# Disseminating a Model for Internal Evaluation of Supported Employment Programs for People with Developmental Disabilities

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## Abstract

*This paper reports on a project underway in Southwestern Ontario since 1992, that has sought to increase the internal capacity for program evaluation of a network of agencies providing supported employment services for people with developmental disabilities. Standardized service delivery indicators were defined and a computerized information system developed and disseminated. Lessons learned included the need to anticipate and assess barriers to using the resulting information; the need for both "bottom-up" support staff as well as "top-down" management support; and the need for more emphasis on how the information collected can contribute to individual service planning. While recognizing the difficulty for organizations of sustaining healthy internal cultures for program evaluation over the long term, the dissemination of this evaluation model has been very successful.*

Supported employment for people with developmental disabilities is an important element of the roster of support services needed for successful community living (Smith & Philippen, 1999). As the delivery of supported employment has become more widespread, there have been calls both to increase the capacity of agencies to improve employment opportunities, and for the evaluation of service outcomes (Mark, 1994). However, whereas program evaluation was once driven primarily by processes external to a program for the purposes of accountability and research, program evaluation is now, more commonly, viewed as an internally driven process for the purposes of program management and improvement (Hudson, Mayne & Thomlison, 1992; Love, 1983), and organizational learning (Preskill & Torres, 1999). This new paradigm for program evaluation has had considerable appeal to providers of health and social services (Love, 1991; 1993). Little, however, has been written about the approaches used, and/or the challenges faced, in attempting to increase the capacity for program evaluation, within either individual human service agencies or a larger system of service providers working in a common domain such as developmental disabilities.

Empirical research, based upon classic organizational theory as well as the action research model of Lewin (1946) and subsequent variations (e.g., Frohman, Sashkin & Kavanaugh, 1976), offers the almost ubiquitous finding that there exists a close relationship between participation in the decision-making process and the adoption of planned change or innovations (Lord, Ochaka, Czarny, & McGillivary, 1998; Spaniol, Zipple, & Cohen, 1991). This finding underscores a longstanding, and strong, recommendation to develop ongoing performance measurement and evaluation systems that not only address the needs of multiple stakeholders, but also involve these stakeholders in the evaluation and change process itself (Grasso & Epstein, 1989; Moran, 1987). To the extent that program evaluation can be viewed as an "innovation" or a new "technology" to support internal decision-making, the large literature on the diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 1983) offers concrete recommendations for the successful dissemination of program evaluation ideas and methods. For example, the diffusion model suggests that a proposed change be consistent with the value system of the target audience; that internal leaders be identified to champion the change process; and that there be enough flexibility in the technology to meet individual needs. These ideas are ensconced in some very practical and common sense strategies useful for developing a positive organizational culture for evaluation. These include conducting internal needs analyses to tailor evaluation processes to current organizational roles and structures; engaging the support of an internal champion or opinion leader; and starting small with manageable projects in order to demonstrate small successes and to build motivation.

## Evaluation of Supported Employment Programs

This paper reports on a project that has been underway in Southwestern Ontario, Canada, since 1992. The overarching goal of the project has been to increase the internal capacity for program evaluation across a network of agencies providing supported employment services for people with developmental disabilities. Given the lack of theory on which to base specific hypotheses about the diffusion process at the time the project was initiated, our objectives were exploratory and descriptive in nature, with a view to building upon the relatively scant literature on the development of internal evaluation capacity in small human service organizations.

Serving as consultants to a stakeholder-based steering committee, the authors helped to develop, implement, and test an evaluation model for supported employment services that would serve a variety of purposes (as will be described below). Beyond model development and testing, however, our additional goal as consultants was to facilitate the development of a network of service providers with the capacity to self-evaluate. Further, while the project was not driven explicitly by an objective to formally benchmark each service provider to the normative performance of the peer organizations within this network, there was an explicit desire to standardize the information being collected in each site in order to allow for at least some cross-site comparisons for the first time.

## The Evaluation Model

In collaboration with a Steering Committee that represented the involved agencies, a three-step evaluation model was designed to enable agencies to improve their program evaluation knowledge and skills. The three steps of the model may be implemented either simultaneously or sequentially and, together, create a comprehensive approach by which agencies can evaluate their supported employment programs. Each step involves detailed processes and activities for staff. In brief, the three steps are:

- Standardized service indicators, gathered on an ongoing basis for each person with a developmental disability who is being supported in the agency's supported employment services
- Satisfaction of service recipients, gathered periodically on all, or a sample of, the people with developmental disabilities being supported in the agency's supported employment services
- Evaluation of outcomes, utilizing an organizational peer support approach

In addition to the specific methods of information collection and data analyses that were incorporated into the model, there was also an emphasis on developing, through the process of implementing the model, a healthy culture for program evaluation within each agency (Community Involvement Council, 1997a). This involved, for example, designating an internal "lead hand" for evaluation and training, and supporting agencies to involve people with developmental disabilities and other stakeholders (such as senior managers and Board members) in the evaluation process.

The peer-assisted model of outcome evaluation is described in a separate report (Lord & Rush, 2002). In the present paper, we report primarily on the first steps of the evaluation model, as these have been the components most widely implemented. We briefly describe the approach and the pilot work done with agencies, and discuss lessons learned in implementation. An additional paper presents and interprets sample data that have emerged from this process (Rush & Dale, 2002).

## Development and Dissemination Strategy

### Project development

The project was initiated in 1992, sparked by the interest of the regional Community Involvement Council in assessing the outcomes for people with developmental disabilities being supported in community work settings. This Council is comprised of Program Managers and Supervisors representing about 25 Community Living Associations in Southwestern Ontario. Financial support for the project was made

available from the provincial government Ministry primarily responsible for funding community living and supported employment services. The Ministry officials involved were also interested in evaluation models and measures that would go beyond the counting and description of service recipients and the services provided to them. A smaller project committee was developed, comprised of 12 agency representatives and a Ministry representative. A Project Coordinator was seconded from one of the participating agencies, himself quite closely involved in the management of a supported employment service.

**Role of the evaluation consultants**

An understanding of the role of the evaluation consultants involved in the project is critical to understanding the dissemination process and eventual uptake of the evaluation models and measures. In 1995, one of the authors (B.R.) was engaged as a consultant to support the work of the smaller project team. From the outset, the role was defined as supportive rather than directive and a close working relationship was established with the Project Coordinator. The consultant did not play a direct role in the work with the end-user agencies. Rather, the advice offered remained at the conceptual level and was used in the preparation of the measurement tools and manuals. The second author (J.L.) was also engaged as a consultant, and in a similar supportive role, as the project moved forward with respect to the third step of the evaluation model, the development of the peer support component.

Both consultants were engaged, from time to time, to make presentations or conduct training workshops for members of the Community Involvement Council and other interested community partners. Some of these presentations concerned the progress of the overall project, while others were focused instead on skill development with respect to the development and use of program logic models; strategies to develop a positive evaluation culture; measuring outcomes of supported employment; and implementing peer support evaluation.

There were two other key players in the dissemination process. One individual was a Program Manager for supported employment services in one of the participating agencies. He was very interested in the evaluation model from the outset, and made a commitment on behalf of his program to seeing the evaluation model through to routine practice. He became a strong internal champion for program evaluation and organizational learning, as well as a role model for his peers both internally, within his own organization, and externally, among the other involved agencies. As the project evolved, he took on a supportive role beyond the scope of his own agency concerns (assisting and pilot testing the development of new software and reporting formats). The second key individual was a Systems Administrator at one of the participating agencies who played a major role in the technical advancement of the software that supported various components of the model.

**Dissemination strategies**

Eight agencies participated in pilot testing the service delivery indicators. Most of these agencies provided a range of supports to community living for people with developmental disabilities, including supported employment services. Two agencies were oriented exclusively towards employment services. The eight agencies varied in terms of existing information systems and experience with data collection and computer systems. The majority could be described as being fairly inexperienced in these areas.

Dissemination of the evaluation model and specific tools and ideas was neither guided strategically by formal diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 1983), nor by a specific model of planned change within human service organizations. Neither did we empirically test different dissemination strategies, as did Stevens and Tornatzky (1980) with a much larger sample of programs. However, consistent with Stevens and Tornatzky (1980), the Steering Committee and Project Coordinator relied largely upon informal, grassroots, "bottom-up" processes as opposed to formal bureaucratic structures, agreements and/or "top-down" directives from either the primary funding body or internal Senior Managers. These informal processes included voluntary participation in the Steering Committee itself (by the Executive Director, Program Manager and\or staff of the site); mail-outs of manuals and computer disks; personal on-site visits by the Project Coordinator to provide support in installation and initial data entry; telephone support as requested and through periodic, scheduled calls from the Project Coordinator to assess needs and review progress; periodic meetings of an end-user support group chaired by the Project Coordinator; and promotion and participation in the various evaluation workshops mentioned above. One contact person, or "lead hand", was also identified in each agency as the focal point for liaison with the project. A manual was prepared to guide the collection of the service delivery indicators and distributed to each participating agency (Community Involvement Council, 1997b). The manual provided the definitions of the indicators, the forms developed to assist in data collection, and the procedures for data analysis and report preparation. The package included the necessary software and instructions for its installation and use.

## Project Review and Evaluation: Methods for Developing this Report

As noted above, the authors have been involved with the project in various stages and in a range of capacities. In preparing this paper, we have grounded our observations, reflections and conclusions in several sources of information including:

1. Minutes of meetings, field notes from on-site visits with end users, and internal evaluation reports from their sites.

2. Review of written reflections of the most actively involved staff of the participating agencies.

3. Semi-structured telephone interviews with five agency representatives who were involved most heavily in implementing the standardized service delivery indicators and the service satisfaction components. The interviews were about 30 minutes in length and covered a range of questions about current status and lessons learned with respect to Steps One and Two of the evaluation model, as well as their past or anticipated participation in Step Three.

4. Meetings between the two authors where themes and issues were developed.

By the end of this dialogue, the writing had been structured around a conceptual framework; the material had been organized into issues and lessons learned that were to be presented in two separate reports for publication; and sharing of the draft report with the key stakeholders who had played a central role in the evaluation process had occurred.

While each of these steps is consistent with contemporary social research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), available resources did not provide for a full qualitative, grounded theory analysis of these various sources of information. However, three strategies were followed to increase the trustworthiness of our conclusions: 1) initial independent assessment of themes between the two analysts (B.R. and J. L.), 2) triangulation across the information sources, and 3) member-checking with the key stakeholders providing information.

**Definitions and agency-level data collection processes**

Employment was defined in a manner consistent with the Employment Standards Act, namely, that the work must pay minimum wage or higher and can include self-employment under the same condition. This definition thus helps draw a distinction between supported work and supported employment.

Consistent with current practice (Smith & Philippen, 1999), for the purposes of this model supported employment was defined as:

> *…the development of an individualized employment plan and ongoing training and support as required. It may also include other work-related supports, i.e., arranging for and\or the provision of special equipment or workforce modifications, transportation or transportation training, teaching functional skills related to the social climate of the workplace, arranging for proper clothing or teaching personal hygiene.Each of the eleven service delivery indicators was also defined and these definitions are as follows:*

1. Number of Agreements in Effect: The number of people with developmental disabilities with whom the agency has contracted, or otherwise arranged, to provide consultation, job search, employment support, or employment-related support through the allocation of staff or other resources during the reporting interval. This data element does not reflect the number of referrals that the agency received over the reporting interval, but includes all those who are actively receiving services directed towards employment (as opposed to leisure, volunteering, etc.). The number of agreements in effect includes those individuals who were employed at some point in the reporting period, as well as those who have not yet achieved paid employment.

2. Number of Service Recipients Employed: The number of people with developmental disabilities receiving services through the agency, during the reporting interval, who were in an employment situation that meets the description of employment contained in the Employment Standards Act (as cited above). This indicator counts the number of people employed, regardless of the length of the employment during the reporting period.

3. Job Classification: A summary of the total number of people working within specific NOC job categories as defined by Stats Canada/CEIC during the reporting interval1. The following categories are used:

- Business, Finance, Administration
- Natural and Applied Sciences
- Health Occupations
- Social Sciences
- Arts, Culture
- Sales, Services
- Trades, Transport and Equipment Operators
- Primary Industries
- Processing, Manufacturing, Utilities

4. Average Hours Worked per Week (per service recipient): The average number of hours (paid) worked each week by each service recipient, averaged across all the weeks in the reporting interval2. There is no requirement for a minimum number of hours. Statutory holidays and sick days are included if the individual is paid for these.

5. Total Hours Worked per Week (all service recipients combined): The combined total of hours (paid) that all service recipients are currently working in a week averaged across all the weeks in the reporting interval3. There is no requirement for a minimum number of hours. Statutory holidays and sick days are included if the individual is paid for these.

6. Average Earnings per Week (per service recipient): The average amount earned each week from employment, by each service recipient, averaged across all the weeks in the reporting interval.

7. Total Earnings per Week: The combined total number of dollars that all service recipients (as counted above) are currently earning in a week from employment, averaged across all the weeks in the reporting interval. Earnings that are reported should be gross earnings per week (i.e., before deductions).

8. Average Hours of Support per Week (per service recipient): The average number of hours worked by direct staff for each service recipient for consultation, job search, employment support, or employment-related support, including such things as travel time, preparation of reports, phone calls, and counselling, averaged across all the weeks in the reporting interval.

9. Total Hours of Support per Week (staff resource): The combined total of hours worked by direct service staff for all service recipients for consultation, job search, employment support, or employment-related support, including such things as travel time, preparation of reports, phone calls and counselling.

10. Average Direct Cost of Support per Week (per service recipient): The average cost of the hours of support worked by direct service staff in support of each service recipient, averaged across all the weeks in the reporting interval. Direct costs are based on an average hourly rate for direct support staff in the program, including salary and benefits. At present, determination of direct costs does not include mileage or other incidental costs such as assistive devices to facilitate employment, or other indirect overhead costs.

11. Total Direct Cost of Support per Week: The total cost of hours of support worked by direct service staff in support of all service recipients, allocated by the agency to people receiving services, averaged across all the weeks in the reporting interval. Direct costs are based on an average hourly rate for direct support staff in the program, including salary and benefits. At present, determination of direct costs does not include mileage or other incidental costs such as assistive devices to facilitate employment or other indirect overhead costs.

The information required for the calculation of the eleven data elements included information for the program as a whole (e.g., number of agreements; average wage of support workers), and information that must be summarized across each individual person (e.g., hours worked). The project manual recommended that each agency designate a single person to be responsible for maintaining the centralized records and for running the computer program used to summarize the data. A basic information system was developed which involved the initial collection of the

information in paper format with subsequent entry of the collected information into a computer software program developed specifically for the project. As with many information systems developed over the 1990s, for small to mid-sized agencies in the social service sector, the system had to accommodate sites with very low levels of information technology. Improvements to the software developed for this project continue with new versions last distributed to the participating agencies in the spring of 2000.

**Adoption issues**

In this section we summarize issues that emerged in the design and implementation of the service delivery indicators. As noted earlier, thematic issues were drawn primarily from the personal interviews with the "lead hands" designated to implement the model in the six agencies most heavily involved in the project; from personal reflections and commentary from the main stakeholders in the development and implementation process (e.g. Project Leader; Project Coordinator); and from the authors' own review and synthesis of project documentation and reports.

The overriding theme is that the adoption of the first two steps of the evaluation model can best be described as a highly variable and sporadic process across individual participants, but also as a process of gradual diffusion across the entire network of target agencies. Implementation across the network clearly occurred along a continuum, with individual sites varying from full and complete adoption of the model to minimal involvement only. What then accounts for these variations across the sites in the adoption of the data collection and feedback systems? We have organized the emergent themes into three broad categories: within-agency issues; systemic issues; and project-specific issues.

**Within-agency issues**

Successful adoption of the model depended considerably upon the intrinsic motivation of the agency, as well as the retention of key internal stakeholders. This is reflected in the following comments:

> *…success depends on perseverance. Can't really use the data until you have a routine process in place and it takes faith to keep it going in light of multiple internal barriers.…started a year ago and then stopped. Not sure why it stopped but the system of data collection has now been reactivated.…don't know [what the issues have been in implementation]. Haven't really been involved that long. No sense of history.In some situations there was a passive adoption of the data collection system but no relationship to existing accountability processes and no mechanism for the application of the data for the purposes of internal quality improvement:*

> *…haven't really used it yet and not sure what it will be used for. Information requested by the Board is different and not sure if discussions have been held about whether their needs might be met with the information from the database.…summary goes to the Vocational Services Committee of the Board. Not sure what they do with it. Information is basically volunteered to the Board.One of the important emerging themes, in the reflections on the implementation process among many stakeholders, was time. This was reflected, for example, in concerns about minimizing the time required for data collection, entry and report preparation by agency staff:*

> *…process seemed difficult and time consuming in the beginning. Still seen as time consuming but expect it will become routine. Difficult with four staff and a part-time coordinator.…difficult in the beginning but with each change [to the software] it is getting better. Now it only takes 15 minutes a week of each worker's time to enter the information. This is very efficient.Also, the concern about the time required by staff to learn the new software was raised, especially given the demands being placed on the agencies during restructuring. In addition, while some participants criticized the data system for not meeting all their information requirements, many were still prepared to commit time to several manual data collection systems. Thus, overcoming the learning curve for new software was interpreted to have a low priority despite the potential to save time in other areas.*

A related theme emerged concerning the need for a long-term view in establishing the culture shift needed within the organization which would place a higher premium on evaluation feedback:

> *…the first couple of times were difficult because people were not used to being asked in this formal way for feedback. People were very tentative early on. Frequency is the key – now it [the service recipient questionnaire] is routine for the people being supported and not that threatening.It's been a long process but look at what we are now able to present at the regional level.*

Initially it was difficult to get over the culture barrier. Now it is seen as part of the job. We had very strong supports from the senior managers for evaluation and this system.

Just as the person needs less and less support [over time] it is the same with the system and supporting it to increase the evaluation capacity.

**Systemic issues**

In addition to those issues related to the individual motivation and commitment of key participants and management support, another issue that influenced participation was the concern that the funding Ministry had continued to request their program planning and accountability information in their traditional format. The new data system and definitions were not completely consistent with this traditional approach:

> *…have been doing monthly stats for MCSS by hand. These were still being done that way on separate sheets.At least one participating agency that started, and then stopped, the data collection processes on two different occasions received funding from multiple sources and found it easier to maintain their original manual, but highly customized, data collection system:*
>
> *…still collecting a lot of manual statistics because of so many funding sources (e.g. CMHA, Ontario Works, HRDC).One early participant commented:*
>
> *…supported employment is only part of what is provided by the agency (e.g. job training, volunteer placement, school to work program). We found ourselves using two databases and given the job demands the decision was made to drop the program.This issue of the inconsistency of the reporting requirements of the funding bodies has gradually improved over the course of the project. The use of the project's key service delivery indicators and definitions in the funding bodies' year-end, regional roll-up of supported employment programs is particularly noteworthy in this regard (Rush & Dale, this volume). One participant in the project, who had delayed their agency's involvement, was later motivated to participate based on the understanding that the issue of Ministry reporting had been resolved:*
>
> *We understand that the new program will collect the statistics we need for MCSS.*

**Project-specific issues**

A very significant barrier to the adoption of the project data systems was the computer software itself both the time required and the difficulties inherent in learning any new software. As well, there were concerns about this particular DOS-based database application. A shareware product had been selected on the basis of its free availability and suitability for operation on a 286 Intel platform at the time the lowest common denominator in terms of hardware available to participating agencies. It was not until the software had been revamped based on an Access 2 (Windows)

platform that concerns about the software subsided:

> *…the main issue has been getting the computer program to the stage where it is a user-friendly product.…started early on with Epi-Info but it was very frustrating. New software is better.…was involved early on with Epi-Info then stopped.An unanticipated barrier, that led to adoption of some aspects of the data collection system but not of others, was a concern over privacy of information.*

In particular, a concern was expressed that it may not be appropriate to ask service recipients how much money they were earning:

> *When asked to enter the wage the person is earning they often don't know. They know at least minimum wage since this is the bottom line for agency policy. But it may not be appropriate to ask. May not be ethical. Some employers don't think of these folks as clients of an agency. At what point are we invading the person's privacy asking about such things as wages. Staff are now getting comfortable asking about or at least estimating [wages] with pressure from the top to get all the data.*

Other stakeholders felt that since the programs were in the business of finding people jobs, that the assessment of earnings resulting from this employment should be viewed as an appropriate performance indicator for accountability purposes.

**Lessons learned**

From a project management and information dissemination perspective, the "bottom-up" strategy of working directly with a "lead-hand" in each participating agency had one advantage. This strategy brought the Project Coordinator (and, later, the individual responsible for supporting software enhancements) directly into contact with the end-user to facilitate assessment of needs and to deal with barriers to implementation. While the pattern of adoption was interrupted and lengthy in some sites due to the many factors cited above, a gradual uptake across the regional supported employment network has occurred, a result of the buy-in and commitment of the small group of individuals involved. This progress notwithstanding, the dissemination process would probably have been smoother and faster if the project plan had been more strategic in five areas.

First, the dissemination plan should have made provision for more comprehensive needs analyses to allow for the assessment of the barriers to using the information collected. While there was a subsequent attempt made to address the evaluation culture in the participating agencies (Community Involvement Council, 1997a), in hindsight, this should have been addressed earlier and more strategically in each

participating site. A more tailored approach to working with each agency, and, perhaps, more deliberate use of some of the key principles of diffusion of inn ovation theory (Rogers, 1983) is suggested. For example, working with agencies to determine how the new system could make incremental improvements over the existing systems might have been a more successful approach to integrating Steps One and Two into the agencies' existing evaluation and quality improvement processes.

Second, the "bottom-up" strategy inherent in the project plan should have been complemented by more "top-down" consultation, intervention and monitoring of agency progress. For example, more direct work with the Executive Directors and\or senior managers of some of the participating sites might have helped the internal lead-hand to integrate the new data collection and feedback processes into existing quality improvement activities. It may also have added another level to the monitoring of progress within each site. This support would, arguably, have been useful given the part-time nature of the Project Coordinator's role and the difficulty in being proactive in the monitoring role across several sites (e.g., dealing with staff departures and other critical events that served to slow progress). The role of the consultants to the project could also have been extended to support the monitoring function, at least in the early trial phase of the project. More direct "top-down" involvement of the funding Ministry in the early stages of implementation might also have been beneficial, in two ways. Ministry involvement may have ensured that the new data collection system would be consistent with Ministry reporting requirements. Further, such involvement may have facilitated the promotion of the benefits of standardized information for cross-site comparisons and system-level bench marking of key indicators.

Third, the dissemination strategy would likely have benefited from greater emphasis in the early stages of the project on the value of the resulting information for individual service planning. In the one site that has made the most progress implementing the service delivery indicators and the service recipient questionnaire, the information that is gathered is examined closely for its potential application at the level of the individual with a developmental disability who is receiving employment services.

Fourth, a tension emerged in response to the customization of data collection and reporting systems at the level of individual agencies. While this refinement and customization of the data collection and reporting systems demonstrated the buy-in and enthusiasm of the end-users, it served also to result in a drift from the original definitions and specifications, thus limiting cross-site comparisons. This was particularly evident in the revisions made in the calculations and reporting of some of the standardized service indicators. In some cases computerized data was collected only for service recipients who were working, thus requiring manual hand calculations be made from the printouts to derive all of the eleven service delivery

indicators as they were originally defined in the program manual. One result of these customizations was that the denominator used to calculate the average hours worked for each person was changed in some agencies to count only those weeks worked rather than all weeks in the reporting period. The level and cost of supported employment leading up to a period of work (or not) is thus minimized by this new method of calculation. Also, as noted previously, some sites only included people who were working, as opposed to all people with developmental disabilities who were being supported in their search and/or preparation for work. This also has the net effect of minimizing the total cost of support for the program as a whole in comparison to total earnings. It is hypothesized that some of this user-specific customization may be driven by the requests of the funding Ministry for accountability information only for people with developmental disabilities who are working. There seems, however, to be a general tendency at all levels to downplay the level of support being provided to those people with developmental disabilities who are not yet working and who may find competitive employment the most challenging. Regardless of the factors underlying customization of data collection and reporting at the site level, the variations from key definitions underscores the need for centralized monitoring of the diffusion process. This should include routine audits of data quality and consistency to ensure both validity and comparability.

Finally, it is evident that any new information technology being introduced for the purposes of data collection and monitoring must be very user friendly. With the aim of being inclusive, the initial choice of software for this project hinged upon the lowest common denominator of hardware available among the participating agencies. As the DOS-based product became increasingly outdated with the move to Windows, it became clear that it would have been preferable to develop the data collection software on the basis of the higher end of the technology. This strategy would have facilitated a more positive experience and allowed project staff to promote the ease of application as an incentive to those other agencies less advanced in terms of technology.

## Discussion and Conclusion

While our objectives in this report have been exploratory and descriptive, many of our findings are consistent with the larger literature on the factors associated with implementing change within an organizational context. This includes, for example, the need for broad stakeholder involvement (Lord et al., 1998); the importance of key opinion leaders and the need to take a long-term view on progress (Spaniol, Zipple & Cohen, 1991); the need to think of the change process as often non-linear and unpredictable (Gorin & Weirich, 1995; Moran, 1987); and the value of providing feedback at the level of the individual consumer to front-line staff (Grasso & Epstein, 1989). Consistent with the conclusions drawn by Moran (1987), we also noted the critical need for the evaluation technology to be extremely user-friendly. Our

experience also leads us to agree with the findings of Stevens and Tornatzky (1980) that the adoption of evaluation strategies and technology is facilitated by participative consultation, such as was provided in this project through end-user involvement, on-site support and telephone follow-up consultation.

The need for participative approaches notwithstanding, our findings further suggest the need for more directive "top-down" management support and a strong reinforcing message from funding bodies that efforts will be rewarded through workload reduction by creating non-duplicative feedback systems for use in decision-making and planning. Gorin and Weirich (1995) concluded that the characteristics of the internal organizational context (such as management style, the mix of funding sources, and centre autonomy) were more important than characteristics of the external context (such as demands for external accountability in the adoption of a Performance Assessment System across a group of community mental health centres in the United States). While our descriptive data do not test specific hypotheses in this regard, we did note the higher level of enthusiasm for the collection of the standardized service delivery indicators when the funding Ministry began to request their accountability data in a form closer to that collected by the project information system. Over time, too, we would expect the role of these external accountability pressures to be even more important given the trend towards performance contracting and outcome-based funding.

We also conclude from our experience with this small group of agencies that the shift that has occurred over the past two decades towards the internal evaluation paradigm (Love, 1991; 1993) needs to now be paralleled by more focused research and theory building that would support strategies to incorporate routine evaluation mechanisms into agencies' decision-making and quality improvement processes. Organizations are complex and planned change requires broad conceptual models to guide "diagnosis", action planning and culture shift (Mordancy & Tolchinsky, 1982). These interventions need also to be grounded in a broad conceptualization of the "use" of evaluation feedback, as it is now widely known that "use" can be "staged" and take many forms over time within a given agency (e.g., Gorin & Weirich, 1995; Kirkhart, 2000; Shuhla & Cousins, 1997).

In summary, developing the internal capacity for evaluation at the agency and system-levels requires a long-term commitment to the process, careful planning, and adequate support. Overcoming initial challenges posed by new computer technology that was not particularly user-friendly, as well as challenges involved in integrating new evaluation data into existing monitoring and quality improvement processes at the agency and district-level, were critical to the success of this project. Challenges remain in the tension between continued customization to meet end-user needs and the perceived need for standardization to allow for meaningful cross-site comparisons. Managerial and Ministry support will be needed to overcome these and

other challenges that remain in the more wide scale adoption of these standardized service indicators and the other components of this evaluation model.

## Endnotes

[1] Job Classification is recorded in the database only for people with some employment. For each person the number of weeks with some work in the reporting period was determined and then summed across all people working to yield the number of "worker weeks". The work in each week was classified in these categories with the total number in each class then denominated by the number of worker weeks and multiplied by 100. For the reporting period this yields the percentage of work in these broad categories.

[2] Calculated by taking the total hours worked by all service recipients divided by the total "worker-weeks" (i.e., workers * weeks worked) in the reporting period.

[3] Calculated by taking the total hours worked by all service recipients divided by the total weeks in the reporting period.

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