



### Evaluating Missouri CPS Supervisory Development Project

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<b>Author(s):</b>	<i>Carrie Bolm, Lesley Pettit, Michael Kelly, and Dale Wolchko</i>
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# Evaluating Missouri CPS Supervisory Development Project

*Carrie Bolm, MSW; Lesley Pettit, MSW; Michael Kelly, PhD; Dale Wolchko, MSW*

## Introduction

This volume of Professional Development is devoted to a funding strategy being tested by the Children's Bureau, US Department of Health and Human Services. The essence of the strategy is to develop learning partnerships between state child welfare agencies, universities and community groups. These partnerships, dubbed "learning laboratories," are expected to bring together representatives from each group who will interact as equals in a context of mutual respect, sharing, and learning (see Collins-Camargo and Groeber in this volume).

Learning labs are rooted in the concept of action research. Dick (1999) describes action research as "...a family of research methodologies which pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time." Action research is based in work by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon (1989, 1996) and closely related to the concept of learning organizations (Senge, 1990). The essence of this approach is that the research (evaluation) will be practical, usable, and available to inform those developing policy and designing practice. Action research emphasizes formative evaluation in which information is 'fed-back' to adjust the intervention in order to make it more effective.

Needless to say, action research places additional burdens on evaluation above those found in the classical experimental designs. Evaluation in this context calls for a subtle and articulated relationship between process evaluation which will determine if and how the intervention can be conceived, communicated, and implemented and the outcome evaluation which will determine if the intervention produces change in the selected outcomes. Further, the evaluation must be a cooperative endeavor between those in practice and those in education.

This article describes how the Missouri project (see Sundet, Mermelstein, and Watt in this volume) plans to employ process and outcome evaluation within an

action research framework to determine if improvements in supervisory practices related to development of clinical decision making skills for workers will lead to improved practice in assessment and intervention, reduced worker turnover, and better outcomes for clients. The article describes the related parts of the evaluation, details the measures to be used, and describes some of the cooperation which has and will make the evaluation useful.

## Requirements

The project will establish a structured model of supervision and convey it to a group of child protective service supervisors, who must then employ the model to better prepare their workers. A structured model is a well-defined series of activities conducted during CPS supervision, which will enhance worker's ability to think critically and make good decisions (Collins-Camargo and Groeber, this volume). Effective conception and delivery of the model is, in turn, expected to address three (3) major outcomes. First, structured case work supervision will positively affect child protection worker practice in assessment and intervention; second, it will positively affect preventable worker turnover; and third, it will positively affect client outcomes. A set of larger evaluative issues will concern the effectiveness of the state agency—university—community partner(s) learning laboratory but these issues are beyond the scope of this article.

## Evaluation Model

The evaluation model is graphic depicted on page 39. The importance of the process evaluation and its relationship to the intervention outcomes are described below through details of the measures that will be used.

### Intervention and the Process Evaluation

The intervention began with collaboration between the University of Missouri, School of Social Work (SSW), the Missouri Children's Division (CD), and

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*Carrie Bolm, MSW is CPS Project Director, School of Social Work, University of Missouri, 7th. Floor Clark Hall, University of Missouri, Columbia MO 65211-4470.*

*Lesley Pettit, MSW is Management Analyst, Children's Division, Missouri Department of Social Services*

*Michael Kelly, PhD is Professor and CPS Project Evaluator, School of Social Work, University of Missouri*

*Dale Wolchko, MSW is Research Assistant, CPS Project, School of Social Work, University of Missouri*

*Correspondence should be addressed to:*

*Carrie Bolm, E-mail: BolmC@missouri.edu*

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Prevent Child Abuse Missouri. Historically, these three entities have enjoyed a productive working relationship that enabled them to quickly form a team and reach consensus on the structured supervisory model and the associated evaluation elements. After the project was funded, the group reformed as a curriculum development group and an evaluation group. The selected model, called 'role demonstration supervision,' is structured in four distinct phases to be taught in nine modules over the three year project period.

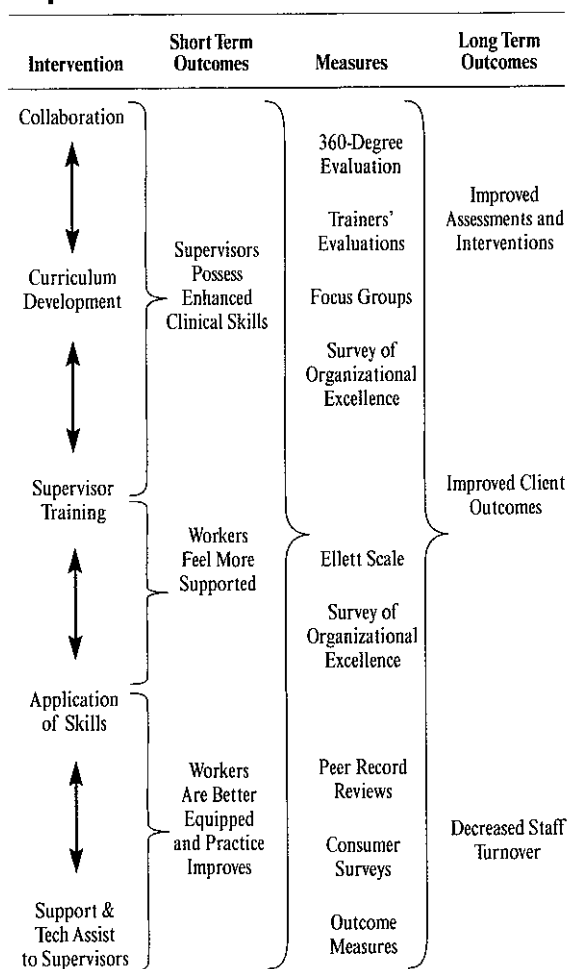
The subjects are 36 CPS units – 36 supervisors with 200 workers. The experimental units were selected by

the team and assigned to participate. Supervisors in the experimental units will be trained and immediately begin application of the skills and knowledge with technical assistance from the training team.

As part of the training, supervisors will complete a '360-degree' supervisory development instrument in which they are rated by peers, superiors, and workers. The results of the 360 are then returned to the individual who in cooperation with the training team will draw-up an individual plan for improvement. The 360 will be completed each year of the project and will serve as part of the required comparison to the other projects.

The process evaluation will study the curriculum development and teaching process via participant observation and by de-briefing the training team. Supervisory learning and implementation of skills/knowledge will be evaluated by review of the 360 results and the personal development plans. The training team will also individually rate the individual supervisors' progress. These ratings will then be pooled for a progress score on each supervisor. Periodically, the supervisors in the experimental group will be brought together in focus groups to determine if the training is meeting individual expectations, how they have implemented the skills and knowledge, and to identify barriers to implementation. In keeping with the action research, the intervention process is dynamic and allows for continual feedback and ongoing project improvement.

**Graph 1: Evaluation Model**



### Outcome Evaluation

The intervention is expected to directly impact CPS supervisors and their workers by increasing their "clinical focus" and giving them methods for teaching their worker assessment skills and how to employ the information in their casework. Workers should, in turn, learn new skills, experience supportive supervision in their work with families, and experience more confidence in the casework abilities. Improvements in support of the workers is expected to lower preventable turnover, improve casework practices as reflected by the peer record review process, impact client/consumer satisfaction, and improve the established child welfare outcome measures. Supervisor development coupled with improved worker support is also expected to improve the overall organizational climate in the experimental areas.

The outcome evaluation component depends upon the use of an experimental and comparison areas design. The 114 counties and the City of St. Louis are divided by the CD into seven administrative areas comprising 45 judicial circuits. There are two experimental areas with two comparison areas chosen for their demographic and agency case load similarity. The first experimental unit is Area 3, consisting of 25 rural counties comprising eight judicial circuits in southeast Missouri. The second is St. Louis County, which is a single county circuit in the largest metropolitan area of the state. The comparison area for St. Louis County is Kansas City, which is also an urban area and a single county circuit. The comparison for Area 3 is 18 rural counties consisting of six judicial circuits in the southwest part of the state.

Antecedent conditions in the experimental and comparison supervisory units will be determined by existing agency records and interviews. This information will provide extensive background information on the individual supervisor's career, educational preparation,

responsibilities, numbers of workers supervised, along with age, gender, race and other demographic information. In the comparison areas, supervisory units will be studied from existing agency records only.

**Measures in detail**

**The 360-Degree Assessment:** Supporting the process evaluation, the 360-degree supervisory development instrument will span between process and outcome by providing information on individual supervisory development. The 360 Feedback is a multi-rater instrument which is provided on-line to individual raters selected by the supervisor. The multi-rater system offers reduced bias, a balanced assessment from different perspectives and a comprehensive, multi-dimensional picture of the individual. The data are grouped into five roles—Communicator, Leader, Manager, Facilitator and Professional—which represent the most common facets exhibited by those in leadership and are comprised of the typical behaviors displayed for each role. The data are then used in a targeted personal development plan.

**The Survey of Organizational Excellence:** The SOE is an on-line instrument designed to measure five organizational dimensions consisting of 20 constructs critical to organizational coherence, effectiveness and efficiency. In addition to serving as a measure of organizational culture for this project, seven of the constructs closely relate to the intervention (See Table 1). Reliability and validity of the SOE were established during development. The survey constructs have an adequate reliability (Cronbach's Alpha averaging .85). Criterion validity was determined through comparisons with other related instruments (Lauderdale, 1999). Face validity was established through a review process with survey users and people knowledgeable in the field. Designed as an organizational census, the survey has been used by the CD since 2002 as part of its quality improvement process.

The first section of the survey solicits organizational groupings, demographic information, and general employment characteristics. The second section contains 59 items asking respondents to indicate, on a five-point scale, the degree to which they agree with statements concerning their immediate workplace. Next, 16

**Table 1: Survey of Organizational Excellence Dimensions and Constructs**

Dimension	Construct
Work Group	Supervisory Effectiveness* Fairness Team Effectiveness* Diversity
Accommodations	Fair Pay Physical Environment Benefits Employee Development*
Organizational Features	Change Oriented Goal Oriented Holographic Strategic Orientation Quality Orientation
Information	Internal Communication Availability of Information External Communication
Personal	Job Satisfaction* Time and Stress Management* Burnout* Empowerment*

\*Constructs of interest to the CPS project.

items deal with compensation and benefits. Next, 10 items use the five-point scale for judgments about the organization as a whole. The last section of the survey allows customized questions and was used to embed the 20 items of the Ellett scale.

**Worker Self-efficacy Scale and Efficacy**

**Outcomes:** Ellett's (2001<sup>(1)</sup>) paper examined the relationship of self-efficacy (SE) beliefs on the intentions of workers to remain employed in public child welfare. The demonstrated relationship between higher SE beliefs and lower expected turnover led to the acceptance of the scale as one method of cross-site evaluation. The scale, as it will be used in this project, consists of 16 self-efficacy items, scored as very strong, strong, somewhat strong, or weak, and four statements related to efficacy outcomes, scored as (#1): no influence, weak influence, strong influence, or very strong influence; (#2): very inadequate, inadequate, adequate, or very adequate; (#3): no responsibility, some responsibility, much responsibility, or great responsibility, and; (#4): unsuccessful, some success, successful, or very successful. The efficacy outcomes are integrated into the larger body of the scale. Theoretically, if an individual believes that a particular task can be accomplished and that he or she possesses the key skills required for accomplishing the task, then they will persevere, even though they may have failed in past attempts at producing the desired outcomes.

**Preventable Worker Turnover:** Turnover is currently reported with measures closely related to the preventable turnover definition; however, there are some discrepancies. Worker turnover in the experimental units will be more closely tracked while work proceeds on improving the comparison site's record keeping. Ellett (2001<sup>(1)</sup>, 2001<sup>(2)</sup>) suggests that organizational change may be needed to raise worker self-efficacy beliefs and thus lower turnover. The Ellett Scale (SEASW) results will be compared with the SOE constructs on job satisfaction, burnout, stress/time management, and team work and the turnover figures.

**Peer Record Review:** Peer Record Review (PRR), developed as part of the CD's quality improvement process, involves front line staff in examining practice for both evaluation and learning purposes. The PRR protocol is based on existing agency policy and best practice

standards and was tested through a number of mock reviews. Following numerous modifications, the protocol was standardized and has been in use since January 2000. The protocol's 14-page detailed instructions allow an overall score to be determined and increase reliability across different raters. Between five and 10 percent of cases from each program area are randomly selected for quarterly review. The PRR was selected as a measure of current practice which would respond to changes in worker assessment and decision ability.

**Consumer Satisfaction Surveys:** Quality service delivery is dependent upon feedback from all stakeholders. Consumer surveys are one mechanism used to obtain critical feedback for the quality improvement process. The agency historically solicited feedback via client response postcards but response rates were abysmally low and distribution was sporadic. In 2001, a cross agency team enhanced the consumer satisfaction measures by developing the survey process for consumers participating in all program areas and foster care vendors. Survey recipients are selected randomly each month from information contained in the agency's automated Legacy system. Consumers respond to 10 items on an agree-disagree scale of 1-5. In excess of 10% of consumers in each program area are surveyed yearly with the results used in quality improvement process.

**Client Outcome Measures:** The outcome measures were also developed for the quality improvement program. The CD had used several measures for strategic planning, budget planning, and management reporting, which frequently changed depending upon the audience and the political climate. The measures failed to provide a holistic historical perspective of the agency's work. In order to provide consistent information for these multiple purposes, a standardized set of outcome measures was developed and has been in use since July 2001. The measures include, among others, those used in the Child and Family Services Review and were derived using AFCARS, NCANDS, and Legacy system data.

Twenty outcome measures, corresponding to all program areas and CD goals, were developed by a team of field staff, central office staff, and researchers from the Department of Social Services. The measures describe program activity, evaluate progress toward agency goals, provide consistent information to multiple audi-

**Table 2: Description of Each of the Five Outcome Measures**

1. **Timeliness of initial contact** — state statute and agency policy dictates assurance of child safety within 24 hours of receipt of a report. The only exception to this mandate is when educational neglect is the sole allegation. This measure is calculated for child abuse and neglect reports concluded within the three month period under review.
2. **Timeliness of report completion** — state statute and agency policy dictates completion of a child abuse and neglect investigation/assessment within 30 days of receipt of a report. This measure is calculated for child abuse and neglect reports concluded within the three month period under review.
3. **Reoccurrence of substantiated child abuse/neglect** — this measure provides the percentage of children with a substantiated child abuse and neglect report within the 3 month period under review who also had a substantiated report within the prior 6 months.
4. **Child abuse and neglect in FCS cases** — this measure provides the percentage of children in Family-Centered Services cases with a substantiated child abuse and neglect report within the 3 month period under review. FCS cases for this measure include only intact families.
5. **FCS families with cases open over 12 months** — this measure indicates the number of FCS families with whom the Division of Family Services has been providing services for over 12 months. FCS cases for this measure include only intact families.

ences, and are used by all levels of staff in the quality improvement process. Data for each of the outcome measures is made available on a quarterly basis through the agency intranet.

Five of the 20 outcome measures were selected for this project as they are likely to respond to changes in casework practice. They include: timeliness of initial contact, timeliness of report completion, reoccurrence of substantiated child abuse/neglect, reoccurrence of abuse in intact families, and number of intact families with cases open over 12 months. These measures were selected as they relate specifically to child protective services and change in these measures can be observed in a relatively short period of time. Table 2 details each of the five measures.

### **Conclusion – Issues and Considerations**

This article overviews the evaluation plan for the Missouri CPS project. It attempts to describe relationship between the process evaluation for the training component and the outcomes that supervisors and workers will create in implementing the training. The models is graphically presented and described along

with detail on the measures to be used.

There remain a few important observations regarding attempts to improve child welfare practice via action research and learning laboratory cooperation between community groups, the university and the state agency. First, action research requires that both training and evaluation fit the realities of day to day work. Consequently, measures were selected recognizing the importance of minimal additional data collection and the use of measures already in place and trusted by the supervisors and workers. The project team selected the SOE, PRR, worker turnover, and outcome measures in use in the agency's quality process and for which data could be extracted to form a pre-intervention baseline.

Second, in order to scale a successful program to the entire agency, supervisors in the experimental units must represent the full range of agency supervisors. The team emphasized the assignment of supervisors to the project rather than individual self-selection to reduce the effect of highly motivated learners who would probably not be representative of all subjects. A limitation of this method is that the progress of individual supervisors in learning and employing new methods

may not available as some of the measures are not traceable from worker to supervisor. The process evaluation's component on individual supervisory development plans may answer part of this question.

Third, the comparison areas have been designated as 'passive' data sites. No data collection beyond existing agency records or measures in the quality process will be

undertaken. Further, the CD will not implement changes in the comparison sites unless the entire state is to receive the change. This also may limit the direct comparison of individual supervisory units but has the advantage of not burdening those who will not receive the training benefit and recognizing that information gathering can itself be an intervention in a social situation.

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