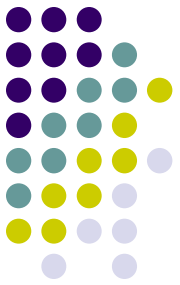# Strength-base, Solution-focused Supervision

Minnesota Department of Human Services

Child Safety & Permanency

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify the three focus areas of supervision

- Connect the strength-based, solution-focused approach (SBSFA) to the Open Systems Model and supervisory tasks.

- Identify the 4 phases of the Interactional Helping Model and the 7 Key Solution-focused Strategies.

- Identify the appropriate use of Solution-focused questions and skills.

- Identify opportunities to implement the strength-based, solution-focused interviewing and intervention approach in supervision.

AGENDA
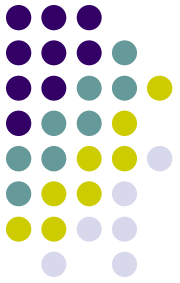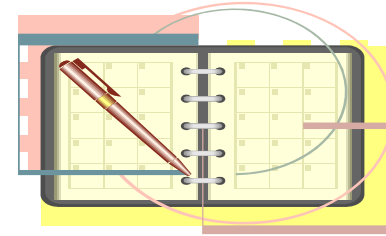
- Introductions and workshop overview
- Connecting the Strength-based, Solution-focused Approach (SBSFA) to the Open Systems Model and to the role of the supervisor and essential supervisory tasks.
- The Interactional Helping Model & the 7 Key Strategies from the Solution-focused Model.
- Application of the SBSFA to unit practice improvement
- Application of the SBSFA to individual worker supervision
- Simulated case conferences using the SBSFA and non-strength-based approach.
- Transfer of Learning
- Evaluation & Closing
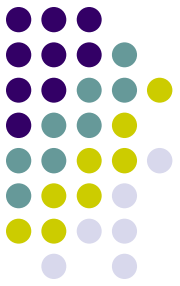
THE SBSFA DEFINED

The *Strength-based, Solution-focused Approach* is comprised of elements of the

- Interactional Helping Model (4 phases: Preparatory, Beginning, Middle, End) and the

- Solution-focused Approach which emphasizes resolution of problems and challenges by focusing on development of clear goals and developing strategies built on strengths and exceptions to the problem.
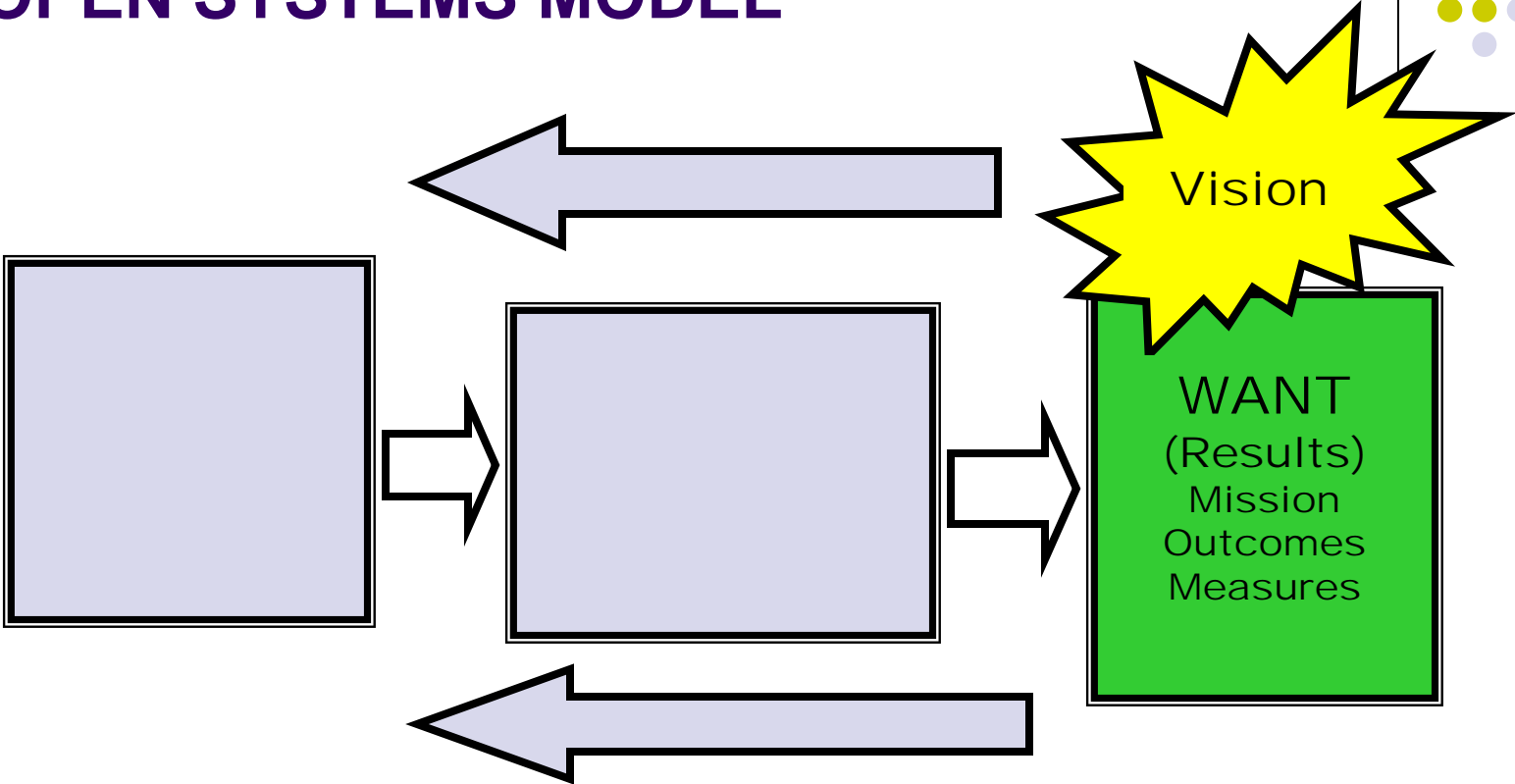
Three Focus Areas of Supervision

- Managing the work of the unit

- Professional development of staff

- External connections

OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL

Vision

WANT
(Results)
Mission
Outcomes
Measures

The Open Systems Model begins with clarification of what we want to accomplish: our unit mission/purpose, our mission-critical outcomes and the measures we plan to use to assess our effectiveness. Our unit mission/function must be congruent with and supportive of the agency's overall mission and vision.
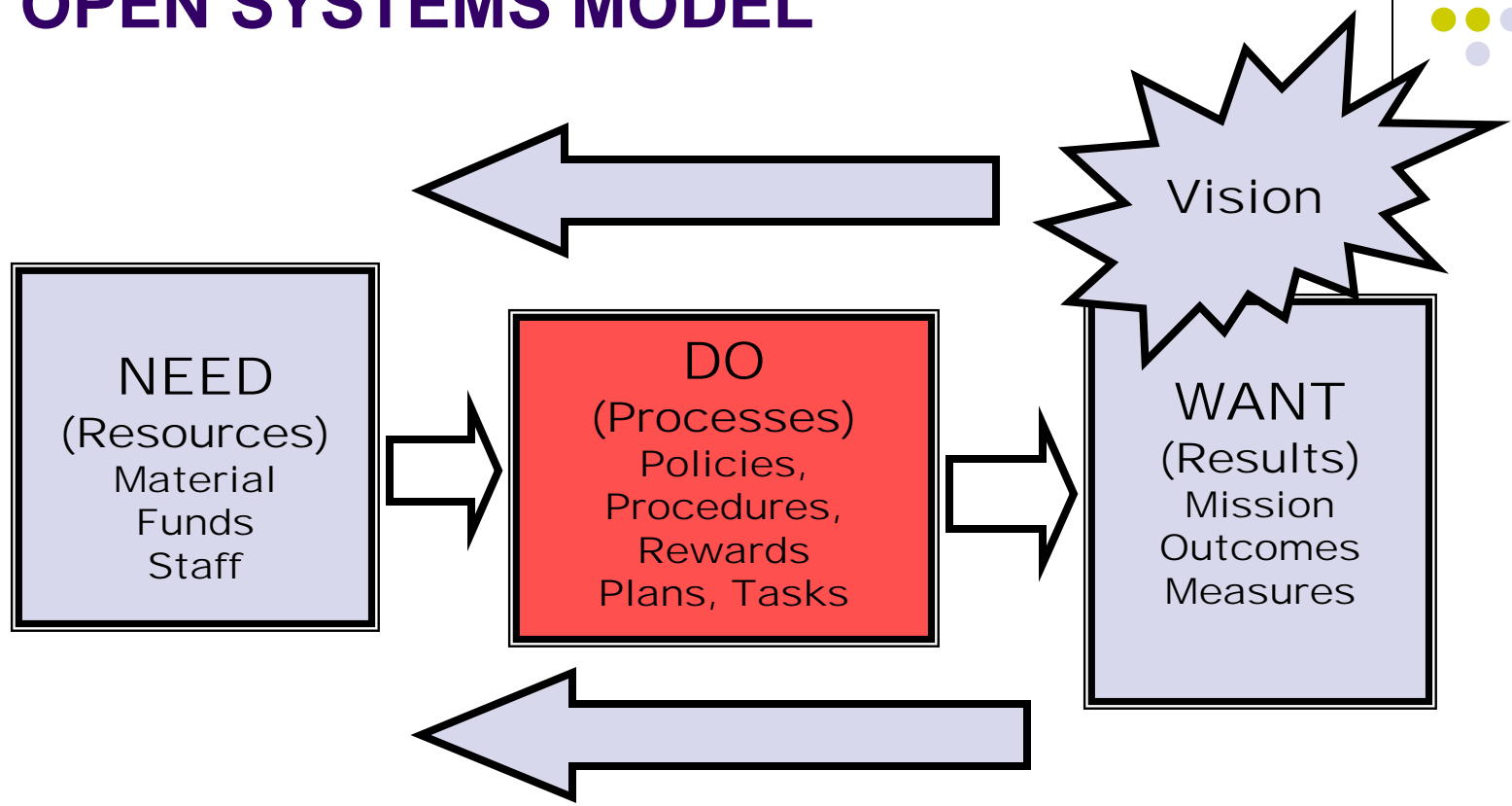
OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL

Vision

NEED
(Resources)
Material
Funds
Staff

WANT
(Results)
Mission
Outcomes
Measures
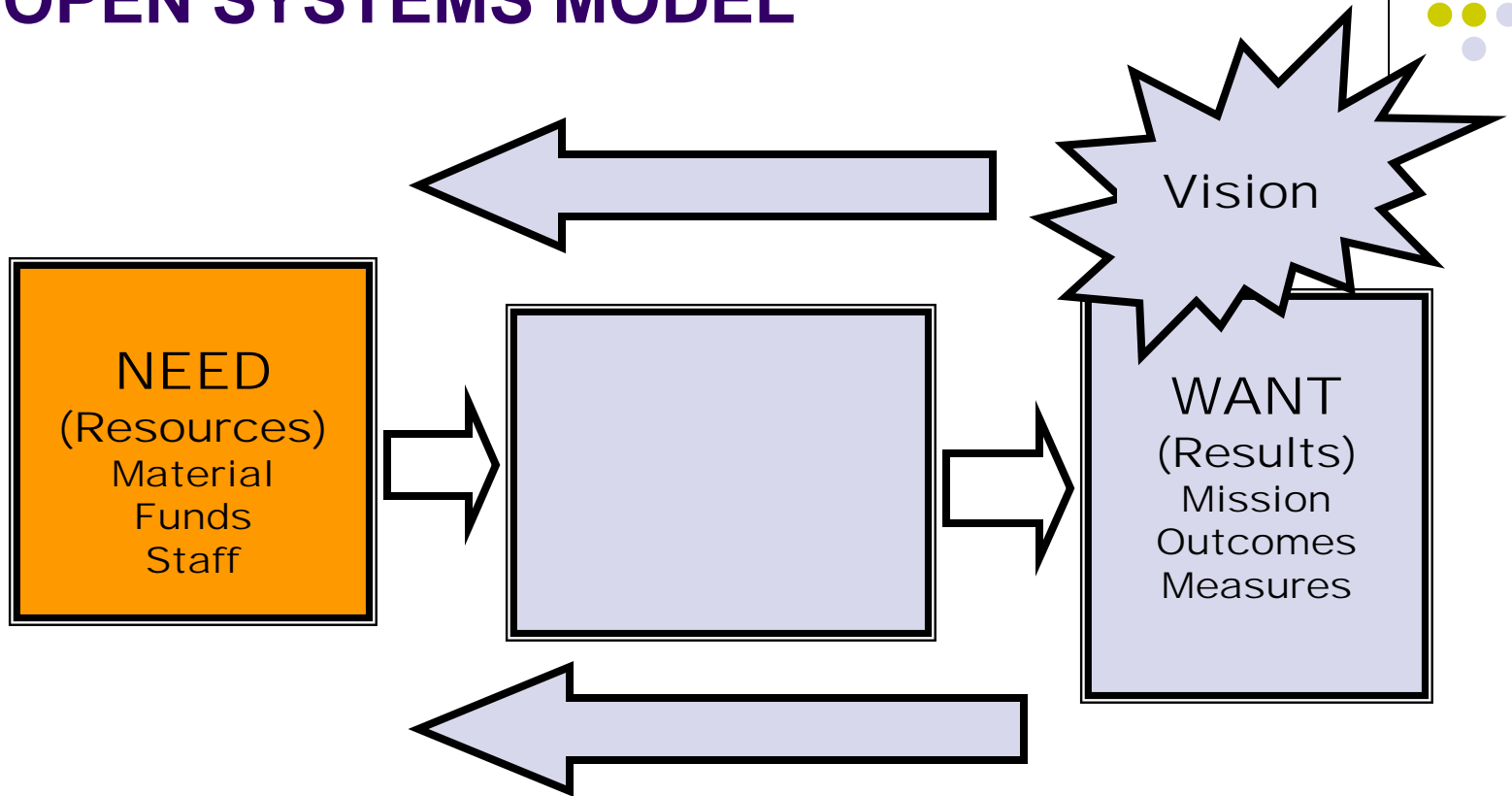
The NEED part of the Open Systems Model includes our identification of the resources we need to effectively pursue and accomplish our unit mission/purpose and mission-critical outcomes. Resources include competent, confident and committed staff.
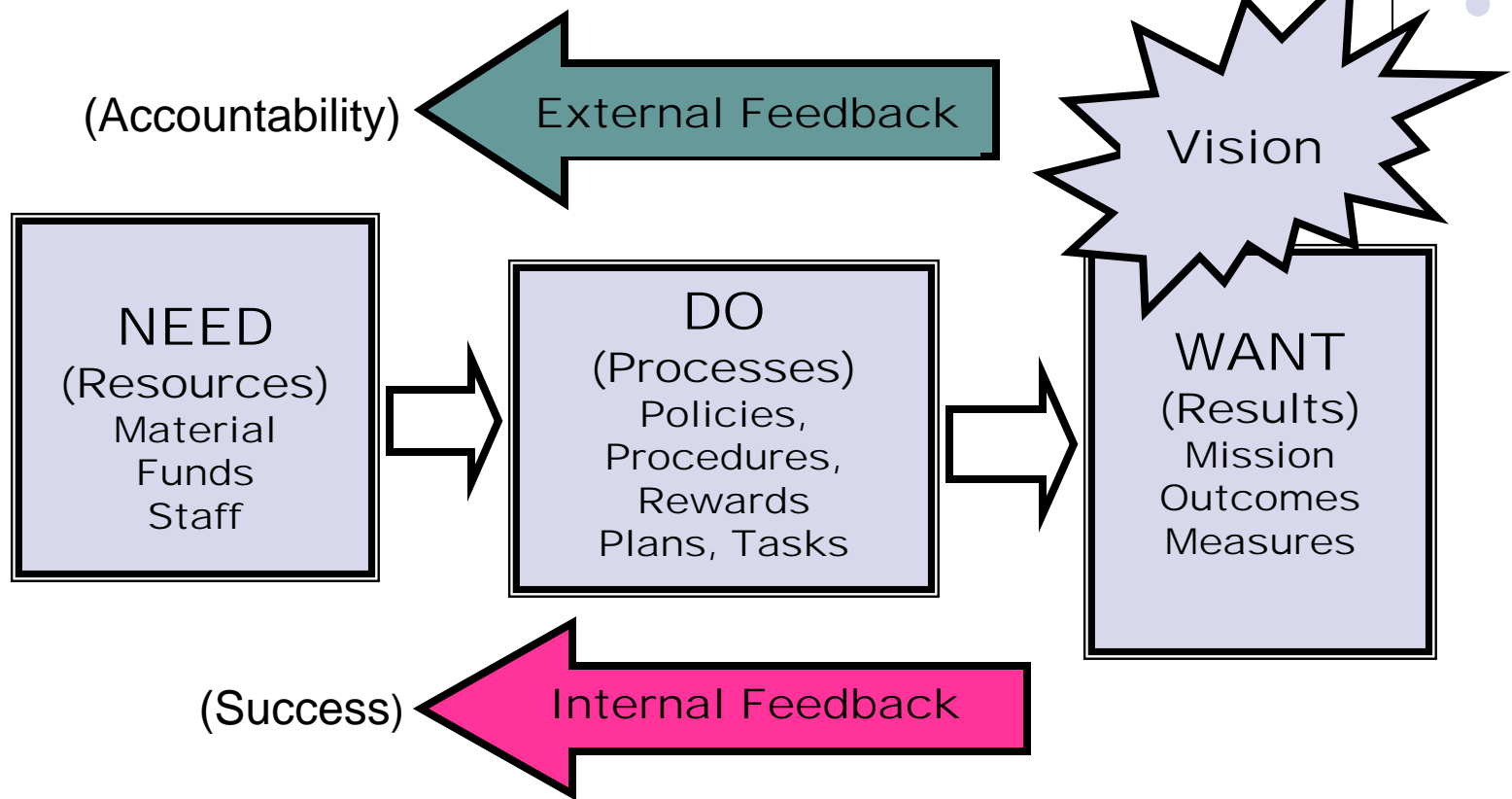
OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL

Vision

NEED
(Resources)
Material
Funds
Staff

DO
(Processes)
Policies,
Procedures,
Rewards
Plans, Tasks

WANT
(Results)
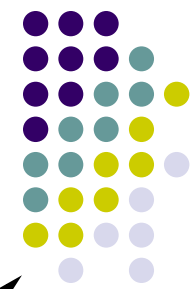**Mission**
Outcomes
Measures

The DO part of the Open Systems Model includes our activities, tasks, policies, procedures, interactions, etc. It is everything we do with our resources as we strive to accomplish our unit mission and mission-critical outcomes.
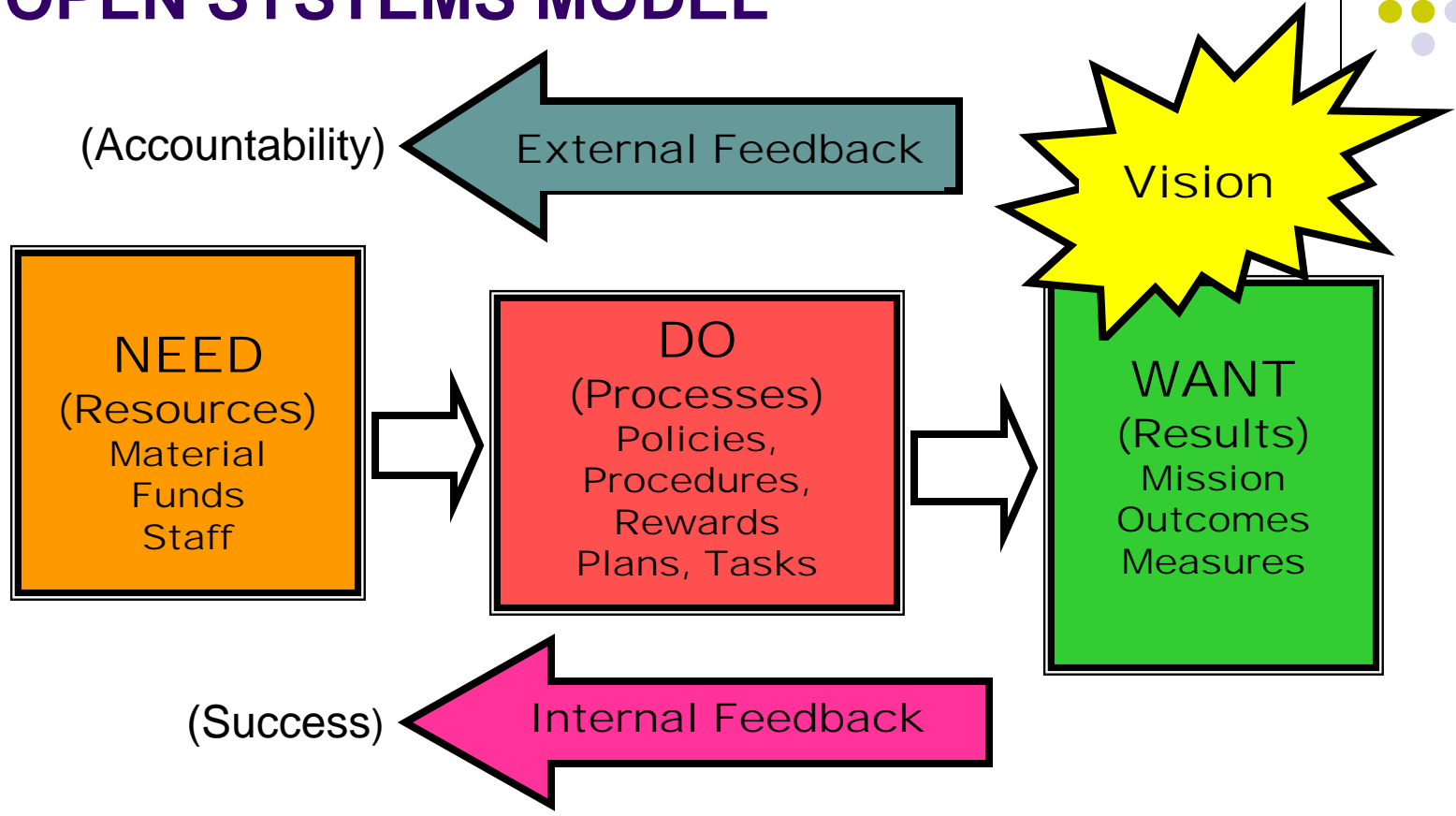
OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL

(Accountability) ← **External Feedback**

Vision

| **NEED**
(Resources)
Material
Funds
Staff | → | **DO**
(Processes)
Policies,
Procedures,
Rewards
Plans, Tasks | → | **WANT**
(Results)
Mission
Outcomes
Measures |

(Success) ← **Internal Feedback**

The FEEDBACK elements of the Open Systems Model include Internal Feedback (our measure of effectiveness of our internal unit processes) and External Feedback (the effectiveness of our work with other units, with our client families and with our partner agencies). Based on feedback we explore changes to NEED, DO and WANT elements.

OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL

(Accountability) ← **External Feedback**

Vision

| NEED
(Resources)
Material
Funds
Staff | → | DO
(Processes)
Policies,
Procedures,
Rewards
Plans, Tasks | → | WANT
(Results)
Mission
Outcomes
Measures |

(Success) ← **Internal Feedback**

This model illustrates the need for supervisors to be aware of and pursue the vision and mission of the agency/unit and to measure performance. Otherwise unit effort gets focused exclusively on processes and needs without a sense of direction or progress.
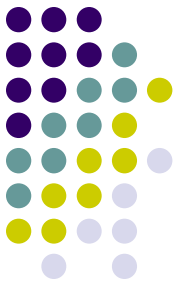
CRITICAL SUPERVISION REQUIREMENTS

To successfully implement the Open Systems

Model requires supervisors to develop and

carry out the following tasks:

- A positive vision of the future.
- Unit critical outcomes
- Measures of internal unit performance
- Measures of external effectiveness
  - *with clients and*
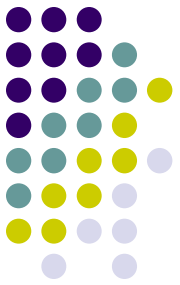 - *in collaborating with other units*
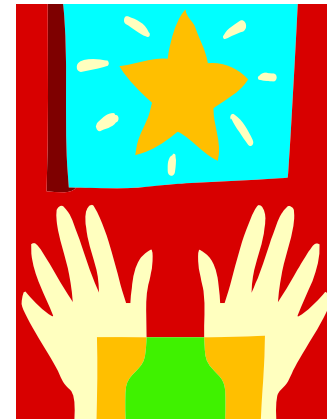
CRITICAL SUPERVISION REQUIREMENTS (CONTINUED)
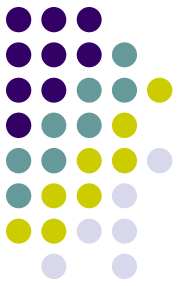
- Assessment of worker performance
- Fostering the worker's ability to self-assess and gain proficiency through experience,
- Promoting worker adherence to social work values,
- Promoting unit use of culturally competent strategies and skills.

SBSFA IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

SBSFA provides the tools for supervisors to accomplish many of the critical tasks associated with implementation of the Open Systems Model.

- modeling of the SBSFA in supervision at the unit and worker levels (parallel process) promotes a positive vision of the future and measurable progress built on strengths.

- using focused questions to gain information about the worker's competency level,

- promoting a sense of partnership and mutual responsibility for a worker's professional development.
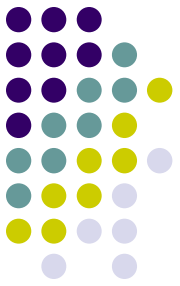
ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS: FIRST STEPS

*Working in small groups of 4 to 6 and referring to **Handout #3**, (critical supervisory tasks associated with implementation of the Open Systems Model), identify and assess the following:*
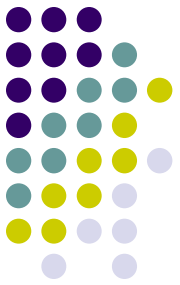
- (a) Identify the strengths that you possess that help you to attempt to implement the critical tasks associated with the Open Systems Model, and

- (b) Identify what you are presently doing to put into practice the critical tasks associated with the Open Systems Model, and

- (c) Scale the overall degree of implementation in your unit of the critical tasks associated with the Open Systems Model, with "0" meaning not at all and "10" meaning full implementation,

    Not at all   Full Implementation
          0 ----1----2---3---4---5---6---7---8---9----10

- (d) Identify what would be required to raise the level of implementation one point on the scale focusing especially on what you can personally do.
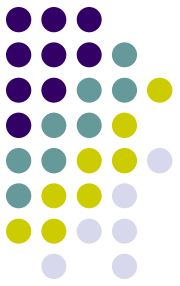
UNIT MEETING PROTOCOL

- Begin by assessment on several levels:
  - *Clarify unit purpose and desired outcomes.*
  - *Identify unit strengths*
  - *Assess job satisfaction (privately)*
  - *Assess client service satisfaction.*
  - *Assess satisfaction of colleagues*

- Use scaling questions to explore assessment rationale

- Create a positive vision of the future

UNIT MEETING PROTOCOL (continued)

- Has some small part of this vision already been experienced?

- Use scaling questions to explore confidence & commitment.

- Use scaling question to explore options for small step improvement.

- Develop action steps and measures.

- Subsequent unit meetings would be used to assess positive differences (progress and barriers) and refine next steps.

WORKER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
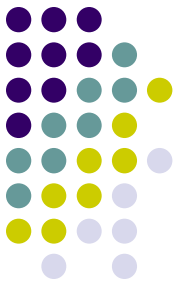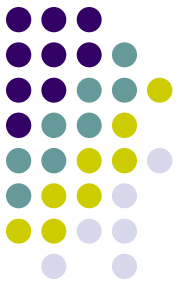
Ask the worker

1. to describe her/his vision of optimum performance.
2. what useful strengths the worker has,
3. to rate current performance against the optimum
4. to explain the rationale for the current rating.
5. what it would take to move that rating up one point, two points on the scale.
6. how the supervisor might be helpful.
7. to suggest specific steps that the worker is committed to take to increase competency.
8. Set a time to review progress on the steps
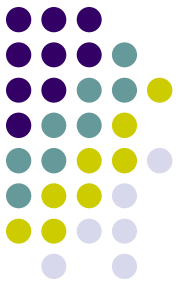
BENEFITS OF SBSFA CONFERENCING

- Alerts the worker to the expectations of the supervisor in regard to:
  - *important information to be obtained.*
  - *forming a collaborative partnership with the client.*
- Promotes worker self-assessment.
- Provides an opportunity for the worker to practice parallel skills.
- Culturally neutral and tends to reduce possible supervisor bias.
- Can be adapted for managing performance problems.

SBSF Strategies in Practice

1   **Greeting**

3   **Expressing interest in the worker's needs**

1   **Clarification of purpose**

3   **Reaching for feedback**

2   **Displaying understanding of the worker's perceptions**

1   **Displaying understanding of the worker's feelings**

2   **Identifying/Exploring strengths in a problem situation**

1   **Facilitating a positive vision of the future**

3   **Follow-up question to the positive visioning question**

1   **Scaling confidence**

1   **Exploring the rationale for confidence rating**

2   **Exploring requirements for movement**

2   **Offering feedback**
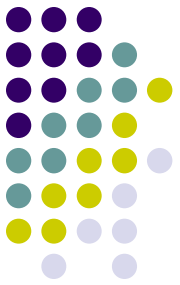
2   **Suggesting/Assigning tasks**
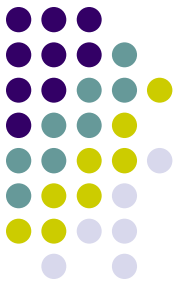
Solutions: SBSF vs. Directive

SBSF solution

- Worker identifies and commits to use existing skills, strategies, and supports

- Worker selects trainings on sexual abuse and documentation

- Supervisor offers support and maintains worker accountability

Solutions: SBSF vs. Directive

SBSF solution

- Worker identifies and commits to use existing skills, strategies, and supports
- Worker selects trainings on sexual abuse and documentation
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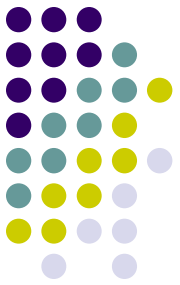
Directive solution

- Supervisor identifies documentation training for the worker
- Supervisor warns worker of disciplinary action if worker fails to correct the problem
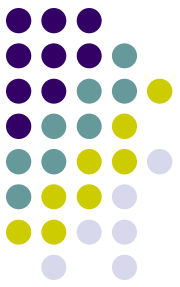
vs.

Outcomes: SBSF vs. Directive

Directive: Non-Strength based Approach

- Problem only partially understood
- Solution imposed on the worker by supervisor
- Motivation diminished by worker resentment
- Supervisor models the directive, authority-based approach

Outcomes: SBSF vs. Directive

SBSF Approach

- Problem accurately defined & understood.
- Two part solution co-constructed by the worker & supervisor
- Worker more motivated to change
- Supervisor models the collaborative SBSF approach

Directive: Non-Strength based Approach

- Problem only partially understood
- Solution imposed on the worker by supervisor
- Motivation diminished by worker resentment
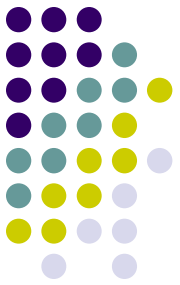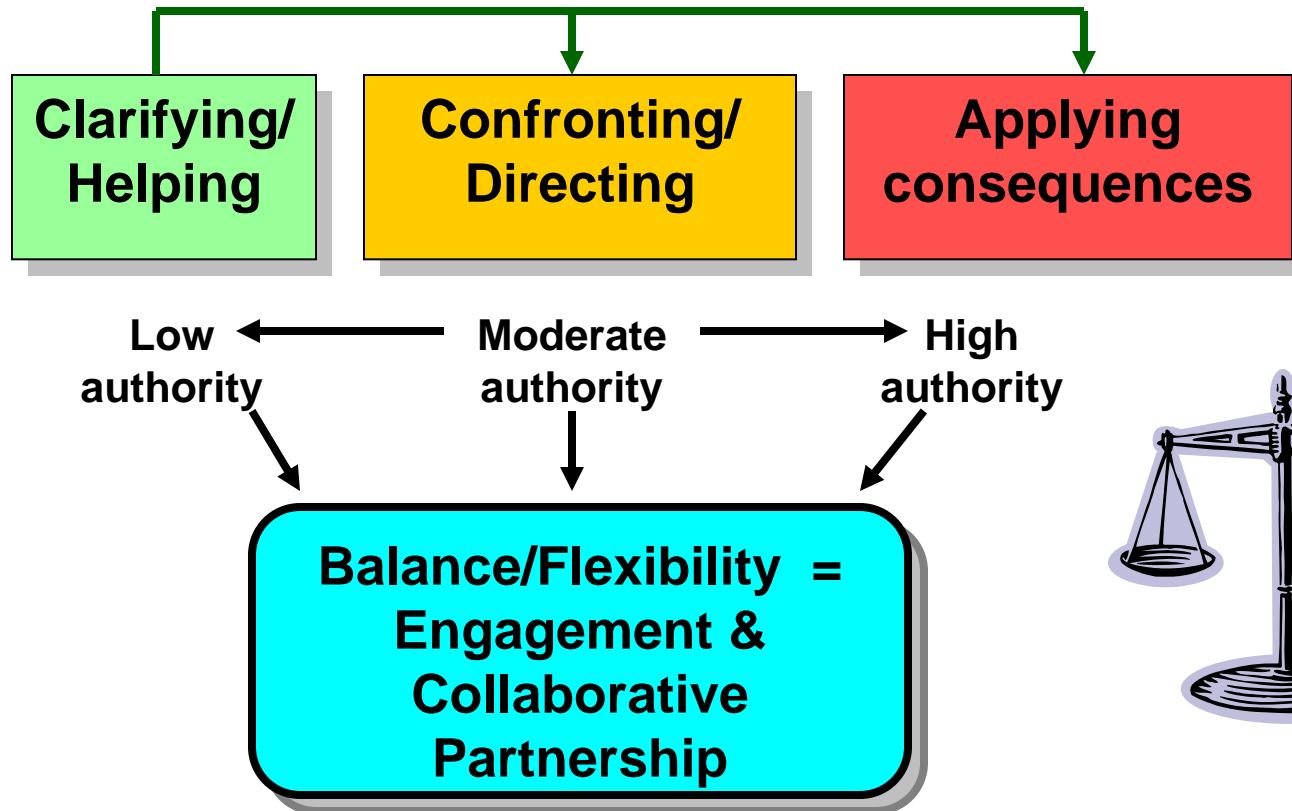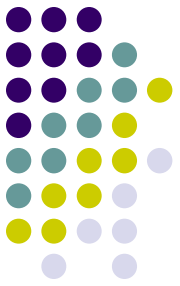- Supervisor models the directive, authority-based approach

The Authority Continuum

Clarifying/ Helping	Confronting/ Directing	Applying consequences

Low authority ← Moderate authority → High authority

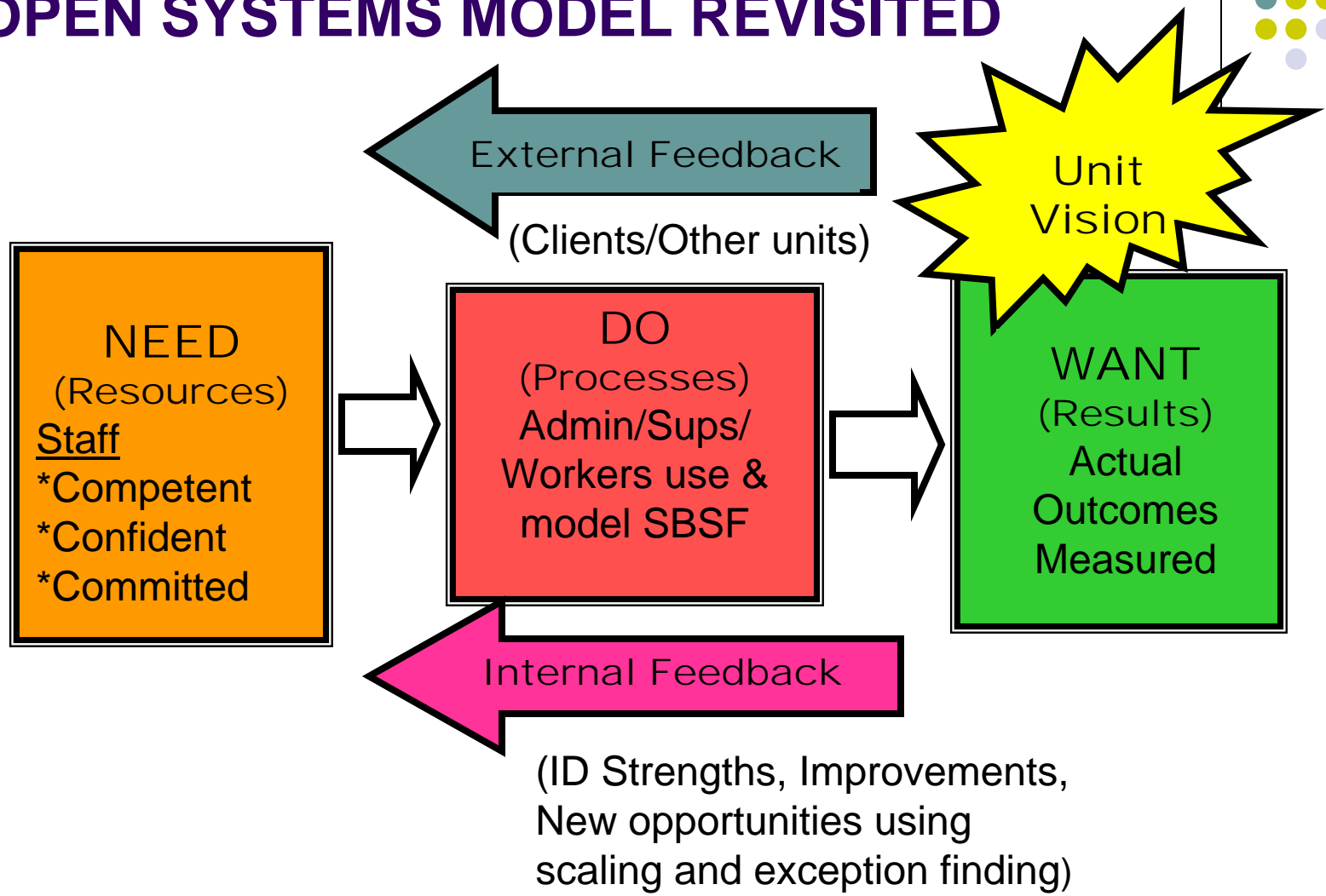**Balance/Flexibility = Engagement & Collaborative Partnership**
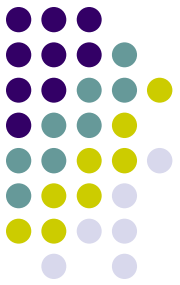
Strategies for Addressing Difficult Issues

- "Saving face": note strengths, competencies when confronting mistakes.

- Be clear about the outcome you want (clear, behavioral, concrete, important)

- Avoid requiring an admission of wrongdoing.

- Collaborative talk: seek out the employee's ideas for improvement.

- Be flexible. The pathway to a solution may include both your and the employees ideas.

- Small, reasonable, doable steps within a clear time frame.

- Document

OPEN SYSTEMS MODEL REVISITED

← **External Feedback**

(Clients/Other units)

Unit Vision

NEED
(Resources)
Staff
*Competent
*Confident
*Committed

→

DO
(Processes)
Admin/Sups/
Workers use &
model SBSF

→

WANT
(Results)
Actual
Outcomes
Measured

← **Internal Feedback**

(ID Strengths, Improvements,
New opportunities using
scaling and exception finding)

WHAT SBSFA CAN & CAN'T DO

No model can give you more time to do your job. However, the SBSFA helps to focus your time and energy in the direction of behaviors and tasks that are sharply focused on the mission of child welfare, on unit performance and the most critical elements of your role.

- *BE CURIOUS
- *BE PATIENT
- *GROW YOUR COMPETENCIES
- *TRY OUT NEW KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS
- *YOUR UNIT IS YOUR AGENCY
  - Lead it
  - Nurture it
  - Celebrate it