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WellSky's hierarchy of human services data needs

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You've likely heard of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. You may even have heard of Piaget's stages of cognitive development or Kohlberg's stages of moral development. In today's focus on outcomes and analytics, we want to introduce you to a new model that can help frame your data capabilities: WellSky's Hierarchy of Human Services Data Needs.

Most people acknowledge the value of sophisticated data analysis, but not everyone is prepared to do it. This pyramid provides a framework to assess your organization's data needs, where you are in your data maturity, and the steps required to achieve predictive analytics capabilities.

Level 1: Descriptive data

The most fundamental building block is comprised of simple descriptive statistics. How many females versus males does your program serve? In what age categories do they fall? How many people are on your waiting list? How many people did you serve this year versus last year? These types of data simply describe your operation. They are necessary to build a picture of your operations, but they are just the beginning.

Level 2: Management data

The next level features management reports. At this level, organizations use data to manage their day-to-day operations. Workers monitor to-do lists, and managers monitor their workers. Are they getting their assigned work done in a timely manner? Is the right amount of work being completed? This level of data ensures everyone is completing their assigned work, identifies critical approaching or lapsed deadlines, and helps prevent service interruptions to clients.

Level 3: Performance data

The next level of the data hierarchy features performance metrics that measure whether programs are meeting expectations. This is the step at which programs operationally define their program goals and measure their progress against them. All too often, programs use simple descriptive data (e.g. the number of intakes completed) as performance metrics, rather than measuring performance in solving the problem a program is attempting to address (e.g. reducing elder exploitation by 10%).

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Benchmarking can be useful at this level, but to take advantage of benchmarks, organizations need to establish goals that can be compared across states, programs, or even nationally. You might build some of your goals based on the data available. For example, if you manage a child welfare program, there is a national average for family reunification. By tracking that same data within your own program, you can begin to ask questions such as, "How do we compare? Are we lagging? If so, why?" To get to this level of analysis and answer those types of questions, you need to meet your more fundamental data needs first.

Level 4: Outcomes data

Outcomes data provides a view into the impact your program has on your community. The data can start with individual outcomes: does a person's risk for re-abuse decrease? And they can also encompass community-wide statistics: has the risk for re-abuse across the at-risk elderly population dropped?

To achieve this level in the data hierarchy, you must be able to identify the challenges in your community or client population, how you can meet those challenges, and how you can measure your impact.

Level 5: Predictive analytics

The ability to use your data to project trends is the pinnacle of data maturity. Today, WellSky has built a predictive analytics model for hospice organizations to help them improve end-of-life care. In the aging and disability network, a predictive model could look at demographic and assessment trends and predict whether a person is at more risk for a negative outcome than another person.

For example, many frail elderly people are placed in long term care facilities because their caregivers can no longer handle the stress and time involved in keeping them in their homes. A predictive model could identify which caregivers are at risk, allowing the agency to offer them extra services that would enable elders to stay at home – where they are happier and cost the community less.

To ascend WellSky's Hierarchy of Human Services Data Needs, you need a system that can capture required data and segment it based on your performance, outcomes, and predictive requirements. WellSky has several such systems for various types of organizations across the care continuum.

In addition, organizations need time to establish those critical outcomes and training to put together the right set of questions that leads to a predictive model. In a world where time, money, and resources are scarce, many agencies don't have this capability. Partners like WellSky can help, and the impact to your communities will improve as a result.

About the author

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Keith Ewell has more than 22 years of experience bridging the communication gap between human services and information technology professionals, leading the design and development of solutions for human service agencies, and managing complex projects. A licensed clinical psychologist and one of the founders of Harmony Information Systems, Dr. Ewell brings an unusual blend of clinical, technical, and management expertise to his role as vice president of product management for WellSky Human and Social Services. He joined the WellSky team in 2014 when the company acquired Harmony.

About WellSky

WellSky is a technology company that delivers software and services which are transforming a wide range of care services worldwide. Building on a history of excellence and a reputation for quality, WellSky – formerly Mediware Information Systems and Kinnser Software – empowers providers to provide exceptional care, improve operational efficiency, reduce cost, and meet the challenges of their rapidly changing industries so both businesses and communities flourish.

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your data, contact your WellSky representative today.

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