What Works? Part 2: Designing Systematic Variation in Program Components

Discussion
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Overview

• Some considerations & implications for
  – whether & how to conduct planned variation
  – scaling up or learning from planned variation

• Goal: help identify some key considerations
  – May differ by policy/program area
  – Considerations may interact

• Caveat: not necessarily unique to planned variation (but choices and implications seem more stark)
Some Considerations for Whether & How to Conduct Planned Variation

- Costs of components or combinations (CE, CB)

- Uncertainty about service technology (Arising from program theory, or prior empirical evidence)
  - In thresholds or decision points (what and where)
  - Time horizon of relevant outcomes (incl recidivism)
  - Focus on action theory and/or conceptual theory (proximal, intermediate, and/or distal outcomes)
  - Peer effects (e.g.) in service/treatment elements that might be affected by targeting
  - Costs of service/treatment options

- System- & organizational-level conditions & capacities
  - Data systems
  - Analytical capacities & proclivities of staff & organization
  - Discretion of frontline staff
Some Implications for  
*Scaling Up or Learning From*  
Planned Variation

**Dimensions**
- Within the tested context
- Across similar tested contexts
- Across different geographic or other relevant areas
- Over time

**System- & organizational-level conditions & capacities**
- Data systems
- Analytical capacities of staff
- Discretion of & buy-in from frontline staff & managers
Some Implications for
*Scaling Up or Learning From*
Planned Variation

* Unintended consequences from planned variation?
  – Performance measurement systems
  – Political support
  – Clients’ perceptions (agency, stigma, opportunity, fairness)
  – Changes in service characteristics (e.g. peer effects)

• Processes for Updating Knowledge & Processes
  – Conducting retrospective checks
  – Adapting to new knowledge about program/processes from external sources