Implementing the Human Factor;
Relationships in implementation practice and evaluation

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Will cover

- Evidence Based Practice, implementation science and relationships

- Why relationships are important

- Systems which encourage relationships

- Future directions for implementation science.

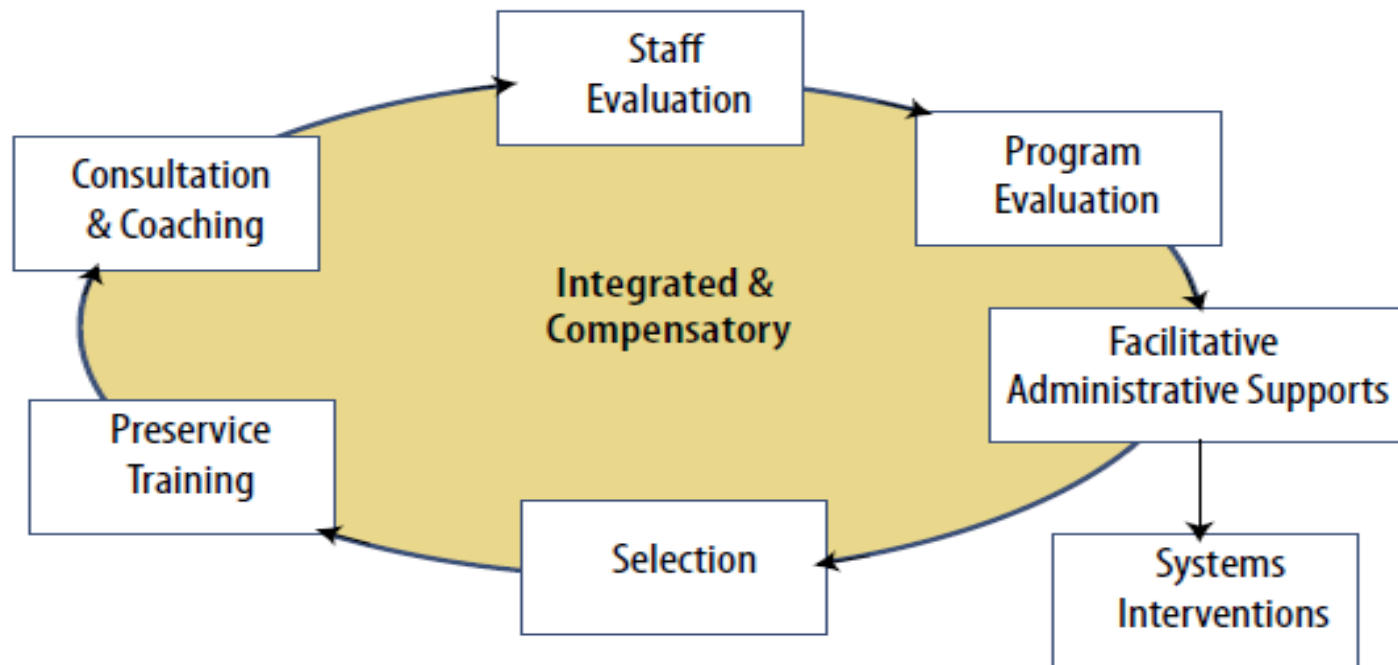# THE PROBLEM

Implementation and EBP

- "Without evidence, policy makers must fall back on intuition, ideology, or conventional wisdom — or, at best, theory alone."(Banks, 2009, p4)

- Therefore focus is on 'what works' – specific programs or policies which have demonstrated effectiveness.

- Similar rationale for implementation science
  - What works in implementation?

Why EBP?

- Part of broader New Public Management
  - Focus on measurable outcomes
  - Efficiency and value for money are the primary goals of human services
- Increased accountability and reliance on data

Core Implementation components

Core Implementation Components
that can be used to successfully implement evidence-based
practices or practices within evidence-based programs.

Staff Evaluation

Program Evaluation

Consultation & Coaching

Integrated & Compensatory

Facilitative Administrative Supports

Preservice Training

Selection

Systems Interventions

Result

- Basic drivers for human services have become
    - Risk avoidance, cost effectiveness,
- Outcomes are defined bureaucratically – not by practitioners or by client population.
    - Wellbeing defined as 'participation' rather than relationships
- Relationships seen as compromising program fidelity

The problem with relationships

- Can't be standardised, manualised or easily predicted – not readily subject to regulation or control
- Can be bad as well as good
- # In research and evaluation
- Relationships and human variation usually controlled for or explained in terms of 'site level effects' or other variations
- Can't generalise easily
  - So research findings seem trite.
- Relationships suppressed by drive for standardisation, accountability, measurement and risk adversity

EBP vs RBP

- EBP therefore seen as denying emotions and relationships.

- Opponents of EBP advocate Relationship Based Practice
  - (but can there be Relationship Based Policy?)

- Argument is basically ideological – belief in professional values

- However there is increasing empirical evidence base that human relationships are fundamental to effective policy and program implementation.

THE EVIDENCE BASE

Three areas of evidence

- Direct work with clients
- Programs and agency systems
- International comparisons

Relationships in direct work

- Research now indicates that the quality of the therapist is more important than the therapeutic technique or program

- The therapeutic relationship is the cornerstone of effectiveness (Hubble et al, 1999; Lambert and Archer, 2006; Norcross, 2002)
  - Accounts for up to 45% of variance in outcome (Alexander et al, 1976)

- Relationships are more important than demography in working with people from diverse backgrounds (Forehand and Kotchick, 1996, 2002)

Factors associated with success

- Front line autonomy - practitioners who have autonomy over how they carry out their work
- Continuity and time – building an effective relationship requires time
- Training and skills – clients will trust providers when they know that they are competent
- Provider attitudes – professionals need to be trusted and respected, and to be proactive in pursuing their case.(Bell and Smerdon, 2011)

- *But how does this relate to program fidelity?*

Relationships in Program implementation

- Evaluations (eg Sure Start, Communities for Children and Brighter Futures and headspace)
  - All show that relationships are key to effective engagement with the community (Barnes and Freude-Lagevardi, 2002)
  - 'Hard to reach' groups particularly sensitive to relationships (Cortis et al 2010).
  - Particularly significant for Indigenous programs.
- Responsive Regulation Theory
  - Authorities need to actively engage with those being regulated (eg asylum seekers, age care providers, taxpayers) (Braithwaite and Levi 1998)
- Leadership vs management

Relationships implementing multi agency initiatives

- Important at all levels:
  - Strategic leadership
  - Operational managers
  - Practitioners
- Trust appears to be more fundamental than communication or structures in promoting collaboration.
- Paradox- the more complex the system, the more system management must rely on leadership and trust.
  - Systems too complex to be managed by data or 'dashboard'

Relationships in national systems

- Child protection systems in all English speaking countries have been in crisis for many years
  - Increased notifications and substantiations, child deaths more children in OOHC and mounting evidence of poor outcomes for children in the CPS.
- Policy has been driven by inquiries, most of which recommend tightening bureaucracy, better risk assessment and tighter management
- Monroe review of English CP system found that bureaucratic requirements prevented caseworkers from making relationships with children and families.
  - Helping children and families involves working with them and therefore the quality of the relationship between the child and family and professionals directly impacts on the effectiveness of help given (Munro, 2011 p23)

'Anglo' vs European Child Protection Systems

Anglo-Celtic

- Residual
- Evidence/objectivity
- Risk avoidance
- Clarity/transparency
- 'Catch net' mentality

European

- Interventionist
- Relationships/Subjectivity
- Risk management
- Uncertainty/ambiguity
- Trained workforce

System and culture

- **The structure of the system is less important than organisational, professional and national cultures**
  - All English speaking countries have similar challenges despite radically different legal and structural systems
- **Child welfare systems are embedded in broader national systems of social care, which in turn are part of national culture**
  - Similar issues for mental health, employment etc
  - Media plays a significant role in the risk averse nature of systems

Principles for a new system

- Trust
- Authority
- Negotiation

Conclusions

- Relationships have been undermined by a number of different forces, particularly risk averse policies and misguided understandings of 'fidelity'.

- Evidence based policy, implementation science and the idea of 'what works' has downplayed the role of relationships.

However research shows that relationships are fundamental to implementing programs and policies

- The basis of all relationships is trust which must be built up over time

Conclusions

- However relationships must operate in the context of organisational frameworks and theoretical basis of the implementation process.

- Need to go beyond ideological divisions between EBP and RBP and understand the interaction between relationships and fidelity, eg focusing on leadership as well as management.

- The research base is growing but there is a need for better and more rigorous ways of researching and evaluating the dynamics of human factors and relationships in human services and social policy.

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