



National Resource Center On Child Welfare Training & Evaluation UNIVERSITY of LOUISVILLE

Child Welfare Training: Outcomes

... only 20% of training evaluation studies document the organizational impact of training...

Training To Outcomes: The Impact of Training on Organizational Outcomes

By Becky Antle, MSSW, Ph.D. and Mavin Martin, Ph.D.

Importance of Organizational Outcomes in Child Welfare

The field of child welfare has been charged with the responsibility of protecting children from abuse and neglect. There is a growing emphasis on the importance of program outcomes in child welfare, such as child safety, permanency and well-being (Gendell, 2001). Child welfare agencies are being held accountable for these outcomes through legislation such as the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (Kautz, Netting, Huber, Borders, & Davis, 1997) and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Gendell, 2001). One strategy to promote best practice and positive outcomes in child welfare is the use of training and evaluation (Scale, 1997; Tracy & Pine, 2000).

Importance of Organizational Outcomes in Training Evaluation

The organizational impact of training is the effect that training has on the processes/outcomes of the organization. The corporate sector has become increasingly concerned with financial outcomes related to training (or return on investment analysis; Phillips, 1996). The emphasis on outcomes in child welfare training evaluation stems from two factors: policies that dictate the reporting of child welfare outcomes (e.g. ASFA of 1997 and GPRA of 1993; Gendell, 2001; Kautz et al, 1997) and the competency based foundation of child welfare training. The competency based approach to training evaluation refers to the belief that child welfare training should be designed, delivered and evaluated to tie worker performance to the goals of the organization (Tracy & Pine, 2000).

Nevertheless, only 20% of training evaluation studies document the organizational impact of training, yet this impact is the most important outcome of training (Shelton & Alliger, 1993). Furthermore, studies that have assessed organizational impact have found that there can be tremendous financial benefits (return on investment) from training (Mathieu & Leonard, 1987).

Level four evaluation can inform administrators regarding whether training should be modified or eliminated based upon its impact on organizational outcomes. However, evaluators should be wary that sponsor expectations of the impact of training may be unrealistic (Alliger & Tannenbaum, 1997).

Definition of Outcomes Evaluation

According to the Kirkpatrick (1959) model of training evaluation, there are four levels of training evaluation. Level one evaluation examines the reactions or satisfaction of trainees with the training. Level two evaluation studies the acquisition of knowledge as a result of training. Level three evaluation refers to the application of knowledge and skills from training to the practice field. Finally, level four evaluation assesses the impact of the training on the organization. Holton (1996) also identifies organizational outcomes as one of three primary domains for training evaluation: learning, performance and organizational change.

Types of Outcomes

There are numerous examples of level four training evaluation. Alliger and Tannenbaum (1997) specified specific level four organizational outcomes as productivity, customer satisfaction, cost savings and morale. However, more broadly, organizational outcomes may be categorized as the impact of training on the worker, client or agency. Worker outcomes include variables such as productivity and compliance with agency policies/procedures such as timeframes for completion of casework components. Client outcomes in child welfare have been identified by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 as child safety, permanency and well-being. Evaluators may also examine the impact of training on the organization through financial or return on investment analysis (Phillips 1996). Phillips describes return on investment analysis with conversion of soft outputs to hard outputs for fiscal outcomes as one application of level four evaluation.

Predictors and Mediators of Organizational Outcomes in Training Evaluation

Previous research has assumed that there is a linear progression of training outcomes in the Kirkpatrick model—that positive reactions lead to learning; learning leads to transfer; and transfer promotes positive organizational outcomes (Alliger & Janak, 1989). According to these assumptions, the primary predictor of organizational outcomes would be training transfer. However, Alliger and Janak identify the predictive pathways for organizational outcomes as learning to organizational outcomes, behavior change (transfer) to organizational outcomes, and organizational outcomes to behavior change. Hence, there is a reciprocal relationship between training transfer and organizational change. The transfer of knowledge and skills from training has a positive impact of the organization, and, in turn, changes in the organization reinforce behavior change or transfer. Similarly, Alliger and Tannenbaum's (1997) found that immediate learning and transfer predict organizational outcomes.

Holton (1996) identifies three primary mediators of organizational outcomes: organizational goals, utility/payoff of training, and numerous external variables. Other mediators of organizational outcomes may be independent of training and include client, worker, and system variables. Client variables that may impact organizational outcomes include the presence of comorbid factors. Other client variables that impact organizational outcomes include the type and severity of child maltreatment, the family's history of involvement with the system and others. Worker variables that may impact organizational outcomes include education level, commitment to the field, and personality variables such as conscientiousness. Finally, systemic variables that impact organizational outcomes include the availability of resources in the community, relationship between child welfare and the court system, information systems, and the level of administrative support within the child welfare agency.

Barriers to Outcomes Evaluation

Many evaluators or administrators avoid level four evaluation because they believe it is more time consuming, expensive and difficult than surveying trainees for other types of evaluation (Shelton & Alliger, 1993). Data needed for level four evaluation may not be routinely available and trainers may also fear being held accountable for organizational outcomes.

One problem with the training cycle is agency shift in goals, policies or procedures (Phillips, 1996). Agency shifts are caused by federal legislation (e.g. ASFA), state budget cuts and changes in the political structure, national trends in practice and accreditation, and other issues. A shift in agency goals impacts the outcomes used for training evaluation. These outcomes should be

directly linked to the goals of the organization. A shift in agency policies or procedures may impact the work behaviors included in training.

The field of child welfare presents a unique challenge for training evaluation because of the rigidity of child welfare organizations (Hopkins, Mudrick, & Rudolph, 1999). Previous research in training evaluation has identified the importance of organizational support and flexibility for comprehensive training and modification of program activities based upon training outcomes (Xiao, 1996). Modern theories of learning organizations suggest that organizations must be flexible and not resistant to change (Kanter, 1995). Unlike these flexible learning organizations, child welfare agencies tend to be bureaucracies in which change is slow and difficult (Tracy & Pine, 2000).

Examples of Outcomes Evaluation in Child Welfare

Caseload Reduction. There is one study in the child welfare training evaluation literature that documents the organizational impact of training. This study by Jones and Biesecker (1980) evaluated training for permanency planning skills. The result of this training was a reduction in the caseload sizes of foster care workers, as well as fiscal savings associated with better permanency planning.

ASFA Supervisor-Team Training. Through support of a Children's Bureau training grant, members of the National Resource Center on Child Welfare Training and Evaluation (NRC-CWTE) recently developed a supervisor-team training approach to ASFA and core casework skills. This training was based upon principles of parallel process, reinforcement of skills, and the solution-based casework (SBC) model of child welfare practice. The purpose of the training was to promote ASFA outcomes of child safety, permanency and well-being through strengthening of casework skills in the SBC model. (please see the monograph [NRC-CWTE: ASFA Supervisor-Team Training: Solution-Based Supervisory Practice for Achieving Outcomes in Child Welfare](#))

The SBC model is linked to these ASFA outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being in numerous ways. Evaluation of the SBC model has demonstrated a number of positive casework outcomes (Antle, Martin, Barbee, & Christensen, under review). Families with whom SBC was utilized were significantly more compliant than families with whom a traditional model was utilized. These SBC families were more likely to follow through with outside referrals and complete tasks assigned by the worker. The use of SBC was also significantly associated with the achievement of more case goals and objectives. As family compliance and goal achievement increases, there will be substantial benefits for children in terms of the safety and stability of placements.



Becky Antle, MSSW, Ph.D.



Mavin Martin, Ph.D.

Another set of positive outcomes associated with SBC was worker effort in the casework process (Antle et al, under review). Workers using the SBC model were significantly more likely to contact collaterals directly and attend appointments with clients. These efforts may be related to child safety and rapid movement of the case through the system.

One of the primary outcomes of ASFA is the reduction of recurrence of child abuse or neglect. Research by Mudd and Huber (1999) on SBC found that recidivism was reduced to 3% in cases with which SBC was used. The evaluation by Antle, et al (under review) also found that SBC is particularly effective for cases with historical involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS). Families who had previous cases with CPS achieved significantly more case goals when SBC was used than families with the traditional model or no previous involvement. Hence, SBC is a casework model that has been show to have a significant effect on this primary ASFA outcome.

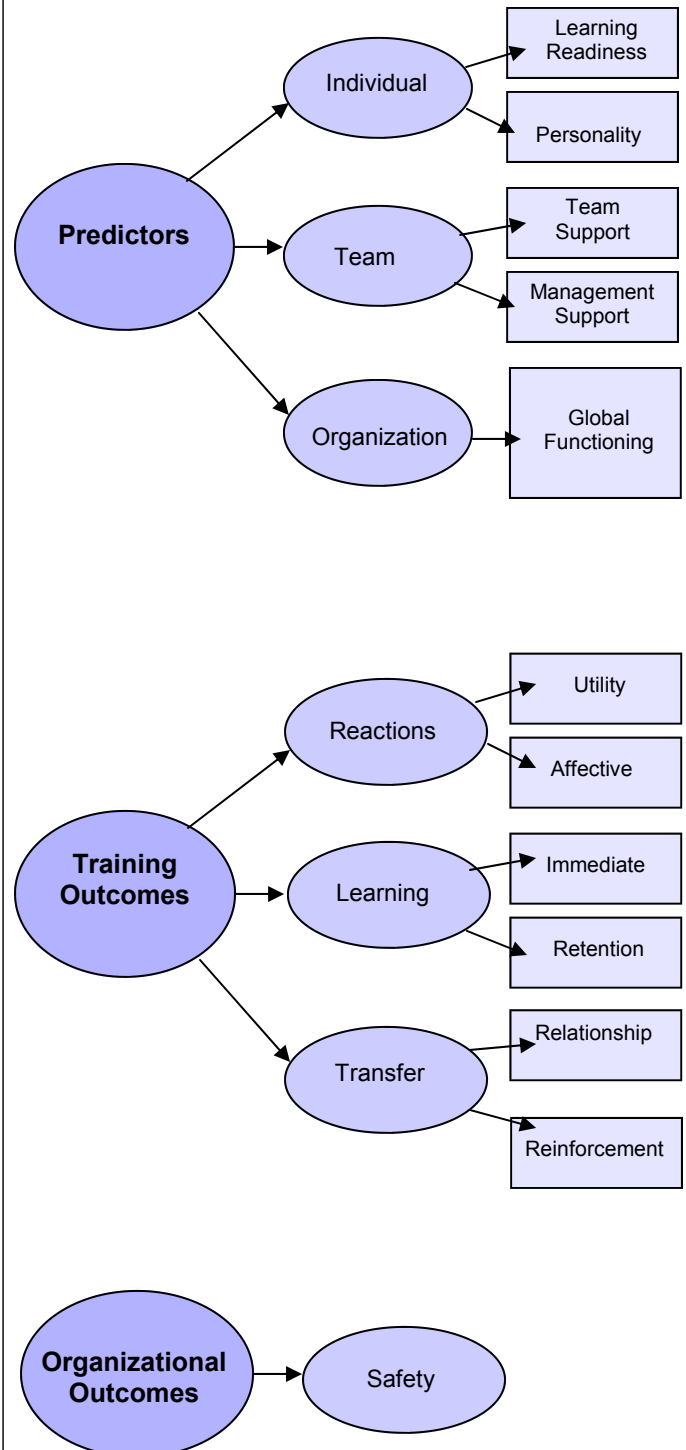
Another ASFA outcome is the permanency of child placements. Antle et al (2000) found that children with whom SBC was utilized were significantly less likely to be removed for out of home placements than those receiving the traditional model. Therefore, another benefit of this grant may be to teach workers how to maintain safely children in their homes.

Finally, other ASFA goals center around the timeliness of casework proceedings. Timeliness of casework is monitored by deadlines for case plans and other casework components. Also, each SBC objective has a specified time frame. For example, the prevention plan is to be developed in collaboration with the therapist within 30 days. Family progress is to be monitored and celebrated on a monthly basis. Workers are required to document the date each objective is achieved.

In addition to the development of training to promote SFA outcomes through these SBC skills, the NRC team also implemented a complex evaluation of this training that included predictor variables, training outcomes and organizational outcomes discussed in this monograph. See Figure 1 for the training evaluation model. As this model indicates, predictor variables such as worker learner readiness and conscientiousness, as well as team learning support and organizational support of training were evaluated. Next, training outcomes at all levels, including reactions, learning and transfer, were included. Finally, the organizational outcome that was targeted for training evaluation was child safety. Predictor variables, knowledge, transfer and safety were evaluated pre-training. Satisfaction knowledge, transfer and safety were evaluated post-training. (please see the monograph [NRC-CWTE: Training Transfer: Variables that Predict and Maximize Transfer](#))

The outcome of permanency was not included in the initial evaluation model because this would limit the sample to out of home care cases, and the training applied to all cases. The outcome of well-being was not included because at the time of planning for the evaluation there were not standardized measures of child well-being available. However, since that time, Kentucky conducted the Kentucky Foster Care Census, which included a number of variables related to child well-being. Therefore, in a second stage of evaluation research for

Child Welfare Training Evaluation Practice Model



Recommendations by the NRC

The National Resource Center on Child Welfare Training and Evaluation recommends the following when conducting level four or outcomes evaluation in child welfare training:

Clearly define organizational outcomes to be measured. Identify the link between training goals/objectives and these organizational outcomes.

- Carefully consider the type of organizational outcomes to be used. The use of worker outcomes may be preferable because there may be a more direct impact of training on worker outcomes such as productivity or timeliness. If client outcomes are to be examined, federal definitions should be considered and federal data used when possible.
- Existing data is an excellent resource for organizational outcomes evaluation. The use of such data is efficient because fewer resources are needed for data collection and entry. However, if existing data is used, examine the reliability and validity of such data. Inaccuracies or biases in reporting can mask the benefits of training. For example, if reporting of child maltreatment is used as an indicator of child safety, consider the potential mediators of this reporting, including racial bias, previous involvement with the system, community resources, etc.
- Allow sufficient time for organizational impact of training. The initial evaluation of the ASFA supervisor-team training by Antle (2002) found that there was not yet an organizational impact of training two months following the training intervention. Consider allowing six or more months for this organizational impact to be captured. This time lag is particularly important if organizational outcomes are mediated by client contact. Many child welfare systems have policies regarding the minimum number of required contacts between workers and clients. If the worker is only required to have one contact per month with clients, evaluation may need to span a number of months before an impact is detected.

REFERENCES

- Alliger, G. M., & Janak, E. A. (1989). Kirkpatrick's Levels of Training Criteria: Thirty Years Later. *Personnel Psychology*, 42(2), 331-341.
- Alliger, G. M., & Tannenbaum, S. I. (1997). A meta-analysis of the relations among training criteria. *Personnel Psychology*, 50(2), 341-359.
- Antle, B.F. (2002). Supervisor-team training for best practice in child welfare. *Unpublished dissertation*.
- Antle, B., Martin, M., Barbee, A., & Christensen, D. (under review). Solution-based casework: A paradigm shift to effective, strengths-based practice for child protection. *Child Abuse and Neglect*.
- Gendell, S.J. (2001). In search of permanency: A reflection on the first 3 years of ASFA implementation. *Family Court Review*, 39, 25-42.
- Holton, E.F. (1996). The flawed four level model. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 7(10), 5-19.
- Hopkins, K. M., Mudrick, N. R., & Rudolph, C. S. (1999). Impact of university agency partnerships in child welfare on organizations, workers, and work activities. *Child Welfare*, 78(6), 749-773.
- Jones, M. L., & Biesecker, J. L. (1980). Training in permanency planning: using what is known. *Child Welfare*, 59, 481-489.
- Kanter, K. M. (1995). In Chawla, S., & Renesch, J. *Learning organizations: Developing cultures for tomorrow's workplace*. Portland, OR: Productivity Press.
- Kautz, J.R., Netting, F.E., Huber, R., Borders, K., & Davis, T. (1997). The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993: Implications for social work practice. *Social Work*, 22, 364-373.
- Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1959). Techniques for evaluating programs. *Journal of the American Society of Training Directions*, 13(11), 3-9.
- Mathieu, J. E., & Leonard, R. L. (1987). A time-based approach. *Academy of Management Journal*, 30(2), 316-335.
- Mudd, H. & Huber, R., (1999). Reduction of recidivism with solution-based casework. *Unpublished manuscript*.
- Phillips, J. J. (1996). How much is the training worth? *Training and Development*, 50(4), 20-26.
- Scale, P.C. (1997). The role of family support programs in building developmental assets among young adolescents: A national survey of services and staff training needs. *Child Welfare*, 76(5), 611-635.
- Shelton, S., & Alliger, G. (1993). Who's afraid of level four evaluation? *Training and Development*, 47(6), 43-50.
- Tracy, E. M., & Pine, B. A. (2000). Child welfare education and training: Future trends and influences. *Child Welfare*, 79(1), 93-113.
- Xiao, J. (1996). The relationship between organizational factors and the transfer of training in the electronics industry in Shenzhen, China. *Human Resources Development Quarterly*, 7(1), 55-74.



National Resource Center
On Child Welfare Training & Evaluation
Kent School of Social Work
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40292
Phone: 502-852-3396
Fax: 502-852-2921
<http://olav.usi.louisville.edu/nrc.htm>

UofL

Child Welfare Training



NRC Publication Resources

ASFA Supervisor-Team Training: Solution-Based Supervisory Practice for Achieving Outcomes in Child Welfare

- . Sample Level 2 Tests
- . ASFA/Family Solutions Level 2 Test
- . Sample Feedback Reports
- . Development of Level 2 Tests based on state curricula
- . Development of Feedback Reports & Decision Tree

Child & Family Service Reviews (CFSR's): Preliminary Results and Implications for Training

- . ASFA/Family Solutions Curriculum
- . Family Solutions Practice Tools
- . ASFA/Family Solutions Level 3 Evaluation Tools (Survey, Chart File Review Tool)
- . QA Tool
- . Case Demographics/ Case Complexity Chart File Review Tool
- . Retention Chart File Review Tool
- . Learning Benefit Inventory
- . Training of Trainers in Family Solutions Model
- . Development of Level 3 Evaluation Tools based on state curricula
- . Training of Trainers in Learning Readiness Intervention
- . Training in Response to issues identified in compassion/fatigue scale

When Do Competencies Work?

- . Sample Job Description for Child Welfare Workers & Supervisors
- . Menu of Worker Competencies
- . Menu of Supervisor Competencies
- . Worksheet for Development of Competencies Unique to States (Policy, Practice Model)
- . Consultation with states around competencies, link to training & federal review process

Engaging Child Welfare Families: A Solution-Based Approach to Child Welfare Practice

- . Family Solutions Curriculum
- . Family Solutions Evaluation Tools (Level 2 & 3 tests)
- . Consultation around Shift to Solution Based Practice Model

So, Your State Wants to Begin Evaluation of Child Welfare Training: The Strategic Planning Process

- . Sample Strategic Plans
- . Development of Strategic Plans for States/Organizations

Training To Outcomes: The Impact of Training on Organizational Outcomes

- . Development of Evaluation Strategy
- . Consultation around Acquisition & Linking of Routine State Outcome Data & Evaluation of Practice Model/Training
- . Training Transfer Inventory
- . Learning Benefit Inventory
- . Scoring & Analysis of Scale Data

Training Transfer: Variables that Predict and Maximize Transfer

- . Training Transfer Inventory
- . Organizational Learning Conditions
- . Team Learning Conditions
- . Supervisor Training Support
- . Positive & Negative Reinforcement of Training
- . Self-Efficacy
- . Level 1 Test
- . Affective
- . Utility
- . FTS Specialist Program Protocol
- . FTS Anchors & Documentation Tools
- . Training Refresher Protocol
- . Training Refresher Content for ASFA/Family Solutions Curriculum
- . Consultation around Implementation of FTS Program
- . Development of Anchors specific to state needs
- . Development of Training Refresher Courses for existing curriculum