating with other partner agencies, and the recalcitrance of clients to accept the concept of “temporary assistance” rather than unlimited welfare.

9. The Top Four “Most Needed Supports” Identified by Interviewees:

Interviewees were asked “if you could have three extra resources to help you succeed, what would be the three?” The top four identifies resources were:

#1. More funding (22 out of 30);
#2. A more human-centered focus which could support clients with individual issues
#3. More staff (16 out of 30);
#4. More flexibility (15 out of 30).

## 10. The Concept of Human Capital:

Human capital development is a concept anchored in economics. It gives rise to a focus on workforce development, including the roles of education and training in workforce readiness. The concept – as applied to workforce development – potentially has considerable importance for TANF and the Bridge Program. Is human capital development an explicit priority or implicit driver determining the direction of TANF and the Bridge Program policies? This research addressed this question.

Interviewees indicated that the population now coming under TANF and left on the welfare roll are harder-to-serve, in the sense that most have multiple barriers in obtaining jobs (such as deficit in skills, domestic violence, mental illness, etc). Half of the interviewees (two-thirds of whom were from Bridge Programs) recognized the concept of career ladder. However, with the program focus so strongly on employment, interviewees believed that there is very little flexibility for professionals to provide clients with long-term skill building/job planning services. Under TANF, a client can only receive twelve months of education/training over a lifetime. Previously, under AFDC, clients could earn a full college degree in pursuit of “a career”, not just “any job.”

### Brief Summary

The aforementioned findings and discussions provide only a limited snapshot of the research examining the Bridge Program. Because only twenty-five interviews were conducted with thirty professionals in the field, the researcher recognizes that there are limitations in term of the access to professionals at all levels and the degree to which findings can be generalized. In addition, because of time limitations afforded by a single interview and the complexity of the policy area, the researcher focused only on the most salient issues relating to system changes under TANF.

The researcher trusts that her findings contribute to policy learning and development as well as system capacity-building.
Appendix 5: Summary of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super Family</th>
<th>Primary Findings in the Family</th>
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</table>
| Systems Change | ▪ Program primary goal and operational principle, AFDC and TANF  
| | 1) no major changes in primary goal, self-sufficiency  
| | 2) dramatic changes in operational principle due to employment-first philosophy  
| | ▪ Changes in individual's roles, responsibilities, and orientations  
| | 1) leader: major challenge-lack of flexibility  
| | 2) middle manager: challenges are more diverse-lack of flexibility, lack of staffing, lack of funding, changeable policy environment, hard to coordinate among different service agencies in the community, hard to balance the mandates from the top and recognize front-line workers’ effort and struggle  
| | 3) front-line worker: major challenge-balance between the mandates and clients’ needs, educate the clients with the new concept of “temporary assistance,” increasing administrative workload  
| | ▪ Organizational change  
| | 1) changes in short-term organizational goals, organizational structure, organizational operating processes, reporting system |
| Intended Policies vs. Implemented Policies | ▪ Staff’s attitude toward changes  
| | 1) nine disagreed with the changes, four supported the changes, five felt ambivalent with the changes  
| | 2) eight believed TANF impaired the agency, seven thought TANF improved the agency, five saw the TANF effects as “a mixed package”  
| | ▪ Lipsky’s street level bureaucracy  
| | 1) all participants claimed that they have some room for discretion, but the also are aware of the need to exercise that discretion within the “safe zone” of federal regulations  
| | ▪ Principal-agent issue  
| | 1) Regarding congruity between intended and implemented policies, thirteen study participants reported “yes”, seven reported “no.” For those who said “yes”, they saw the TANF policies implemented faithfully “at the street level” matching the TANF intentions on the “drawing board”; for those who said “no”, they felt that TANF intended policies were too strict and too unrealistic to achieve.  
| | 2) more than half of the thirty study participants believed they provided significant feedback to the top levels of management, but were suspicious about how much their feedback actually influenced the decisions process.  
| Partnerships | ▪ Mutual recognition  
| | 1) all agencies shared the same mission self-sufficiency  
| | 2) the fundamental philosophies between the educational and social services agencies are seen as being different  
| | ▪ Interactions among partner agencies  
| | 1) major facilitator for effective coordination: regular face-to-face monthly or quarterly communication and open dialogue; major barrier impeding effective coordination: lack of policy influence at the top levels of policy making, resulting in the reluctance of communications  
| | 2) TANF forced agencies to work together more; however, TANF also created more competition among the service providers.  
| | ▪ Artifact: Shared Values, Processes, and Relationships  
| | 1) involved agencies professionals now have regular-scheduled meetings for joint-planning and decision-making processes; the process can also occur in an ad hoc fashion whenever multiple agency issues occur  
| | 2) the Bridge offices and DSSs professionals do not use the same data system, but |
do share data with one another which at some level eliminates assessment duplication and better understands clients issues

3) agencies have different fundamentally different philosophies, different expertise, resulting in different cultures.

4) two-third of the participants believed they do have coordinative working relationships: harmonizing, synchronizing, and turn-taking according to both the established protocols and the “tacitness” throughout the working relationships in the past years

5) two-thirds of participants believe that a collaborative working relationship has developed since TANF; but only one-third feel a sense of inter-dependency among partners.

6) the agency professionals that have coordinative/collaborative relationships maintain the unity of purpose as they fulfill TANF mandates, by: a) the regular monthly or quarterly meetings, b) the regular referrals flow: Local DSSs to Bridge Programs, c) the constant channels of data sharing from DSSs and Bridge Programs

7) for the agency professionals that share the sense of interdependency, they are mutually accountable, and strongly and voluntarily committed. Since the agencies are committed in pursuit of the same goal, they sometimes also try to mobilize agency resources across boundaries.

8) partnership evolution:

Stand-alone agency → cooperation → coordination → collaboration

a. Agency level:

Federal mandates initiated the need for agencies to work together → agency leaders start to build the organizational ties in order to attain the common goal → agency leaders all recognize and acknowledge the common mission, value, and working process, and the leaders feel the ownership of the relationship → agency leaders hold the sense of interdependency, and are willing to mobilize resources across agencies for successful collaborative relationships

b. Individual level:

The authoritative pressure and order from the top leaders force the inter-professional working relationships → professionals sense the urgency of reaching the goal and start to buy-in the idea → professionals trust, understand, and feel the sense of community among one another → professionals work together formally and informally with the sense of oneness (we-feeling).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization learning</th>
<th>Single-loop learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) learning is frequently reactionary to policy mandates, with organizational learning most often reflective of a single loop learning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Double-loop learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) some double-loop learning does occur as a result of participants going through the stages of “freeze, rebalance, unfreeze” when conducting inter-agency business and communicating at an inter-participant level</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human capital</th>
<th>Educational focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) education is no longer a major focus in Bridge after the TANF enactment, with little focus on the development of human capital</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) only short-term education and training are allowed in Bridge services since TANF, focusing more on job preparation than career development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) stringent mandates and an employment focus dictates most service activity offerings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other human capital issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) the hard-to-serve population usually encounter multiple barriers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) half of the study participants recognized the importance of career development for the clients, however, the stringent employment focused regulations limit the services provided for long-term development</td>
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