The Role of Implementation Drivers in Child Welfare Systems Change

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Context

- Child welfare is turning to implementation science to improve services and outcomes to children and families.

- From 2008-2013, the Children's Bureau (CB) funded 5 national implementation centers (ICs) to develop & apply implementation knowledge within child welfare.

- CB & ICs guided by National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) Framework, posits key stages and drivers important in successful implementation.

Context

NIRN framework developed primarily by examining education and mental health programs

> ➢ Tend to be service-level interventions and evidence-based

Child welfare system change implementation projects tend to span service & system levels

> ➢ Require more design & development than evidence-based service level interventions

Context

Successful adaptation of NIRN to child welfare systems change requires understanding:

- Which drivers are most important at different stages of implementation?

- What is the child welfare context in which drivers are understood and used?

Research Questions

- What do the phases of implementation look like in child welfare organizations that are designing change initiatives to improve practice?

- Which drivers are most important to implementation projects at different stages of implementation?

- What are the key components of these important drivers?

- How much do important implementation drivers overlap with each other?

- How do other state child welfare initiatives influence the implementation of systems change projects? Does this change our understanding of the importance or context of key implementation drivers?

Implementation Drivers ("Keys")

An initial review of implementation literature & identified "Keys to Implementation" in child welfare. These keys are very similar to, but not exactly the same as, NIRN drivers

- **Executive Leadership** to establish vision, create urgency, and authorize managers to implement.
- **Stakeholder Involvement** throughout the process.
- **Family Engagement** in project design and implementation.
- **Culture and Climate** should be assessed to understand potential readiness, support, acceptance, and resistance.
- **Communication** to provide timely, clear, and consistent information about the project.
- **Cross-Functional Project Team** is created to guide the project, manage details, and solve problems that may impede success.

NCIC Implementation Drivers ("Keys") *(continued)*

- **Staff Competency: Coaching and Training** helps staff assimilate training and use it in everyday practice.
- **Operational Details** need to be thought through to align policy, training, and quality assurance.
- **Organizational Structures** should align to promote horizontal and vertical integration.
- **Resources** must be secured for additional and necessary equipment, materials, expertise and training.
- **Ongoing Commitment** of leadership and resources is needed to support and sustain necessary project activities and change.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring** is needed to assess and guide progress, understand fidelity, and assess impact.

Implementation Projects

New Jersey:

Manage by Data Project

- Build capacity to use data to manage

- Developed and implemented a model to train Data Fellows using a competitive selection process

- Training spanned 18 months, involved working with real data from their district on issues identified as a priority by managers.

New York:

Building a System of Sustainable Supports for Child Welfare Supervisors

- Provide system of supports for child welfare supervisors in a county administered, state supervised system

- Developed and implemented a model of supervision piloted in 6 of the state's 62 counties

- Plans to expand the model statewide, based on what is learned.

New Hampshire:

Design and Development of a Practice Model

- Improve consistency in family engagement and service delivery

- Designed statewide practice model using inclusive design process involving Executive leadership and field

- Model ultimately incorporated practice-based components including Solution Based Casework

Approach and Methods

Interviews with agency staff involved in their state project on the implementation process

- Interviews conducted three times: early, mid and end of project
- Which drivers have been most important in implementing the project?
- States describe drivers in their own words

Detailed interview notes, including quotations, were coded using pre-established codes (implementation keys and NIRN phases of implementation framework)

- Check-coding used to ensure inter-coder reliability and definitional clarity
- Content analysis of interviews used to supplement NVivo coding query analysis

Caveats/Issues

- Assessment of CW implementation is based on a small sample

- Timing and length of time spent in the design/installation phase resulted in more data on design/installation, less on exploration.

- While very important, "resources" key is likely over-represented due to interview instrument focus on the quality and usefulness of resources.

- Ethnographic approach. Asks "which drivers were most important", "what does this driver mean to you", "how did it play out" and "what other factors in your state's environment affected implementation?"

What do the phases of implementation look like in child welfare organizations that are designing change initiatives to improve practice?

Phases of Implementation

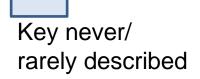| Exploration	Design/Installation	Implementation
• Identify priority issue • Consider potential solutions that fit with agency context • Identify general strategy • Determine "design of design"	• **Design of Intervention** (curriculum, delivery method, develop model, policies that support practice) • **Detailed Planning for Roll Out** (timelines, resource needs, communication strategies, evaluation planning)	• Pilot selection • Begin roll out (build staff competency, implement supporting organizational structures) • Implement Evaluation and QA Structures to provide feedback • Further design articulation as needed

Keys and their Relative Importance over Phases of Implementation

	Exploration Phase	Design/ Installation	Implementation Phase
Communication			
Cross Functional Project Team			
Culture and Climate			
Family Engagement			
Frequent Monitoring & Evaluation			
Leadership Commitment			
Ongoing Commitment			
Operational Details			
Organizational Structures			
Resources			
Staff Competency: Coaching & Training			
Stakeholder Involvement			

Key never/ rarely described Key sometimes described Key frequently described Key consistently described

12

Which drivers are most important to implementation projects at different stages of implementation?

Important Drivers over Phases of Implementation

Exploration	Design/ Installation	Implementation
• **Culture and Climate**	• **Culture and Climate**	• **Culture and Climate**
• **Leadership & Executive Sponsorship**	• **Resources**	• **Resources**
• **Resources**	• **Stakeholder Involvement**	• **Staff Competency: Training and Coaching**
• Stakeholder Involvement • Operational Details	• Leadership & Executive Sponsorship • Operational Details • Organizational Structures	• Leadership & Executive Sponsorship • Operational Details • Frequent Monitoring and Evaluation

Exploration
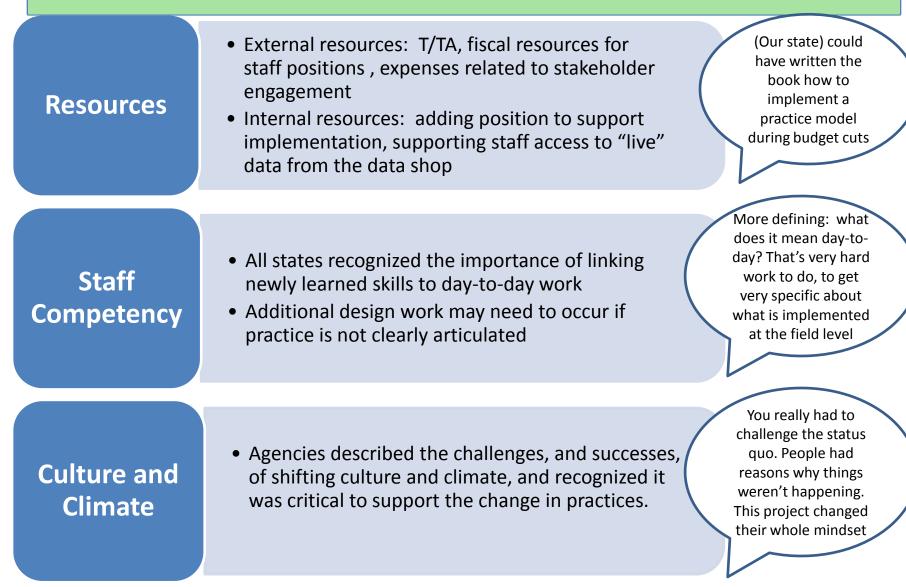
Resources
- Time to reflect: current status, priorities, benefit/challenges of taking on a project
- Consultation/knowledge transfer: impact of culture and climate, logic model development, change management, budgeting, staffing
- Peer connections/Peer knowledge

> A former CW Director that could talk through the process of implementing a practice model was helpful as it was a peer that could speak of their experience

Leadership
- Alignment of leadership's goals/priorities with the project focus

> the Deputy Commissioner had worked on an earlier effort on supervision, so it's an issue that is near and dear to her

Culture and Climate
- Pre-existing agency culture is an important building block in initial conceptualization
  - Does the current culture/climate support taking on a project?
  - How will culture climate support – or challenge – a potential project?

> That's what we see influencing the success of our initiatives over the years, that county organizational culture and climate

Design/Installation

Resources

- Peer resources- transfer of knowledge from other state agencies
- Coaching and thought partnership provided by implementation center staff
- Project coordinator role
- Curriculum development and deliverer

> The reality is that resources were key. If we hadn't had the Project Manager, Parent Partner, Youth Partner, and technical assistance, we couldn't' have done what we've done

Stakeholder Involvement

- Internal stakeholder involvement to design initiatives to appeal to the end users
- All three states recognized that without stakeholder involvement, projects would not gain traction

> The bottom up design… as I'm going out and doing training, staff are saying "I know this, I developed this"

Culture and Climate

- Implementation projects were both influenced by – and meant to influence – the agency's culture/ climate
- Engagement of stakeholders an important component of shifting the culture/climate to support new practice
- Identification of agency's strengths, prior initiatives/available resources, communication patterns, learning style, political context

> We had data available; it was on everyone's desktop People knew that the organization had valued it enough to have it out there

Implementation

Resources
- External resources: T/TA, fiscal resources for staff positions, expenses related to stakeholder engagement
- Internal resources: adding position to support implementation, supporting staff access to "live" data from the data shop

(Our state) could have written the book how to implement a practice model during budget cuts

Staff Competency
- All states recognized the importance of linking newly learned skills to day-to-day work
- Additional design work may need to occur if practice is not clearly articulated

More defining: what does it mean day-to-day? That's very hard work to do, to get very specific about what is implemented at the field level

Culture and Climate
- Agencies described the challenges, and successes, of shifting culture and climate, and recognized it was critical to support the change in practices.

You really had to challenge the status quo. People had reasons why things weren't happening. This project changed their whole mindset

Relationships and Intersections Between Keys

Executive Leadership - Resources

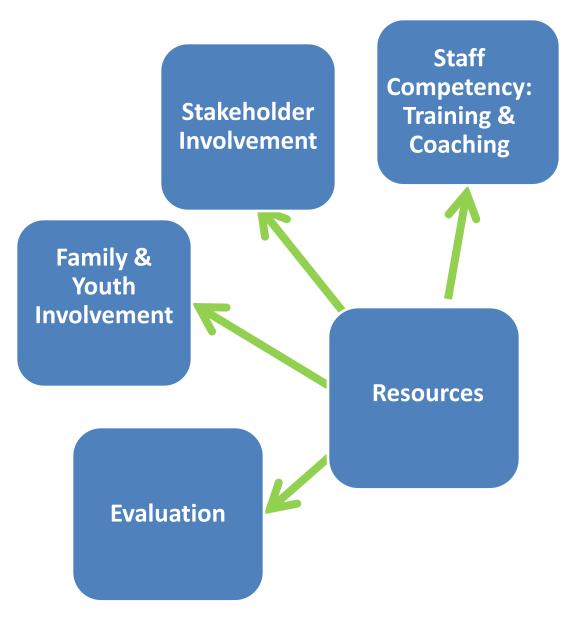- Provides and protects resources

Executive Leadership - Stakeholder involvement

- Political context leads to frequent turnover at executive level.
- Engagement of the mid-level management, through stakeholder involvement, supports implementation and sustainability
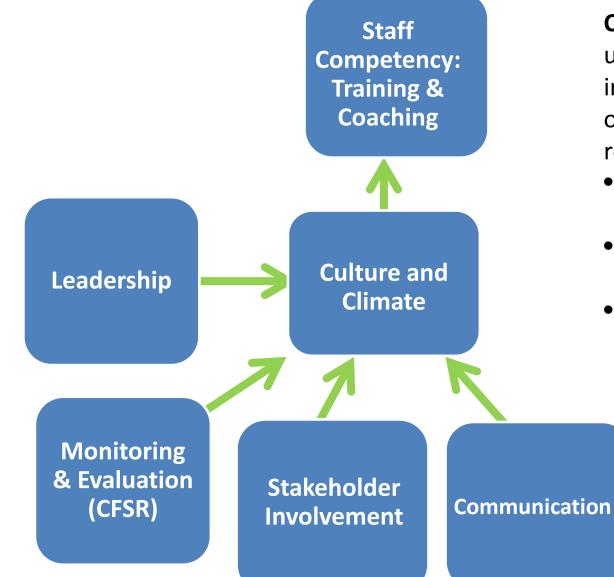
Organizational Structures – Resources

- Agency initiatives impact resources. Too many dilute scarce resource; building on prior initiatives and identifying priorities make good use of resources

Relationships and Intersections Between Keys

Stakeholder Involvement

Staff Competency: Training & Coaching

Family & Youth Involvement

Resources

Evaluation

Resources are required to support other necessary keys

Relationships and Intersections Between Keys

Staff Competency: Training & Coaching

Leadership → Culture and Climate

Monitoring & Evaluation (CFSR)

Stakeholder Involvement

Communication

Culture and Climate: understanding and influencing potential sources of support, acceptance, and resistance

- Intersects with a number of keys
- Varies across counties, offices, regions
- *Determines whether or not staff will be willing – and will be supported in – changed practice*

How do other state child welfare initiatives influence implementation of systems change projects?

- Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) described by agency staff as related to several implementation keys
  - Evaluation Monitoring: Source of data for state child welfare agencies, can confirm practice strengths
  - Organizational Structure: If CFSR is strongly valued by state agency, improvement initiatives can be aligned and integrated with CFSR results and PIPs
  - Culture and Climate: CFSR impacts context in which state operates, workload requirements take significant resources, results influence agency climate

- Number/integration of initiatives in agencies influence available resources

- Prior initiatives can be used to extend work/build on agency strengths

Highlights

- States acutely aware of culture and climate (many described failed initiatives as important learning)
    - Agencies are aware of "change fatigue"; multiple initiatives, federal requirements, and competing priorities
    - Involvement of internal stakeholders – the end users – is challenging; agency staff recognized the value and importance of this strategy

- Leadership throughout the agency is critical
    - Executive sponsorship must prioritize project, provide resources
    - Mid level managers must find project relevant; without buy-in, project sustainability unlikely because field will lack support

- Design/Installation stage is lengthy and complex in change initiatives. Requires concurrent design and planning.

Questions for You…

- We found that the design/installation phase takes longer than anticipated. Is this similar to your experiences in your field?

- We found that culture and climate and leadership are very important drivers. Are these drivers as important for implementation in your field?

Post Presentations Discussion Questions: Implementation and Systems Change

- When implementing a non-evidence based organizational change, how much design is needed? How can this be assessed or measured?

- What do we know about an appropriate, or reasonable scope for systems change projects? (Not too small? Not too big?)

- How do we know when systems change initiatives are working? What does this suggest about measuring or evaluating them?

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