Understanding the Context: Organizations as Critical Points of Intervention for Improving Homeless Service Outcomes

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Broad Concept

• Organizations are social processes.
• Client outcomes are partly a result of these social processes.
• Interventions designed to enhance these social processes improve client outcomes.
HOMELESSNESS

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http://www.adriftamerica.com/Home.html
Homelessness in Knoxville

• Since 2009
  – 9% increase in the number of children experiencing homelessness
  – 31% increase in the monthly average of new individuals experiencing homelessness in Knoxville

• From Jan. to Sept. 2010, 3251 individuals sought services for the first time in Knoxville.
First-time Homeless in Knoxville

- 14% were chronically homeless
- 31% were children
- 49% were either a single female head of household or a child in a family headed by a single woman
- 8% were U.S. military veterans
Homeless Services and Technology

• 1999 – HUD introduced HMIS nationwide
• 2001 – HUD began funding HMIS implementation
• 2004 – Knoxville Continuum of Care (CoC) implemented KnoxHMIS
• 2009 – 8 agencies actively participated in KnoxHMIS
• 2010 – 411 communities contributed HMIS data to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (23% increase from 2009)
### Unit List - Demonstration Shelter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Floor</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Bed</th>
<th>Hold</th>
<th>Client</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Group ID</th>
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Example of Data Collected in HMIS

Self-Reported Primary Reason for Homelessness by Gender

- Loss of Job
- No Affordable Housing
- Domestic Violence
- Underemployment
- Substance Abuse
- Eviction

Bar chart comparing reasons for homelessness by gender (Female: blue, Male: green).
Researching Homelessness

Client Characteristics
- Mental Illness
- Without Work
- Without Shelter

Organizational Services
- Mental Health Services
- Job Training
- Shelter
Research Questions

• Do services (e.g. HMIS) vary across organizations?
• If so, what influences these variations?
Organizational Culture

• Shared values, beliefs, and expectations in the social environment guide employee behavior (Schein, 1992)

• Three layers
  – Artifacts – furniture, dress codes
  – Articulated values and beliefs – mission statements
  – Unarticulated values and beliefs – unspoken, and implicit assumptions about how to behave
Layers of Organizational Culture

- Artifacts
  - Explicit Values
  - Implicit Values
Cultural Domains

• **Proficient** – valuing staff competency and providing high quality services

• **Rigid** – maintaining clear and consistent policies and procedures

• **Resistant** – discouraging change and innovation
Hypothetical Example: Google vs. General Motors
Hypotheses

- Organizational culture (rigidity, resistance, and proficiency) is related to staff members’ use of an HMIS within organizations.
- Individual characteristics (gender) interact with organizational level characteristics to influence staff members’ use of an HMIS.
Steps to Study

• 2005 – Began working on HMIS implementation in Knoxville, TN
• 2005-2008 – Observed variability in implementation as well as organizational environments
• 2007 – Applied for and received Early Doctoral Student Research Grant (EDSRG) from HUD to conduct pilot study
• 2009 – Applied for and received Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant (DDRG) from HUD to expand study
METHODS
Design

• Primary data collection
• Multi-site
• Cross-sectional
• 26 organizations
• 144 staff members (78% female)
Measures

• Outcome – number of times that staff member attempted to log on to the HMIS during a one-year period

• Organizational culture
  – Organizational Social Context (OSC) Questionnaire (Glisson et al., 2008)
  – Self-report from staff members
  – Individual responses aggregated to organizational level
Analysis

• Hierarchical linear model (HLM) (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002)
  – HMIS users nested within organizations
  – Lack of independence among organizations

• Negative binomial model
  – Dependent variable – count
RESULTS
### Results: Log On Attempts

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<tr>
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<th>M (s.d.)</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual total log on attempts</td>
<td>111.7 (140.36)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>719</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization total log on attempts</td>
<td>660.92 (952.1)</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3688</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Regular, Proportionate HMIS Use
Irregular, Disproportionate HMIS Use
Extreme Organizational Culture Profiles

Organization A

Organization B

Rigidity  Proficiency  Resistance

Rigidity  Proficiency  Resistance
Average across homeless service providers:

- Rigidity: 60.39
- Proficiency: 58.11
- Resistance: 64.11
Gender X Proficiency

![Graph showing the relationship between proficiency T-scores and the number of login attempts for SEX = 0 (Female) and SEX = 1 (Male).]
IMPLICATIONS

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• Long-term funding to support technology use

• Policies and procedures to support technology use

• Utility of technology and confidence using it

• Mediators and moderators of organizational culture

Policy Makers

Research

Org.

Staff
Impact on KnoxHMIS

• 2008 – Foundation funding acquired to
  – Enhance understanding among homeless services leadership regarding utility of HMIS for improving services and client outcomes
  – Increase technical training and support for staff
• 2011 – 13 agencies participate in KnoxHMIS
• 2011 – KnoxHMIS staff participate in Compassion Knoxville using KnoxHMIS data to dispel stereotypes about homelessness
Future Directions

• Identify mediating and moderating variables of organizational culture’s effects
  – Individual
    • Education
    • Technology proficiency
  – Organizational
    • Public vs. non-profit
    • Organizational climate

• Assess the relationship among homeless service culture, technology use, and client outcomes
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