

TSIG Evaluation



New Day Ohio Update
July 2007

TSIG Evaluation

The Office of Program Evaluation and Research (OPER) at ODMH is evaluating the activities of the Transformation State Incentive Grant (TSIG) for the state and the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The main purpose of the evaluation is to assess Ohio's progress in meeting the goals specified in both the TSIG proposal and the state's Comprehensive Mental Health Plan (CMHP).

This section of the newsletter will communicate the progress of the evaluation, as well as important findings that may help the Content Work Groups in their continued efforts to improve mental health services to persons with mental illness in Ohio.

How can you learn more about "A New Day"?

Visit www.anewdayohio.org for a number of materials to help consumers of mental health services, their families, advocates, mental health professionals and others learn more about transforming Ohio's mental health system.

Conflict management and problem solving in content working groups: A necessary element for transformative change

by Kraig Knudsen, Ph.D., TSIG System Level Evaluator

"Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors." - African Proverb

Summary: This evaluation study surveyed a large cohort of Content Working Group members (N=80) affiliated with Ohio's Mental Health Transformation State Incentive Grant. Content Working Group members completed a baseline survey about their satisfaction with Working Group meetings. The results suggest that Content Working Group meeting satisfaction is positively associated with how well the meetings are organized, and the ability of the Working Groups to problem solve and manage conflict among members. Taken together, these two factors predicted respondents' meeting satisfaction 90% of the time. Findings suggest efforts to improve the organization of meetings and learning to manage conflict and solve problems between members can improve overall satisfaction with Content Working Group meetings.

Introduction

To accomplish transformation of the mental health system in Ohio, a number of Content Working Groups have been established with missions to be agents of change by 1) assessing areas of needed improvements in their content areas; 2) making recommendations to improve services; and 3) monitoring the progress of changes made. The Content Working Groups are central to the success of Ohio's transformation, and therefore are an important component of the evaluation. Previous research on collaborative Working Groups has found that better quality meetings were associated with more Working Group success and productivity.¹ Thus, the TSIG evaluation team is examining a number of variables which could impact Working Group meeting satisfaction.

Methods and participants

Confidential surveys were mailed to 170 members of the Mental Health Transformation Content Working Groups between November-December, 2006. Eighty (80) surveys were returned completed, for a response rate of 48%. Using a five-point scale (1=poor; 5=excellent), respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of their meetings on eight core dimensions: clarity of goals, general participation, meeting leadership, decision-making quality, cohesiveness, problems solving, meeting organization, and meeting productivity.

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Respondents included administrators from state-level Departments, consumer stakeholders, and community-based treatment providers, administrators, and support staff. The two most common roles of participants were mental health service administrators and advocates, and the highest level of education was a master's degree (57%). Most participants had been employed at their organization an average of 9 years.

Findings

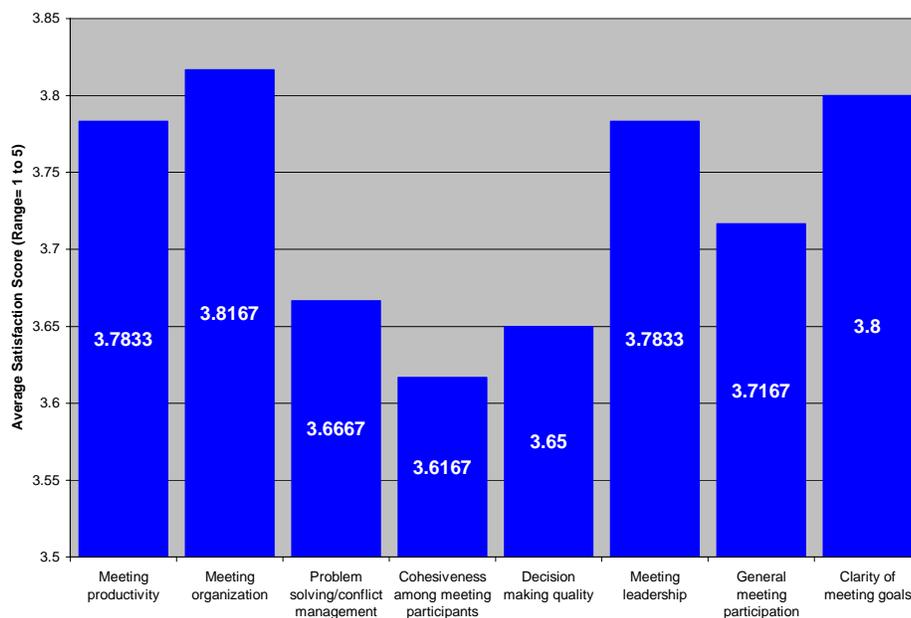
Overall Meeting Satisfaction.

As evidenced in Graph 1, survey respondents who participated were generally satisfied with their Working Group meetings, with an average score for all content Working Groups of 3.74. Differences were found in overall satisfaction with meetings between the different Working Groups, with scores ranging from 2.59 to 4.26 (see graph 2). These may reflect the differing stages of Working Group development. In terms of individual meeting characteristics, content Working Group members were most satisfied with highly organized and productive meetings (average scores were 3.81 and 3.78 respectively). When looking at respondent characteristics, those that had worked at their jobs longer were more satisfied with the decisions made in the meetings, ($p < .03$).

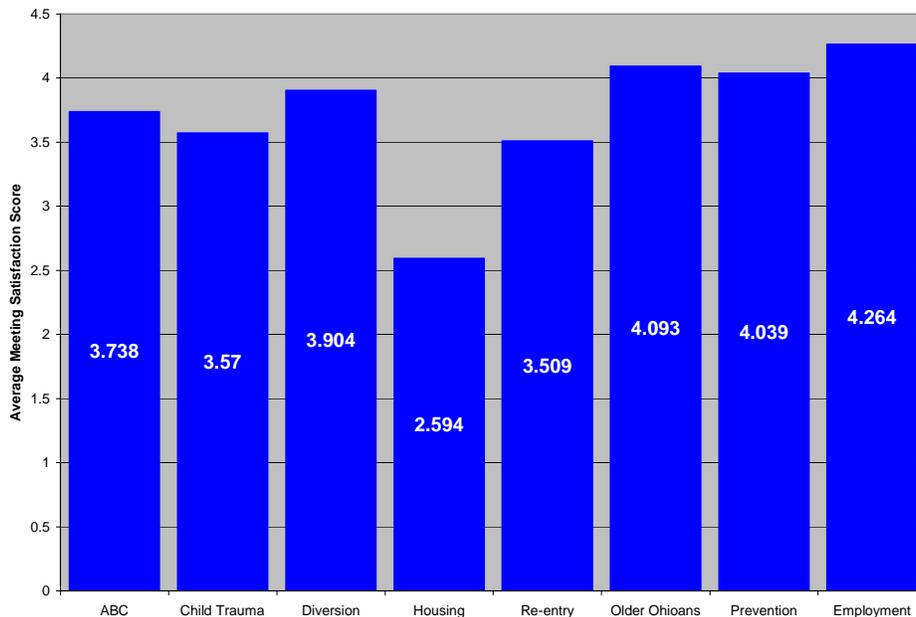
Predictors of Meeting Satisfaction.

To better understand how to create more enjoyable Working Group meetings, we also examined predictors of meeting satisfaction. The greatest predictors of meeting satisfaction for all the Content Working Groups were the organization of the meetings, and the Working Groups' ability to solve problems and manage conflict between members. Graph 3 illustrates this trend—meeting satisfaction increases as problem solving capacity (blue, dotted line) and meeting organization (green, solid line) also increase.

Graph 1: Overall Content Working Group Meeting Satisfaction Scores



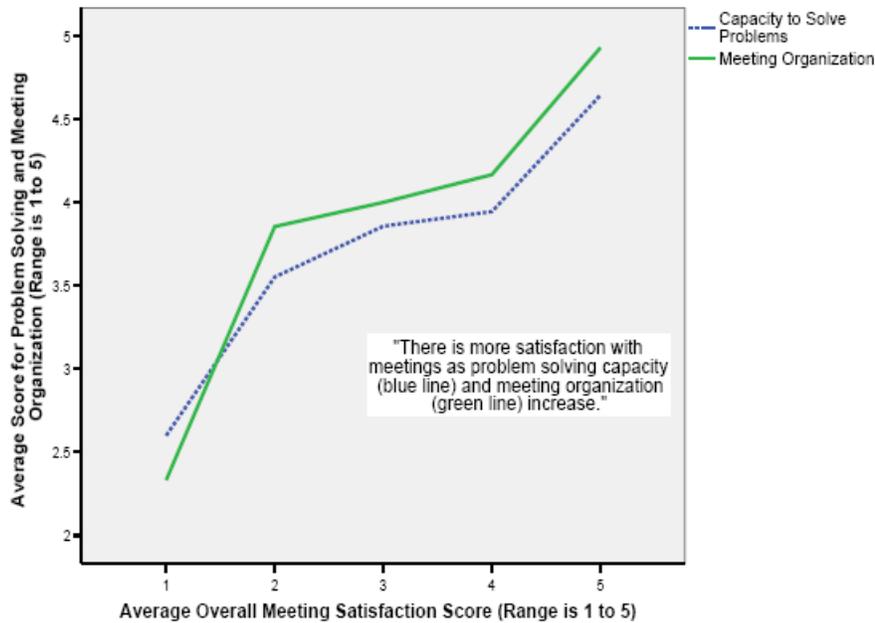
Graph 2: Average Meeting Satisfaction by Content Working Group



Discussion

These findings suggest that overall, people are satisfied with Working Group meetings; however, there is room for improvement. The results show the best way to improve satisfaction with Working Group meetings is to focus on improv-

Graph 3: Predictors of Meeting Satisfaction



ing the organization of the meetings and enhancing the Working Groups' ability to solve problems and manage conflicts. If these two areas are adequately addressed, our results suggest that satisfaction with meetings could increase by as much as 90%. Additionally, as with any improvement, the results can be synergistic, meaning they can enhance other areas as well. In the case of Working Group meetings, making improvements may help facilitate better meeting attendance and increased ownership of Working Group activities, promote active participation, and create a culture of transformation throughout the Working Groups, which then can be passed on to others—a very good investment.

Cooperative problem solving

So, how do we go about improving our Working Group meetings? Most problem solving models share some common characteristics, including: sharing perspectives, defining issues or problems, identifying the shared or competing interests, generating alternative solutions, developing a fair standard for decision making in the group, evaluating the merits of the options, and reaching agreement^{1,2,3}. As depicted in the pyramid (Figure 1), reaching an agreement to an issue is just the apex of the pyramid. In the end, the agreed upon solution is supported by a strong foundation of preparation and consensus building.

From literature on structured problem solving,^{2,3,4} some basic components are:

1. Sharing Perspectives: Perspective sharing lays the groundwork for problem solving. There must be an open and honest dialogue from all stakeholders about the issue. All members of the Working Group should have the opportunity to share what is important to them. Only through sharing multiple perspectives can we begin to identify *all* of the issues that need to be addressed.

2. Defining Issues and Problems: The group as a whole must make a thorough assessment of the problem, including what is unsatisfactory, what led to the undesirable situation, what members ultimately desire, and what the obstacles are to that goal. Focusing on the problem before thinking about how to solve it is essential in this phase. Problem analysis encourages group members to develop a shared image of the problem, to stay on track, and to develop solutions that address the issues.

3. Generating Options: Brainstorming is critical in generating alternative solutions to the agreed upon issue. The goal here is to generate as many ideas and options as possible. When brainstorming for ideas it is critical that no judgments are made—go for quantity and variety, combine ideas and expand upon them, and look at the problem from all angles. This is especially true with cross-system problems where various systems have different missions and goals (e.g., juvenile justice vs. mental health). Be sure to have a written record of all ideas that are generated during the discussion. Be careful to avoid “groupthink”, when members of the group avoid promoting viewpoints outside the comfort zone of consensus thinking.

4. Develop Criteria for Decision Making: During this phase the group evaluates the merits of each alternative solution. Pros and cons of each solution are explored. Every member must feel free to express opinions openly and honestly. The group should develop criteria for decision making that is fair and objective. Some ways groups can come

to a final decision is through consensus, compromise, majority vote, decision by the leader, or through a non-vested party. Another method described below is the Nominal Group Technique.

The Nominal Group Technique. A technique that is commonly applied to group decision making is called the “Nominal Group Technique”⁵. In this technique group members work individually to list all alternatives to a problem or issue. Then the group members share their ideas out loud and have them recorded on a flipchart. After that, the group facilitator asks each member to individually rank all the options from lowest to highest priority. Finally, the facilitator computes an average score for each idea; the lowest score is the highest priority for the group.

5. Evaluate Options and Reach

Agreement: Evaluate each option using the agreed upon method in step 4 and reach agreement.

When applied correctly, these problem solving steps can work to increase creativity and reduce conflict in Working Groups. Try it out or suggest it for your next meeting; you may find the members of your Working Group appreciate the extra effort to ensure that their voices are heard.

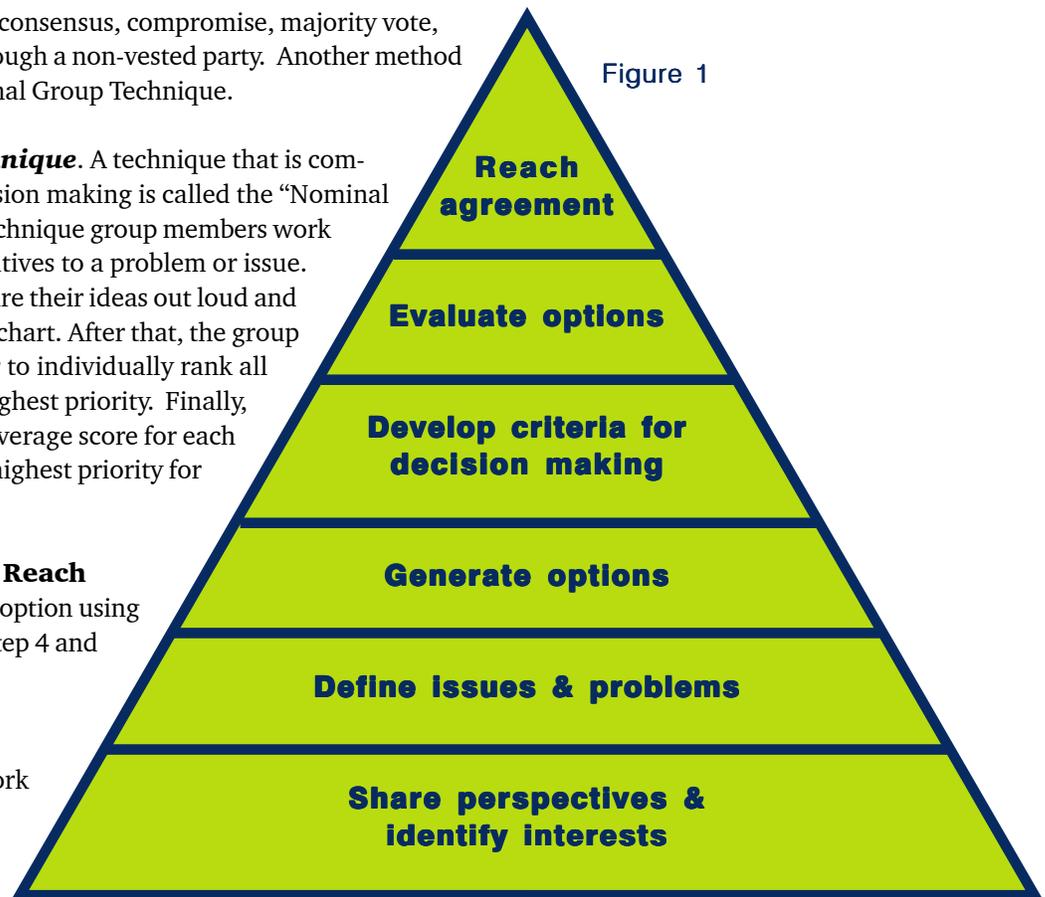


Figure 1

Article sources

¹ Jehn, K., Chadwick, C., Thatcher, S. (1997) To agree to not to agree: The effects of value congruence, individual demographic dissimilarity, and conflict on Working Group outcomes. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 8 (4): 287-305.

² Windle, R. & Warren, S. (2007). Collaborative Problem Solving: Steps in the Process. <http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/section5.cfm>. Accessed June 15, 2007.

³ Selby, E., Treffinger, D., Isaksenm S., Lauer, K (2004). Defining and Assessing Problem-Solving Style: Design and Development of a New Tool. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 38(4): 231-243.

⁴ Galanes, G. (Accessed, 6/2007) Confidence in Public Speaking. *Group Leadership and Problem Solving, Seventh Edition* (Telecourse Version).

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, G, Fowell, S., Bligh, JB (1999). The use of the **nominal group technique** as an evaluative tool in medical undergraduate education. *Medical Education*.