Collecting Implementation Data via Focus Groups and Surveys

REL West Seminar

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December 18, 2012

Phoenix, AZ

REL West Educator Effectiveness Alliance

- REL mission: Increase use of data and evidence in educational decision making
  - Primarily achieved through research alliance partnerships
- Alliance: A group of stakeholders who share a specific education concern and agree to work together to learn more about it so they can make sound decisions to improve education outcomes

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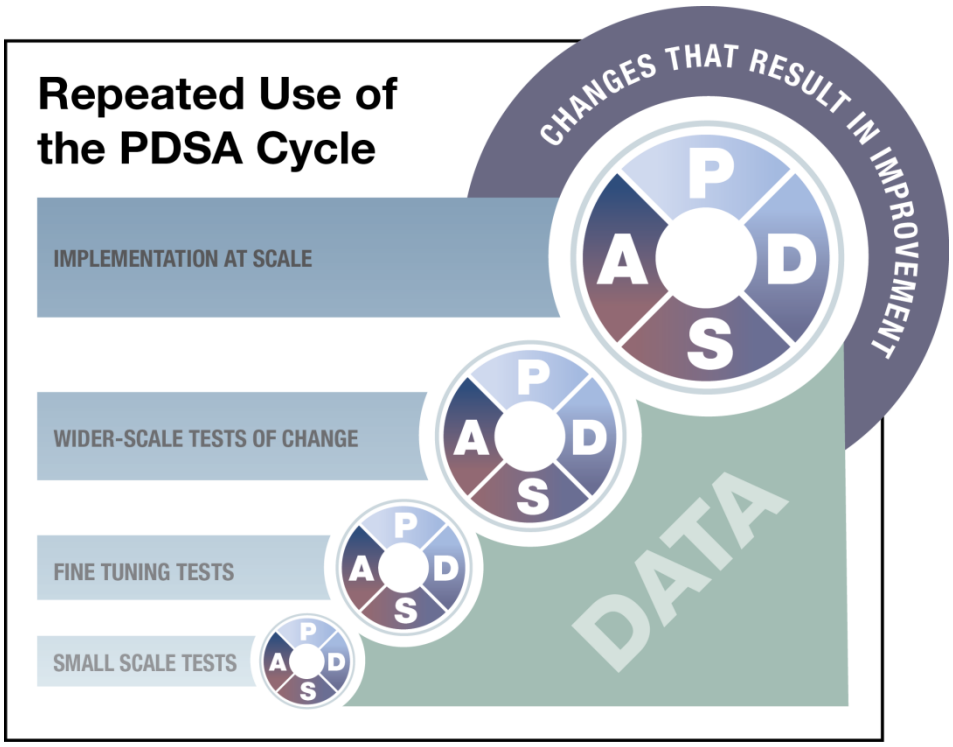
Alliance Conceptual Framework



Plan ➡ **D**o ➡ **S**tudy ➡ **A**ct

Repeated use of PDSA cycle:

Small scale tests

⬇

Fine-tuning tests

⬇

Wider-scale tests of change

⬇

Implementation at scale

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Build knowledge (1-3-5 year plan)

- Kane & Staiger 2012: MET recommendations
  - Refine measures
  - Continue to develop better ways to provide feedback to teachers
  - Evaluate measures based on the criteria of "predictive power, reliability, and diagnostic usefulness"
- Designs for pilot implementation studies may not be the best designs for technical studies on measures, but
  - Limited research on topic
  - High cost of implementation (especially observations)

EE Alliance Study Ideas for 2012/13

- Properties of the New Utah Measurement of Instructional Effectiveness (UMIE)
  - Principal Investigator: Reino Makkonen
- Describing Pilot Implementation of New Multiple-Measure Teacher Evaluation Systems in Arizona
  - Principal Investigators: Carole Gallagher and Dan Bugler
- Combining Classroom Observations with Student Surveys and Achievement Gains During Pilot Implementation of Arizona's New State Teacher Evaluation Model
  - Principal Investigator: Empirical Education (with Reino Makkonen)

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Today's Objectives

1. Deepen understanding of data collection and analysis methods for studying pilot implementation of new educator effectiveness measures/systems

2. Begin drafting focus group and survey questions to study pilot implementation

Surveys

- Comprehensive (large sample) view of specific issue
- Respondents interact directly with questions, which may be misinterpreted
  - Not easy to provide participants with clarification
- Questions can be open-ended or multiple choice
  - Multiple choice questions are easier to summarize (via frequencies) but the data may not be as rich
- Response rates may be a problem

Focus Groups

- Smaller sample, narrower focus, more detail
- Exploring depth/shades of opinion and complex explanation
- Can help define issues or develop preliminary theories
- Responses may be harder to score on a scale
- Requires a trained facilitator
  - Results arise from interaction between respondents, facilitator, and questions
- Participants can get clarification and build on ideas
  - But the public environment may intimidate some participants

Conducting Focus Groups

- Key is participant chemistry (don't include employee and boss)
- Typically 6-10 participants with similar associations to topic
- Typically cover about 5-10 clearly worded open-ended questions (each with sub-questions or probes) in the span of 90 minutes
- Goal is to get all members to contribute while making sure one or two members don't dominate
- See handout of focus group guidelines

Conducting Focus Groups (cont.)

- Not necessary to randomly select participants because results from a focus group are not meant to generalize to a larger population
- Seeking a full range of opinion, so participants should be able to offer a representative sample of opinions you are concerned about
- Describe group membership selection and do not generalize results to other groups

Conducting Focus Groups (cont.)

- Moderators should know topic, stay focused, ask clear questions (no jargon), be flexible (respond to what is important to the participants), question inconsistencies and relate what's said to what has previously been said
- Convey the expectation that everyone will contribute, all contributions will be valued and remain confidential, and session will be recorded
- Recording increases accuracy of conclusions and makes sure ideas don't get lost
  - Either tape-record (with permission) or take detailed minutes

Developing Surveys

- Write short, clear, and specific questions that contain only one concept (not double-barreled)
- With closed-ended questions, choices should be exhaustive and mutually exclusive
- An even number of response choices forces respondents to choose one side of the scale (preventing neutrality)

Survey Response Rates

- More important when study purpose is to measure effects or make generalizations to larger population, less important if purpose is to gain insight
- Acceptable response rates vary by type of administration
  - Email/Online: 40% average, 50% good, 60% very good
  - Mail: 50% adequate, 60% good, 70% very good
  - Phone/Face-to-face: 80% good

Implementation Issues of Interest

- Local variation
  - What were the system's features (definitions, measures, processes, etc)?
  - What content was delivered in trainings? In what format?
- Feasibility/capacity
  - Were resources (e.g., fiscal, time, staffing) adequate?
  - Technology: able to efficiently enter, tag, and process the data and store/manage results?
- Fidelity
  - Measures and processes implemented as intended?
  - Evaluation results connected to PD offerings?
  - What were the challenges, unintended consequences?

Implementation Issues of Interest (cont.)

- Diagnostic usefulness
  - Were results interpretable? Were steps clear?
  - Pedagogically useful? Seen as credible/relevant to work?
- Early outcomes
  - Teachers reflect more about their practice?
  - More instruction-focused interactions?
  - Level of teacher and principal buy-in/engagement?
  - Did results lead to changes in practice, school climate?

Discussion with Natalie Lacireno-Paquet

- Senior Research Associate at WestEd/REL Northeast and Islands (REL NEI), based in Boston
  - Focus is evaluation geared toward program improvement
  - Former assistant professor of educational leadership at UMass-Boston and survey researcher at Mathematica
- Leading REL NEI study in NH examining initial implementation of state's new teacher evaluation model
  - RQ2: Do districts implement the evaluation processes as intended?
  - RQ3: What are the factors that influence implementation?
  - RQ5: How does the professional climate of the school change during the implementation of the teacher evaluation system?

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Analyzing Focus Group Data

- Not RCT, instead a more informal process to obtain feedback as you monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and responsiveness of program and make adjustments
  - Have more than one person review transcripts/field notes
  - Group key words, phrases, ideas into clusters
  - Look for emerging themes and patterns
- Coding Scheme: Using labels to classify and assign meaning to pieces of information

Coding Focus Group Data

- Central questions should shape your coding scheme
- Initial Coding: Generate initial codes/tags as you review responses and identify related information
  - Watch for special vocabulary
  - One piece of information might be assigned several codes
  - Write notes, list ideas, or diagram relationships you notice
- Focused Coding: Review codes and eliminate, combine, or subdivide coding categories
  - Organize codes into larger themes/repeating ideas that connect different codes

Analyzing Survey Data

- Re-code/number responses (collapsing categories as needed) and create coding key
- Tabulate responses to obtain question frequencies
- Unrepresentative sample? Response bias?
  - Check response rates for key subgroups in your sample
  - Examine means for respondents' key characteristics/ demographics that could affect responses
- Cross-tabulations to examine relationships across questions
  - Guided by research questions or patterns noticed in data

Drawing Conclusions from Focus Groups

- Build from coding: Repeating Ideas > Themes > Conclusions
- Repeating Idea: Same idea expressed by different respondents
  - Focus on most meaningful
  - Avoid using percentages (given smaller samples)
  - Quote one or two responses that exemplify idea (plus an exception)
- Theme: A topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas
  - Consider context; work to identify underlying factors that explain observed themes
- Conclusion: What seems to be working well and what might need to be improved based on repeating ideas and themes

Drawing Conclusions (cont.)

- Be flexible and open to the unexpected
- Interpreting data can be subjective, so try to verify conclusions
  - Construct a logical chain of evidence
  - Review data repeatedly to check that conclusions are grounded in what was said
- Use care when interpreting cross-tabulation results from surveys
- Triangulation improves the validity of conclusions
  - Examine responses/findings from multiple sources (surveys, interviews, and focus groups)

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