Measuring Change

Background: The measurement of change is an essential component of organizational improvement (OI) efforts. Changes in OI indicators can tell child welfare agencies if an initiative is operating as intended. These indicators measure specific constructs that the initiative intended to affect. They may be qualitative or quantitative but should be closely aligned with the project's goals for change. The measurement of OI indicators may include multiple observations of the same data point over time to determine if efforts are working to achieve goals and objectives relevant to changing the organization's practices or outcomes. This information can then help decision-makers to make data-driven changes within the organization.

Types of Measures:

There are different types of measures that can help with the assessment of child welfare agency practices. Relevant measures include:

Process Measures: Focus on the implementation of a project. The measures track the "who, what, when, where, and how" questions related to a project. There are two sub-types of process measures:

Inputs: Are the financial, human, and material resources used. For example, this could be training materials produced or staff hired. Inputs are converted into program activities that then produce outputs.

Outputs: Are the direct and immediate effects produced through project activities. For example, this could be the number of children served by a program.

Examples of Process Measures:

Input-related questions:
- What staff were involved in the program?
- What was the program budget?
- What equipment or materials did the program have?
- How were all the inputs used?

Output-related questions:
- What services did your program deliver?
- Who delivered the services?
- How well were the services delivered?

Other process questions:
- To whom did you direct program efforts?
- How were the services delivered?
- When did your program activities take place?
- Where did your program activities take place?
- What were the barriers and facilitators to the implementation of program activities?

Types of Measures (continued):

Outcomes Measures: Focus on measuring immediate, mid-term and long-term project-level effects and assess progress towards meeting goals and expected outcomes/deliverable (as identified on your Charter). Outcome measures track the levels of change related to the project itself, without a comparison condition. A well-defined set of outcomes can inform decision-making processes at child welfare agencies. For example, if an agency has the goal of improving child safety and permanence, then outcomes should relate to the quality of services that are provided.

Impact Measures: Assess the total effects of a project or program in comparison to the counterfactual. The counterfactual refers to a set of conditions that describe how participants would have fared if the program had not existed (or had not existed in its current form). Having a clear counterfactual is important for delineating effects directly related to a program that cannot be attributed to any other factors.

Examples of Outcomes Measures:

Outcome-measure questions:
- Did the agency workforce training result in changes in knowledge, attitudes, and skills among members of the target population?
- Did the program have any unintended consequences?
- Do the benefits of the program justify a continued allocation or resources?

Select Measures That:

1. Assess progress toward meeting the goal identified on your Charter;
2. Assess whether expected outcomes/deliverables on your Charter have been met; and
3. Test the goal and hypothesis of each PDSA cycle.

It is important to keep in mind that the best measures are:
1. Relevant and related to agency processes, outcomes, or project impacts;
2. Easily measurable and can be realistically improved, and;
3. Accurate and based on guidelines or group decision-making.

Measurement is key to organizational improvement efforts if you want to understand if your change led to an improvement.

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Organizational Process Improvement