The Learning Collaborative Model: An Integrated Knowledge Translation Approach to VR Research

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Presentation Outline

• What is a Learning Collaborative?
• The Learning Collaborative as a KT Strategy
• Theoretical Underpinnings
• Examples
• Implementation & Learning
How can VR agencies learn from their peers to address challenges most of them face?

How can VR researchers engage end-users and tailor research to intended audiences needs?
Learning Collaborative

- Researchers provide a fabric for stakeholders to interact
  - Someone plays a matchmaker
  - Encourage relevant peer-to-peer interactions

- Constant feedback loop that benefits both stakeholder and researcher

- New knowledge is created
  - From interaction between stakeholders
  - From interaction between stakeholders and researcher
Core Elements of a Learning Collaborative

• Topic to explore (addressing an unmet need)
• Coaches
• Peer group
• Forum for interaction
• Common goal
The Learning Collaborative Model

FEATURES:

- In-person meetings
- Webinars
- On-site and distance consultation
- Self-assessment
- Tailored evaluation
Knowledge Translation
KT Elements of the LC model

- Interactive and engaged process
- Built lasting relationships
- Facilitated knowledge sharing
- Customized technical assistance
- Tailored research to users’ needs
Theoretical Underpinnings

• Research is an important component of LC
• LC can be a vehicle for participatory action research
• Researchers work with stakeholders
• Field becomes the lab
• Research inform actions and actions inform research
Cont...

- LC allows for
  - Stakeholders learning from stakeholders
  - Stakeholders learning from researchers
  - Researchers learning from stakeholder
  - Using mixed methodology

- Research issues can come from
  - Researchers (e.g., researcher wants to test a hypothesis)
  - Stakeholder (e.g., stakeholder wants to improve a program)
Learning Collaborative Examples

• RTAC on VR Program Management
• Demand Side Progressive Employment
• American Indian VR
Research and Technical Assistance Center on VR Program Management (RTAC)

- RTAC: Project funded by NIDRR and RSA
- Goal: Identify, test, and disseminate management practices
- End Product: Performance management model/ framework
VR Program Management Learning Collaborative

- ICI adapted a Learning Collaborative (LC) strategy to partner with 29 SVRAs including:
  - 7 Commissions for the Blind
  - 1 American Indian VR program (Chickasaw Nation), and
  - 21 General or Combined agencies.

- The LC strategy is a tested strategy (notably used in public health)

- Applied to RTAC to engage SVRAs in intensive TA that culminates in shared learning, adoption of practices, and professional development
Key components of the RTAC Learning Collaborative included:

- Initial visits by ICI staff to each project to develop plans
- Three face-to-face meetings with all agencies
- Monthly teleconferences involving all agencies
- Additional in-person and telephone interactions between VR agencies and ICI staff
- Peer-to-peer exchanges on specific topics of interest
- Coaches helped facilitate the process and foster partnerships between agencies
Components of VR Program Management Examined in Management Model

- Communication
- Leadership
- Partnerships
- Services & Processes
- Customers
- Mission & Strategic Planning
- Data, Quality Assurance & Metrics
- Workforce
- Outcomes
Outcomes

• Define in greater detail how each component relates to VR Program Management
• Identify & develop tools
• Examine relationships between practices & intended outcomes
“Successful and sustainable collaborations are not self-managing; rather they require well-explicated processes and structure and capacity-building.”

-Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Implementation and Learning

- Adapting the LC strategy
- Improving the LC strategy
- Evaluating the LC strategy
Adaptation of the LC strategy

• The ICI plans to adapt this strategy in two other projects focusing on:
  – Progressive employment
  – American Indian VR system
Evaluation of the LC strategy

• Employed an outside evaluator who completed quarterly formal evaluation surveys

• Reported improvements were:
  - Improved communications with and among agency staff
  - Increased awareness, knowledge, and use of data as the basis for agency decisions
  - Increased staff development opportunities for emerging agency leaders
  - Improved relationships with agency stakeholders and partners
  - Streamlining of agency policy
  - Improvements to agency hiring practices and identification of new staff positions
  - Improved management focus and alignment of resources
Improving the LC experience: Lessons Learned

• Participants should set clear goals & establish work plan (accountability)
• Significance of early interaction
• Identifying the right issue/topic to be addressed
Key takeaways

• Research “with” stakeholders rather than research “for” stakeholders
• Transferrable to almost any population/audience
• Tool for advancement of VR research & KT efforts
Questions & Discussion
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