Strategic Learning and Social Innovation in Times of Uncertainty

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Navigating disruption & uncertainty

In times of uncertainty, there are three basic potential outcomes. Based on how we think the disruption will impact the outcome, informs our choice of action.
Navigating Uncertainty: Strategic Learning

Strategic Learning is the intentional practice of collecting information, reflecting on it, and sharing the findings, to improve the performance of an organization and inform its direction.
Strategic Learning

• Creates institutional memory;
• Supports just-in-time iteration; and
• Clarifies our hypotheses about our work.

By keeping insights, assumptions, and hypotheses at the forefront of organizational consciousness, our learning practices ensure that the design of any future work is informed by the learning of prior endeavors.
Social Innovation

Good Design...

• Anthropology honors reality.
• Social Work creates ownership.
• Organizing builds power.

Source: George Aye
Design thinking: An innovation process

**Discovery**
- Understand
  - Literature Review
  - Framing
  - Expert Interviews

**Ideation**
- Include
  - Synthesis
  - Concepting
  - Inclusive Brainstorming

**Testing**
- Test Small, Fail Small
  - Prototyping
  - Piloting

**Implementation**
- Shared Learning
  - Pre-implementation
  - Implementation
  - Continuous Quality Improvement

**Scaling**
- Adaptation
  - Pre-scaling
  - Change Management
  - Communities of Practice
Children’s ICFW Strategic Learning Process
Strategic Decision-Making: Gut Check

By standardizing our decision-making process with the Gut Check, we ensure that our proposals:

• Align with our mission, values and growth priorities;
• Frame clearly why, how and what;
• Define the correct starting point;
• Determine if we have the capacity and/or plan to implement and sustain the project.

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Strategic Planning: Before Action Review
Conducted prior to an activity or event to help:
• Clarify desired results;
• Plan for anticipated challenges;
• Set clear goals and action steps.

Strategic Learning: After Action Review
Conducted after an activity or event to help:
• Reflect on what actually occurred versus what was intended;
• Identify potential ways to improve the next time;
• Share what we have learned.
ICFW’s Before Action Review

Why do we use the Before Action Review?

• The BAR serves as a guiding star by aligning activities and objectives with our values, mission and the needs of those we are serving.

How do we use the Before Action Review?

• The BAR serves as a planning tool that focuses on:
  • Solutions for identified problems,
  • Employing lessons learned from past efforts, and
  • Developing clear and achievable goals.
• It also sets expectations before implementation for strategic learning and its use to solve unforeseen or new challenges in subsequent iterations.
Learning Logs

• Learning Logs are where we share insights and reflections on work that we’re doing—from interviews to meetings to thoughts that arise in the course of writing, reading, or otherwise engaging in our work.

• The log serves a knowledge management function in a multi-site office, and allows us to track how our thinking and work with others evolves over time.
ICFW’s After Action Review

Why do we use the After Action Review?

• Our lessons learned, whether positive or negative, must be based on actual results, not desired results.

How do we use the After Action Review?

• By contrasting our intended results with our actual results, we can begin to surface important insights and lessons learned. These, ultimately, inform how we proceed – what we sustain and what we seek to improve in another iteration.

• The AAR and its lessons learned then contribute to shared learning and to a new cycle in which our lessons are further tested.
Assessing Strength of Lessons

- **High Rigor**
  - High Quality (apply with confidence)
  - Not relevant (apply with caution)

- **Low Rigor**
  - Hunch (apply with great caution)
  - Elegant Hunch (apply with caution)

- **High Relevance**
- **Low Relevance**

Adapted from Mark Cabaj
Framing the lessons

How might we…?

• How might we statements are a tool for prescribing what should happen in your world tomorrow.

• Questions that help us generate ideas.
COVID Resilience Plan

Mission Statement

Identify and elevate innovative practices that support the well-being of families that are adaptable to our current limitations and may enhance future practice. Highlight policy and system failures that impact family well-being for advocacy efforts.
Guiding Principles

- User focused
- Inclusive of community voice
- Generalist
- Pragmatic
- Shared learning
COVID Resilience Plan Process

1. **Strategic Learning**
   - Uses & Principles
   - Clearly identify the end-users of collected information and routinely engagement for feedback

2. **Engage Informants**
   - Collecting Information, reflecting on it, and sharing findings to improve family and organizational resilience

3. **Share Lessons Learned**
   - Sharing lessons learned strengthens our hypothesis, uncovers hidden assumptions, and ensures future work is informed by these learnings

4. **Substantiate Emergent Practices**
   - Ensures alignment of emergent practices with brain science and trauma informed care principles by developing precise theories of change

5. **Support Use of Findings**
   - Empower programs to learn and adapt from findings as they see fit in their context
Sources and information collection efforts:

- Champions Team
- 19 After Action Reviews
- 7 Communities of Practice
- 1 Parent survey
- 2 Parent focus groups
Lessons Learned & Insights

A *Lesson Learned* is knowledge and experience - positive or negative - derived from actual incidents that can be translated into relevant and useful knowledge.

An *Insight* reflects a deeper understanding of a lesson learned.
Strategic Learning into Action

Lesson Learned + Well-defined Framing Question = Action

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Framing Questions for Action

“A properly framed How Might We doesn’t suggest a particular solution, but gives you the perfect frame for innovative thinking.” - IDEO, Field Guide to Human-Centered Design

Source: George Aye

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Thank you!

We value your participation and feedback. Please complete the brief survey that you will receive upon the conclusion of this webinar.

We will follow shortly with supportive materials for further learning.
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