Systems Integration:
Pursuing the "Holy Grail" of Public Policy

Toronto, Canada

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Institute for Research on Poverty
University of Wisconsin - Madison

Overview

Discussion Topics

- Background Information
  - Why are we interested in this topic once again?
  - What is happening around the United States?
- Service Integration 101
  - What do we expect?
  - Why the current interest?
- Challenges
  - What challenges have been identified?
  - How can these challenges be overcome?

Background

Framework for Research, Analysis, and Technical Assistance

- Since 2002, we have been participating in an umbrella project involving several partners that encompasses:
  - A legal analysis of what is possible under current federal law.
  - An operational analysis focusing on sites pursuing service integration.
  - A technical and methodological analysis of accountability and evaluation issues.
- We have adopted an iterative process whereby research and analysis informs technical assistance and technical assistance informs research and analysis.

Iterative Process Components

- Welfare Peer Assistance Network (WELPAN)
- Intensive on-site work in Midwest states
- NGA Policy Academy on Cross-Systems Innovation
- National “lighthouse” site visits and meetings
- Brainstorming meetings with policy analysts, evaluation researchers, and state and local practitioners
- Other analysts and researchers at the local, state, national, and international levels

What states are doing it?

- Arizona
- Michigan
- Pennsylvania
- Hawaii
- Utah
- Wisconsin

What counties are doing it?

- Oregon: Coos and Jackson Counties
- New Jersey: Atlantic County
- Georgia: Bibb County
- California: San Mateo County
- Ohio: Montgomery County
- Colorado: Mesa and El Paso Counties

What localities are doing it?

- Hampton City, Virginia
- Louisville, Kentucky
- Seattle (White Center), Washington

Key Observations

- Overall belief that systems integration has the potential for improving outcomes for target populations.
- Bottom-up, locally-driven strategies are germinating all over the country.
- Innovation benefits from—and often requires—technical assistance and information about “lessons learned” from other sites.
- More evidence is needed to test the hypothesis that systems integration leads to improved participant outcomes.
- Systems integration is easier said than done.

It is easier said than done.

- Service integration is:
  - not extensive. Even in “successful projects,” none had fully developed intended service linkages.
  - an evolutionary process. It takes time to organize and implement, to attain legitimacy in the eyes of service providers, and to develop working relationships among participating agencies.
  - facilitated and inhibited by numerous factors, but no single factor is instrumental in benefiting or impeding a majority of projects.
- There is no one best services integration method for providing client services.

Who said that?

- From “An Evaluation of Services Integration Projects” completed for…
- U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social and Rehabilitation Services in…
- 1972.

Systems Integration 101

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What is systems integration?

- No single definition.
- Other labels include “service integration” and “cross-systems innovation.”
- Common goal: to simplify and streamline access to and coordination of a broad, often complex array of services in order to improve outcomes for a specific population (e.g., children and families, children aging out of foster care, ex-offenders).
- Requires a shift in program management focus from delivering discrete services to a more holistic approach.

“Typical” Service Delivery System Attributes

- The system is too fragmented, leaving those clients with multiple issues vulnerable.
- The goals of individual programs are too limited.
- The services are often provided “in an inefficient, duplicative, and bureaucratically confusing manner to those who have the need.”
- The services tend to be lacking in accountability and to be self-perpetuating regardless of effectiveness.
- The service system is not sufficiently attentive to the long-term needs of clients.

Selected Attributes of Interest

- Families have:
  - Access to a broad range of services and supports
  - Ability to engage the system at different levels of intensity
- Families have access to individualized service plans that:
  - Accommodate multiple issues simultaneously
  - Respond to changing circumstances

Selected Attributes of Interest (continued)

- The focus is on achieving overall goals for individuals and families rather than those of a particular program.
- Public programs are viewed as one part of an overall system designed to support achievement of individual, family, and community goals.

Current interest is driven by opportunity…

- Natural progression of reforms since the 1980s.
- There has been a fundamental shift in how policy challenges are framed at the state and local level.
- This shift is reflected in evolving program purposes and emerging institutional cultures.

Evolving Program Purposes

Income Support

⇓

Job Placement

⇓

Work Support

⇓

Family Support

⇓

Community Support

⇓

Prevention

Emerging Institutional Cultures

Traditional Attributes	Emerging Attributes
Focus on benefits	Focus on behavior
Limited purpose	Multiple goals
Autonomous agency	Collaborative agency
Autonomous staff	Teams/collaborative staff
Rule oriented	Flexible
Limited target populations	Broader target populations
Short-term focus	Long-term focus
Process oriented	Outcome oriented
Static operations	Dynamic operations

…but also by necessity.

- Various populations have multi-faceted needs that individual programs are not designed to address.
- Concurrently, the ability to access flexible resources has diminished.
- The Deficit Reduction Act is requiring a re-examination of current practices.
- Effectiveness is more often being measured by outcomes rather than inputs or outputs.

Challenges

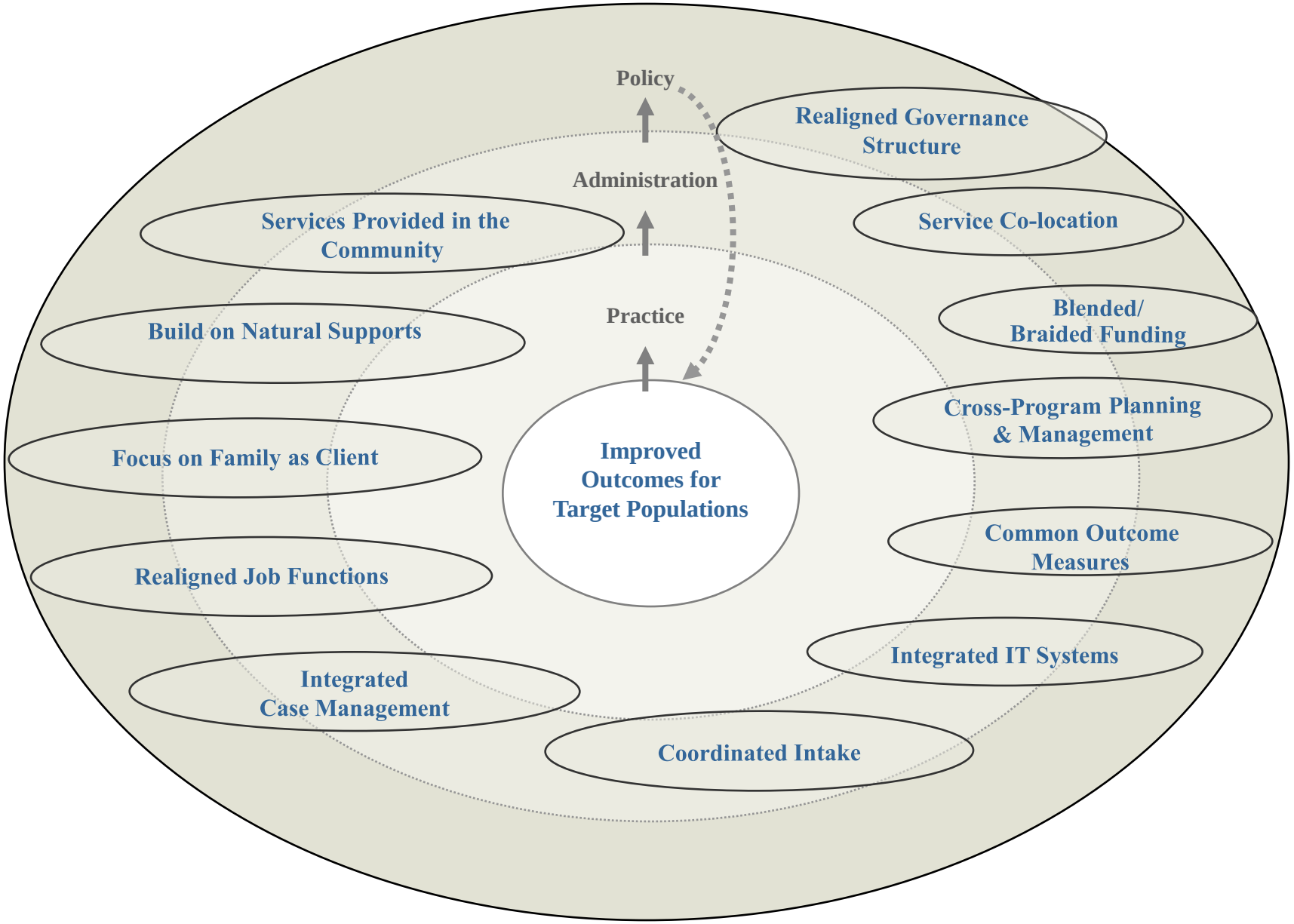
A Few Minor Challenges!

1) Not starting in the “right place.”
2) Confusing the means with the end.
3) Not having a alternative framework for thinking about integration.
4) Failing to appreciate the institutional implications of proposed changes.
5) Thinking about service integration as an event and not a process.

Not Starting in the Right Place

- Focusing on implementation of tactics rather than on:
  - A specific population.
  - A set of goals related to that population tied to measurable outcomes.

A Conceptual Framework for Service Integration



Confusing the Means with the End

- "Importing a solution" by picking from a list of tactics such as:
  - Co-location
  - Realigning governance structures
  - Consolidating intake
  - Consolidating job functions
  - Blending or braiding funding
  - Hiring a service liaison or "broker"

Not Having a Framework for Thinking About Systems Integration

- Institutional Similarity
- Relationship Intensity

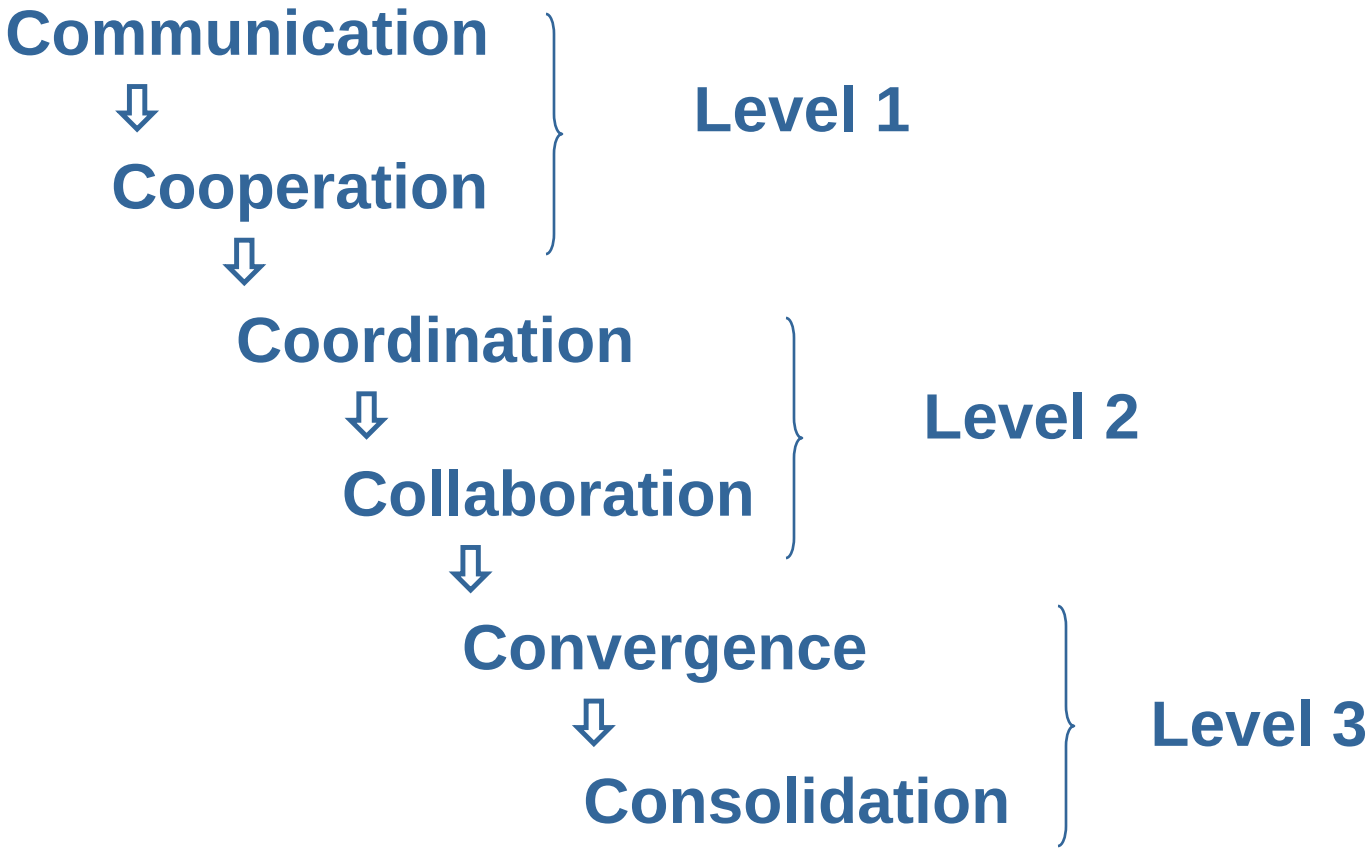
Institutional Similarity Continuum

- Routinized – benefits-issuing; rule-driven; bureaucratic
- Mixed – contained elements of both routinized and non-routinized
- Nonroutinized – people changing, discretion-focused, professional models

Institutional Similarity Matrix

FIRST CULTURAL TYPE	SECOND CULTURAL TYPE		
	Routinized	Mixed	Nonroutinized
Routinized	A	B	C
Mixed	B	A	B
Nonroutinized	C	B	A

Relationship Intensity Continuum



Relationship Intensity Matrix

INSTITUTIONAL SIMILARITY "A"	RELATIONSHIP INTENSITY		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
1st/2nd	Communication	Collaboration	Consolidation
Routinized/ Routinized	1	2	3
Mixed/Mixed	1	2	3
Nonroutinized/ Nonroutinized	1	2	3

Institutional Similarity-Relationship Intensity Matrix

SIMILARITY INDEX	CULTURAL TYPES		RELATIONSHIP INTENSITY		
			1	2	3
	First	Second	Communication	Collaboration	Consolidation
A	Routinized Mixed Nonroutinized	Routinized Mixed Nonroutinized	A1	A2	A3
B	Routinized Nonroutinized	Mixed Mixed	B1	B2	B3
C	Routinized	Nonroutinized	C1	C2	C3

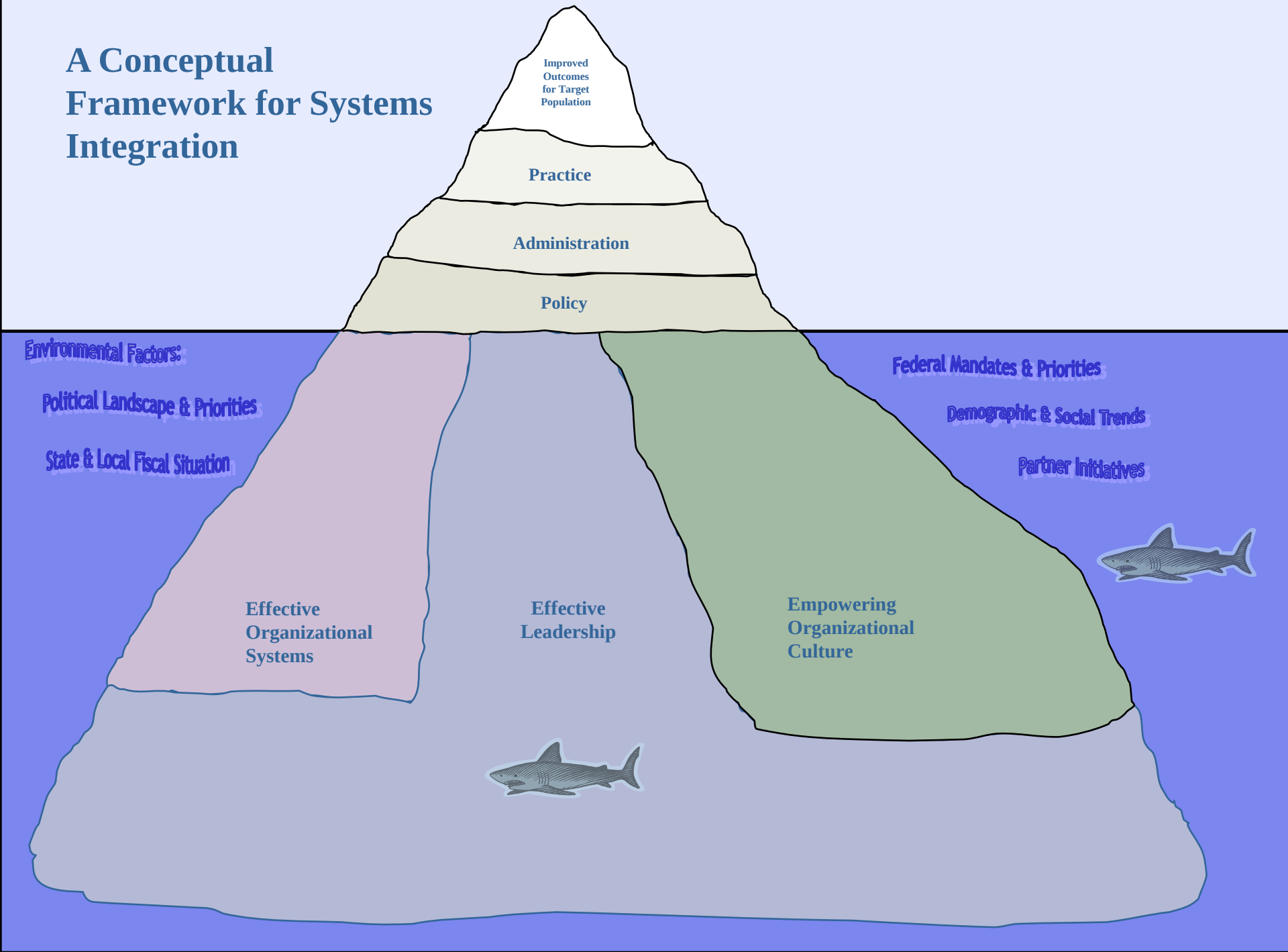
Failing to Appreciate Institutional Implications

- Concentrating efforts on modifications to practice protocols, administrative systems and policies.
- Neglecting differences in leadership style, organizational culture, and institutional systems.

Visualizing the Implementation Challenge

- Think of an iceberg.
- Above the waterline are things we can easily see: practice, administration, policy.
- However, there are other important factors below the waterline: leadership, organizational systems, and organizational culture.
- Below the waterline factors are often overlooked when designing and carrying out these innovations.

A Conceptual Framework for Systems Integration



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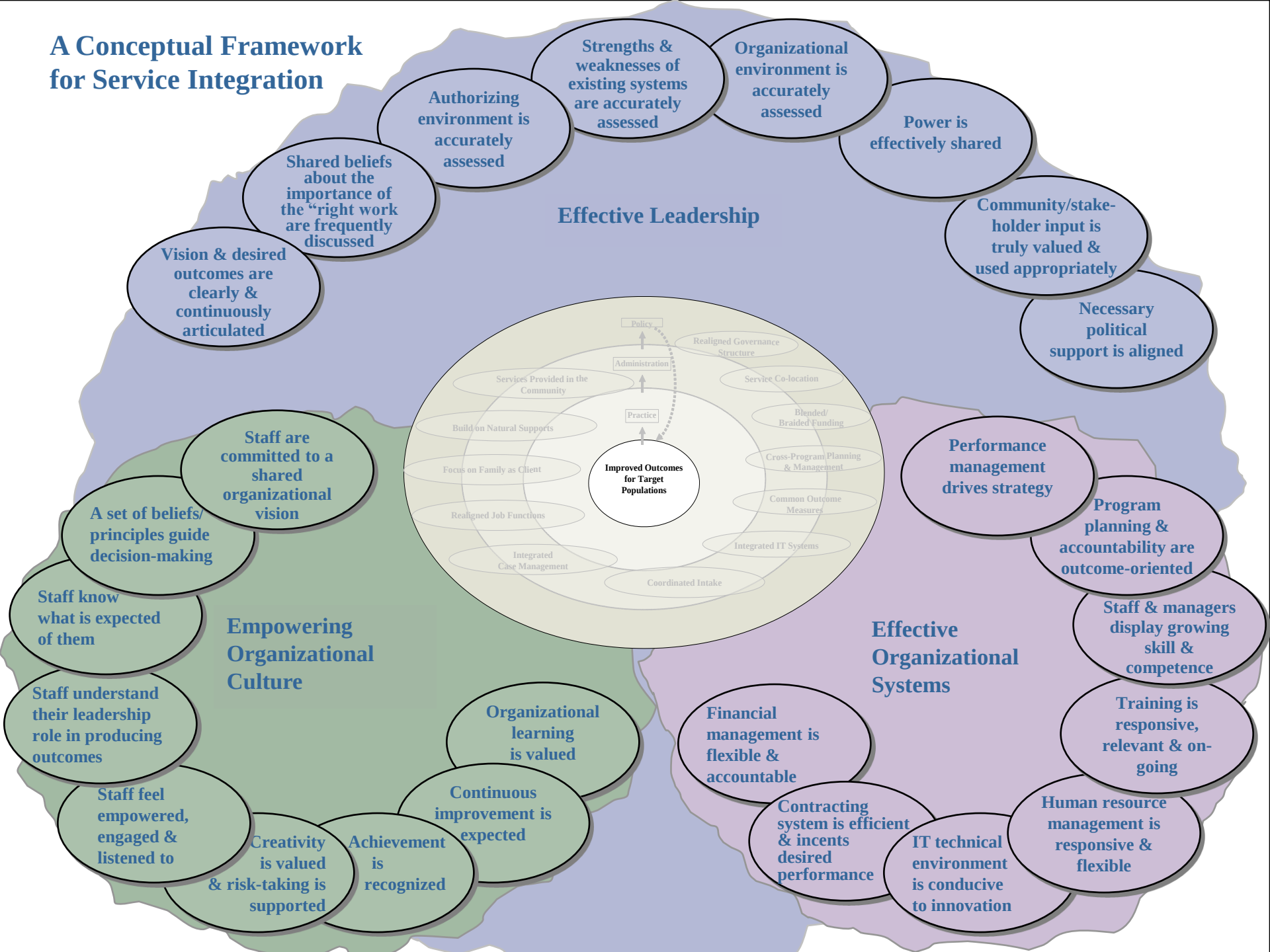
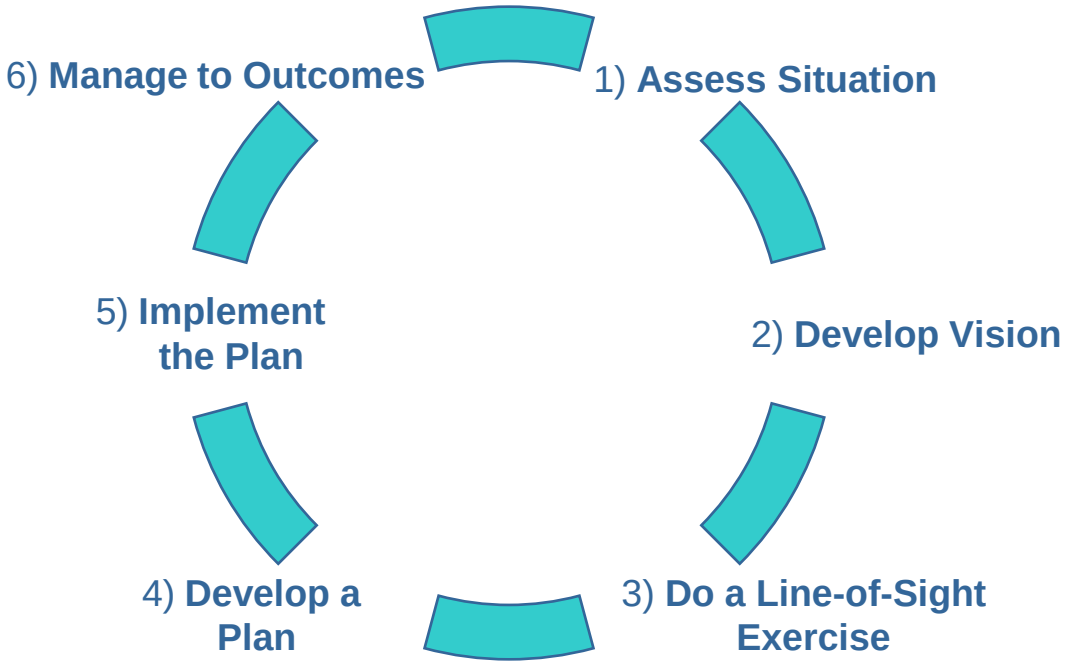


Thinking of Service Integration as an Event, Not a Way of Doing Business

- Limiting flexibility within the implementation process.
- Failing to adjust to changing circumstances.
- Employing a “once and done” mind-set.

Systems Integration Life Cycle



How can identified challenges be overcome?

Central Questions

- What is to be accomplished and for whom?
- What tactics and strategies will lead you to the desired outcomes?
- Is there a good fit between the tactics and strategies chosen “above the water line” and the institutional milieu “below the water line”?
- What strategy is needed to bring these two into correspondence?

Four Critical Steps

1) Start with the ends rather than the means.
2) Replace tactical solutions with strategic thinking.
   - Begin with the participant's perspective.
   - Follow with the institutional perspective.
3) Determine feasibility (understand the systems you are blending together).
4) Assess and adjust as you go.

Step 1: Focus on the ends rather than the means.

- Start with the population of interest.
- Determine what you want to accomplish for this population.
- Articulate a vision for change.

Step 2: Do a "Line-of-Sight" Exercise!

- Develop the story from the participant's perspective
  - What will the system look like?
  - How will it be qualitatively different from what they experience now?
- Test your theory of change
  - Will your proposed strategies lead to your desired outcomes?

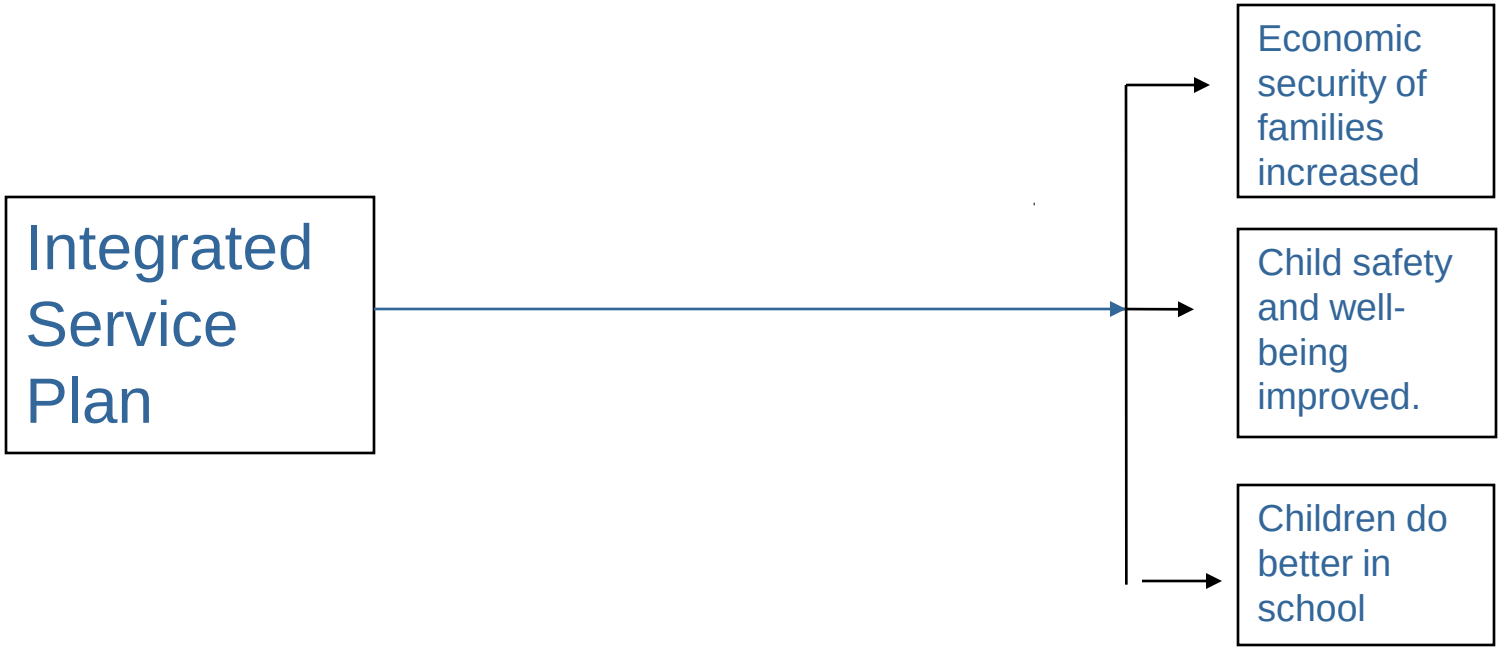
Outcome-Sequence Chart

- A linear, graphical depiction of the relationship between events and activities in a participant's experience with the integrated system and defined benchmarks that need to be reached in order to achieve the intended outcomes.

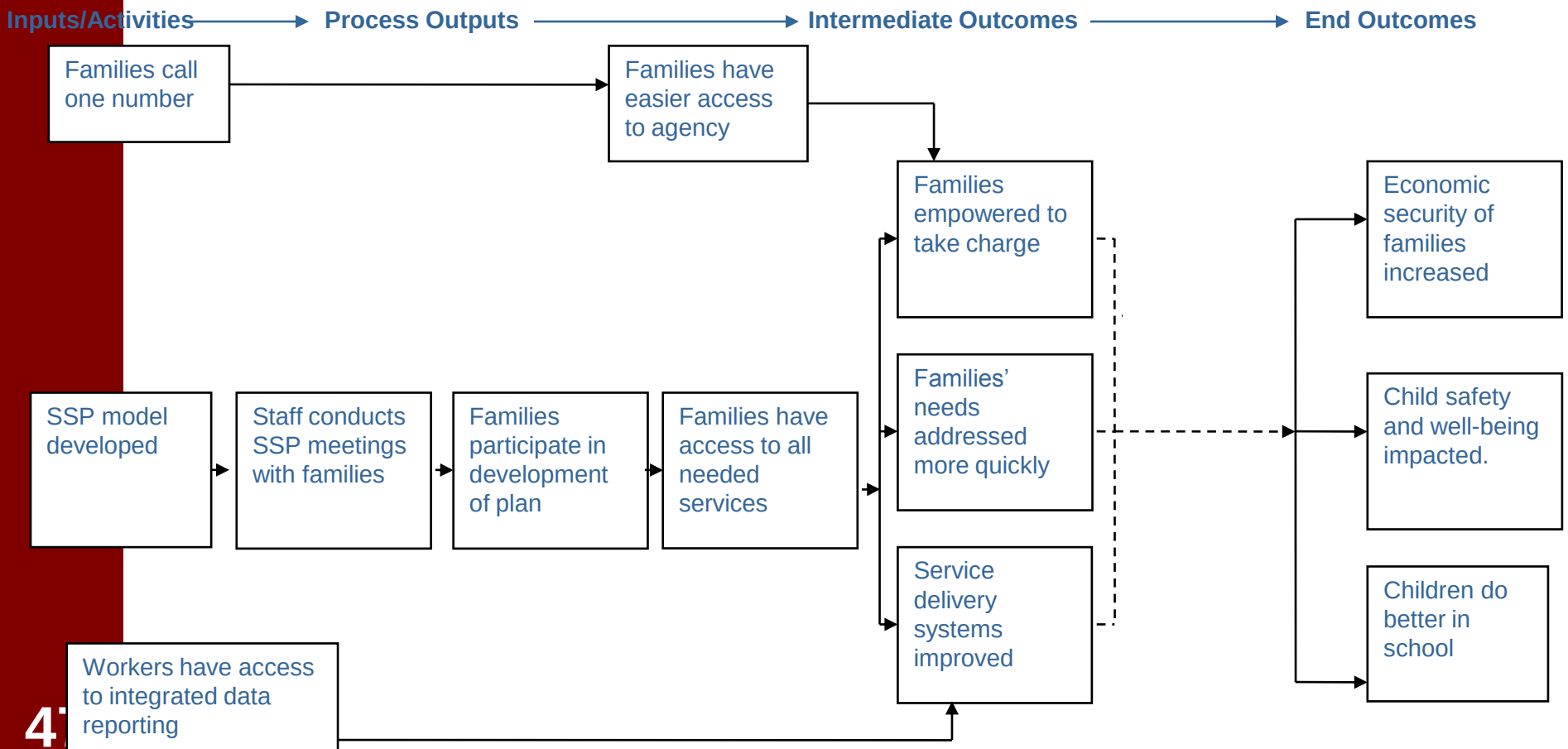
Questions for Consideration

- For each event, interaction, and decision point, consider:
  - Why are you pursuing this particular strategy?
  - How will it contribute to the intended outcomes?
- For the sequence of events:
  - What are the critical junctures?
  - What needs to happen to move down the sequence?
  - Are there gaps in your logic/line of sight?
- What do you need to measure to make sure you are progressing? What are your benchmarks?

“Before” Strategic Thinking



“After” Strategic Thinking



Add the Institutional Perspective

- Consider what changes are needed in institutional practice, administration and policy to support the transformation in the participant's experience.

Step 3: Consider whether the proposal is realistic; appreciate your institutional cultures!

- Do you have the pieces in place—leadership, empowered organizational culture, and dynamic organizational systems—to support taking these actions?
- What changes do you need to make before going forward?

Step 4: Assess and adjust as you go!

Benchmarks

- Inputs/Activities—expected to lead to outcomes but are not, in and of themselves, what we hope to achieve.
- Process Outputs—immediate benchmarks.
- Intermediate Outcomes—typically measures of participant behavior or circumstances.
- End Outcomes—long-term consequences or conditions in the target population that you desire.

Thinking Critically About the Model: Process Benchmarks

- Saturation
- Misdirection
- Drift
- Leakage
- Dosage

Thinking Critically About the Model: Operational Benchmarks

- Efficiency
- Comprehensiveness
- Individualized treatment
- Family coverage
- Family involvement
- Satisfaction

How do we know if systems integration really makes a difference?

The Conundrum

The more successful the effort to integrate (and many agencies/communities are very enthusiastic about their progress on this front), the less successful the ability to apply traditional evaluation strategies. As a result, very little rigorous evaluation has occurred.

Problematic Attributes of Systems Integration Models

- Research designs are complicated by questions about:
  - Which populations are served or targeted?
  - Which service technologies are ‘integrated’?
  - What are the program boundaries?
  - What are appropriate time frames for client outcomes and for when integration is implemented?
  - What are the agreed upon outcomes?

Questions, Comments, Final Thoughts

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