PRACTICES TO PROMOTE
EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK IN ISP/WRAPAROUND

Individualized Service/Support Planning (ISP, often known as *Wraparound*) has become one of the most popular strategies for implementing the system of care philosophy for children with serious emotional or behavioral disorders. However, achieving high quality implementation of ISP has proven to be difficult. In part, this difficulty stems from the fact that while there is agreement about the values that should guide ISP, there is no generally agreed-upon model or manual for ISP practice.

In this article, we describe some of the theory and findings that have emerged from an RTC research project focusing on two questions:

1) **What are the characteristics of effective ISP teams? and**
2) **What are specific practices (techniques, structures, procedures, etc.) that team members can use to promote effectiveness in their ISP teamwork?**

Of course, good teamwork alone is not enough to ensure that ISP teams will be effective. ISP teams also require extensive support from the organizational and systems contexts within which they work (see page 8). For more about our research methods, read our full report on high quality implementation of ISP (see page 7).

Effective Teamwork

According to our model of effective ISP teamwork (see figure on page 13), teams are most likely to achieve desired outcomes when they "adhere to a practice model that promotes team cohesiveness and high quality planning in a manner consistent with the value base of ISP." (This statement is also found in the upper left cell of the figure on page 9.) We use the term *practice model* to mean a group or repertoire of *practices*, which are specific techniques, structures, and procedures that team members use to develop the plan and operationalize the value base. *Cohesiveness* refers to the team members' shared belief that the members are willing and able to work together to achieve goals they hold in common. In the remainder of this article, we discuss each of the three necessary elements—high quality planning, cohesiveness, and the value base—describing why each is essential for effectiveness in ISP teamwork, and outlining how each can be promoted in team practice.

High Quality Planning

At its heart, ISP is a planning process. Robust research evidence indicates that teams that are effective in complex, long-term planning use a structured process for creating and monitoring their plans. Effective teams
- agree on a long-term goal or mission,
- define intermediate-term goals with observable performance indicators,
- link tasks or action steps to the intermediate goals and assign responsibility for performing each task, and
- monitor progress on each goal and revise goals and strategies as needed.

Among the ISP teams we observed as part of our research, fewer than one third maintained a team plan with team goals. Thus, the large majority of the teams we observed were not making use of the element of teamwork that has been most consistently linked to team effectiveness in virtually any setting (West, Borrill & Unsworth, 1998). In our observations, the teams that maintained plans with goals were also more likely to adhere to other elements of a high-quality planning process. These teams often used plan templates that required them to include a mission statement and goals, as well as to describe family needs, strategies to meet the needs, and the tasks that team members were to carry out. Meetings then revolved around assessing progress and revising strategies for reaching goals and meeting needs.

A high quality planning process also requires that teams work to generate options before making decisions about which goals to pursue or which strategies to use to achieve the goals. In general, teams have the *potential* to be highly creative; however teams rarely realize this potential because members tend to be over-eager to commit to the first goal, strategy, or solution that comes up, rather than generating multiple options and then choosing among them (Paulus, Larey, & Dzindolet, 2001). This tendency appears to be present in ISP teams as well. In our observations of team meetings, fewer than one in five teams considered even two options before making *any* decision during a meeting. Brainstorming or other techniques were used in fewer than one in twenty meetings. This may be one of the reasons that many ISP teams often have little success in developing highly individualized plans that incorporate community and natural supports.

ISP teams need to work to develop a mindset that will keep them from committing too quickly to the first solution—often a service solution—that comes up. For example, teams can maintain a practice of always generating two or three options before choosing a course of action. Teams can also agree to "Always come up with at least one option for a strategy that is not a formal ser-

vice." This practice has the further advantage of stimulating strategies that incorporate informal supports. Discipline in generating multiple options also has great potential to increase the extent to which the plan will be family driven and culturally competent, since family members have the opportunity to select options that best fit with their strengths, needs, beliefs, and values.

Cohesiveness

Team cohesiveness has been consistently linked to effectiveness (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). On cohesive teams, team members believe that they are pursuing shared goals, that team members trust and respect one another, and that team decisions are made in a fair or *equitable* manner. This does not mean that team members will never have disagreements; on the contrary, disagreement is a source of creativity and learning on successful teams (Tjosvold & Tjosvold, 1994). Successful teams are able to work through disagreement constructively.

Disagreements are particularly likely to occur on teams, like ISP teams, that have a high level of diversity in background and experience. What is more, on ISP teams, different team members may be responsible for carrying out specific mandates that appear to be contradictory. Teams must therefore be familiar with a variety of specific strategies for dealing productively with disagreement. For example, facilitators should be able to recognize and intervene quickly when team members say things that may feel hostile or attacking to other members (even when the speaker does not intend an attack). Specific techniques for helping teams stay "solution-focused" during disagreements are often included in trainings for dispute resolution and mediation. Modules and exercises from such trainings can be incorporated into facilitator training, coaching, and supervision. Teams can also create and enforce "ground rules" that describe the type of inter-

personal behavior that is expected from members.

Conflict is likely to be increased on teams whose members feel that discussion and decision making processes are inequitable (*un*fair). When team members feel that decision making is unfair, they are unlikely to feel committed to the decisions or to follow through on tasks. It is important to note that equity and equality are not the same. For example, teams may well feel that it is fair (equitable) for a mother to have more (unequal) opportunities than professional team members to speak and to make decisions.
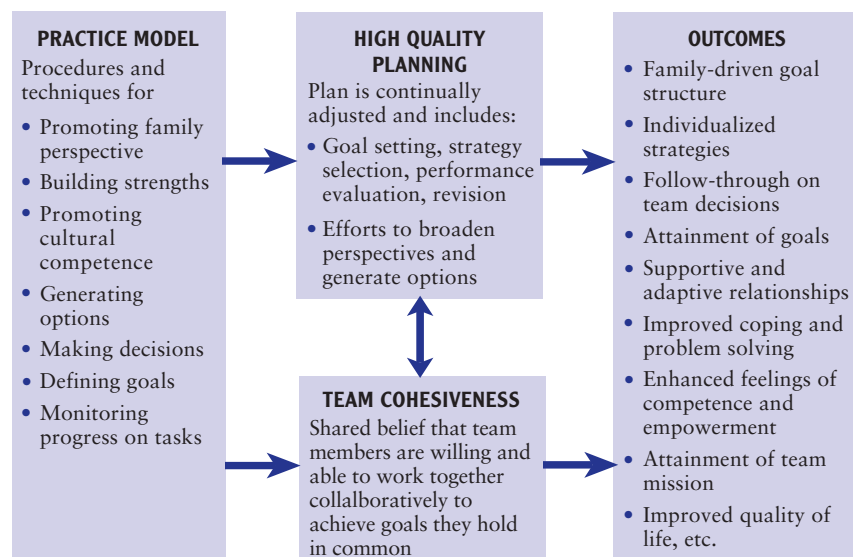
Equity perceptions are higher on teams that use practices to ensure that members feel that their ideas and opinions are valued. For example, teams can provide structured opportunities for each team member to contribute to discussions during decision making. Input can be acknowledged through verbal reflection or through a written record, such as a list or summary of the discussion. Equity perceptions are also enhanced on teams that use a clear and consistent process for making decisions. This avoids the appearance of arbitrariness that can alienate team members and cause them to feel that their input has been ignored.

Value-based Practice

The value base of ISP specifies that the process is to be family centered, with teamwork being driven by the family's sense of its strengths, needs, and priorities. Available research indicates that this is likely to be very difficult. Mental health professionals often appear to be reluctant to acknowledge the family's perspective and expertise. This may also reflect a more general dynamic that appears in teamwork. On any team, people of higher social status tend to talk more and have more influence over the decisions that are made (Owens, Mannix, & Neale, 1998). Thus, team meetings are likely to be dominated by men rather than women, by bosses rather than subordinates, or by people with more rather than less formal education. It is very difficult for teams to overcome this sort of imbalance, even when members are trying to do so. On ISP teams, it is not uncommon for family members (particularly youth) to possess relatively few markers of high status. Even where family members have higher status, their status within meetings is likely to be deflated because of team members' tendency to see the family in terms of its needs and deficits.

If teams do not actively and con-

Effectiveness in ISP Teamwork

PRACTICE MODEL	HIGH QUALITY PLANNING	OUTCOMES
Procedures and techniques for • Promoting family perspective • Building strengths • Promoting cultural competence • Generating options • Making decisions • Defining goals • Monitoring progress on tasks	Plan is continually adjusted and includes: • Goal setting, strategy selection, performance evaluation, revision • Efforts to broaden perspectives and generate options	• Family-driven goal structure • Individualized strategies • Follow-through on team decisions • Attainment of goals • Supportive and adaptive relationships • Improved coping and problem solving • Enhanced feelings of competence and empowerment • Attainment of team mission • Improved quality of life, etc.
	TEAM COHESIVENESS Shared belief that team members are willing and able to work together collaboratively to achieve goals they hold in common	

sistently use practices that work to counteract the imbalances of power between the family/youth and professionals, it is unlikely that the family's perspective(s) will drive planning. Practices that increase the amount, consistency, and/or impact of family members' contributions are likely to increase their influence in teamwork. Strategies we have seen include providing opportunities for family members to speak first and last during discussions, verbally summarizing or reflecting family contributions to discussion, checking back in with families after any decision, and using a family advocate to reinforce the family perspective as elicited in interviews outside of full team meetings. It is particularly important that the team goals reflect the family/youth perspective so that the team's work is structured by their views. Obviously, this will not happen if the team has not set clear goals.

The ISP value base also stresses that planning should build upon the strengths of the family and youth, and should incorporate the assets of other team members and the community. The "how to" of strengths-based practice is not well developed either in theory or in practice, and interviewees in our research studies were quite frustrated by this. Interviewees did point out that child and family strengths are affirmed when the family is trusted and empowered to drive the ISP process. In our observations, we also saw teams using various practices to draw attention to strengths, espe-

cially those of the family (though whether this means that strengths were being built on or enhanced remains an open question). The most common practice was to undertake a structured inventory of team and family strengths. Interviewees also spoke of a practice of linking each strategy in the plan to specific team member strengths.

The "how to" of culturally competent teamwork also remains difficult to pin down. It is likely that cultural competence will be greater on teams that are successful in promoting the family perspective and building an appreciation of strengths. Several research studies have shown that building team cohesiveness is particularly important on teams whose members are ethnically and/or racially diverse, and that facilitator neutrality is linked to satisfaction for team members from racial/ethnic minority populations. Thus, practices that promote perceptions of cohesiveness and equity are also likely to enhance cultural competence. Team members in our studies have also suggested that cultural competence is likely to be higher on teams whose members have developed clear expectations for interpersonal behavior and on teams whose members are skilled in managing and resolving disagreements.

Conclusion

Effective ISP teams are familiar with a repertoire of practices that promote high quality planning, cohesiveness, *and* the ISP value base. What is more, teams do not need to pursue each of these three elements separately. Indeed, effective practices often promote two or even all three elements at the same time. We have outlined some such practices in this article, and more are available or forthcoming in other products of our research. However, there are certain areas (e.g. strengths-based and culturally competent practices) where information that can provide guid-

ance in selecting practices is scant. One of the primary goals of the National Wraparound Initiative (see page 24) is to increase the extent to which communities and providers can share practices that are consistent with high quality ISP, and a primary goal of the Initiative is to make available not just a greater number but also a wider spectrum of practices for effective teamwork.

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