

Using Rapid Learning Methods to Design and Test Promising Interventions for Low- Income Families: Jefferson County (CO) Department of Human Services

OPRE Methods Meeting

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presentation overview

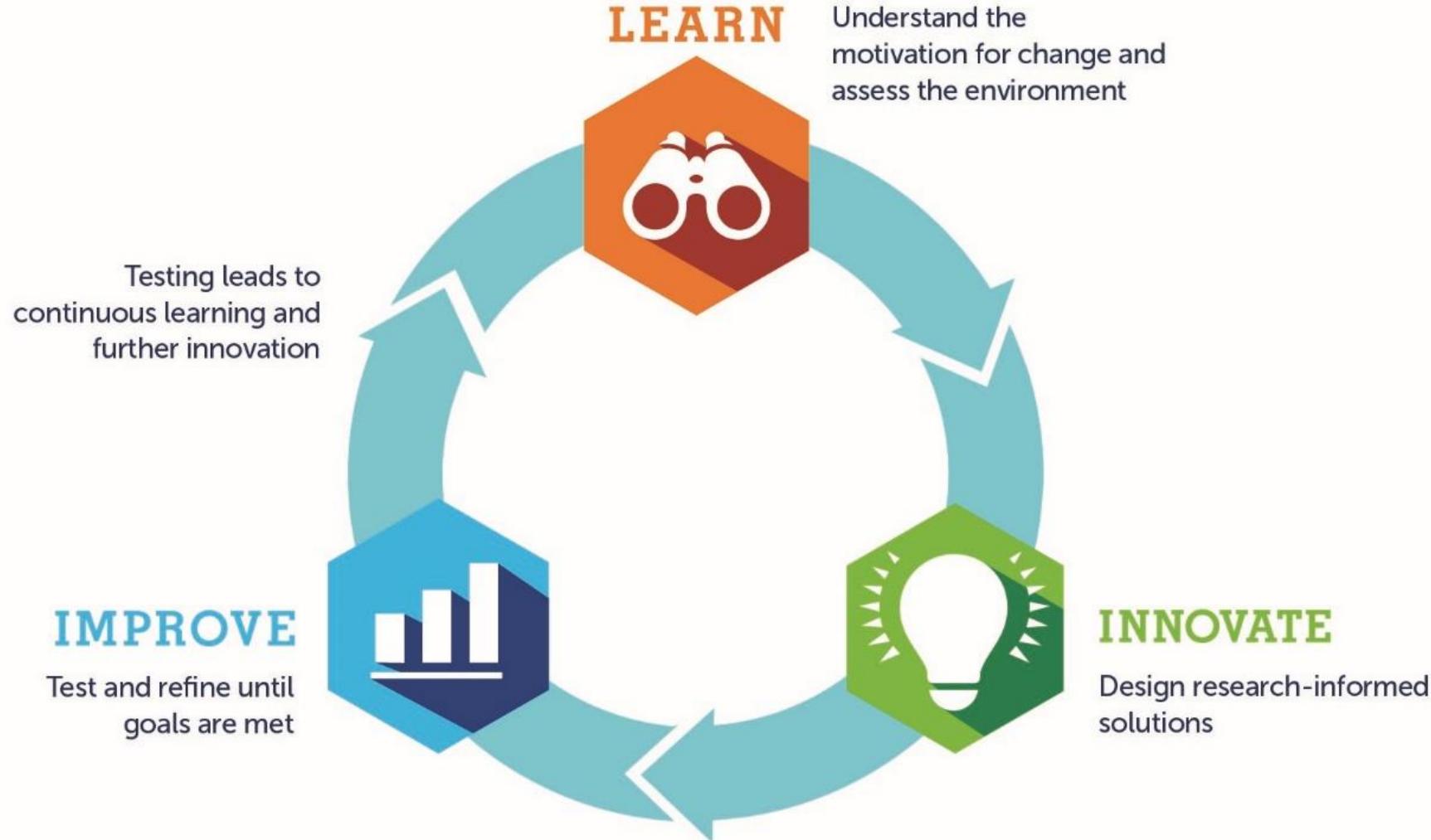
- Introduce an analytic, rapid learning approach for working with practitioners to improve programs
- Illustrate how the approach has been used to transform practice using the Jefferson County (CO) Department of Human Services as a case study
- Demonstrate how rapid learning methods can be used to build research evidence for practitioners making everyday decisions and to build research Evidence for the field

a transformation of practice

...but why?

- Most employment programs for low-income families have modest impacts on sustained employment; very limited success moving people out of poverty
- Limited capacity among public agencies for research-driven innovation and program improvement
- Is it that the programs don't work, implementation is poor, or something else?

rapid learning methods: Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI²)

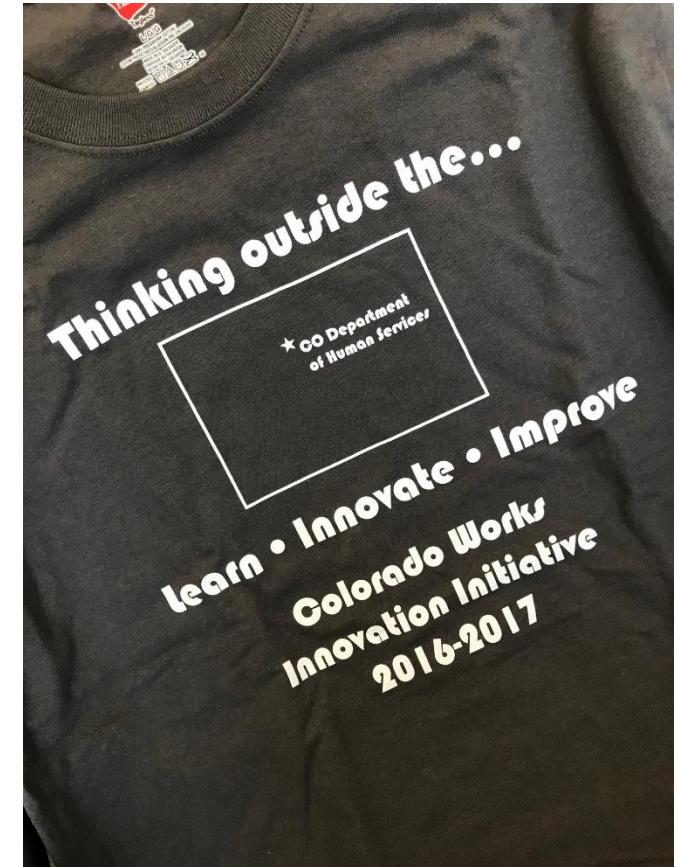


key features of LI²

- Close collaboration between the technical assistance (TA) team and program staff
 - Co-creative: TA team inspires and supports program improvement but the program owns it
- Evidence and strong analytic approaches in all stages
- Capacity building so programs can use the methods on their own
- Differs from other continuous quality improvement methods in that it:
 - Draws upon qualitative and quantitative analytic methods
 - Focuses on evidence using and building
 - Uses iterative “road tests” to design, refine, and integrate the intervention or program change into existing services before rigorous testing

case study: Jefferson County (CO)

- Jefferson County (JeffCo) Department of Human Services serves roughly 2,600 TANF clients per year
- Like many TANF programs, it struggles with:
 - Low engagement rate
 - Transactional, compliance-driven relationships
 - Cumbersome paperwork and processes
 - Limited ability to focus on skill and capacity building
- Participated in the statewide Colorado Works Innovation Initiative to increase client engagement
- Contracted with Mathematica to further program improvement



Research questions:

- What factors contributed to low client engagement in TANF program activities?
- What program conditions might help or hinder the implementation of promising strategies for improving employment outcomes in JeffCo?

Methods:

- Implementation study to identify targeted problem(s) and assess the program's readiness for change

Select findings:

- Inconsistency in the quality and implementation of case management
- Contradictory messages between the individualized, “family-centered” approach and adherence to federal work participation rate (WPR)



LEARN

Research questions:

- What strategies might improve the quality and consistency of case management practices to improve client outcomes?
- What are the expected outcomes of the targeted strategies?
- How will the proposed strategies change staff and/or client attitudes, behaviors, or skills to produce the outcomes?



Methods:

- Logic model/theory of change (or “road map”)
 - Create narrative alignment between the intervention and expected outcomes
 - Convert elements of road map to intervention “fidelity measures”

the intervention

Goal4 It!™ Framework



Research questions:

- What is the experience of JeffCo staff in using Goal4 It!? Which tools are they using? Under what circumstances? How long does it take to use the different tools?
- What are case managers' perceptions of the clients' reactions to using Goal4 It!? Do they like it?
- What are the strengths and limitations of Goal4 It!?
- What recommendations do JeffCo staff have for revising Goal4 It!?

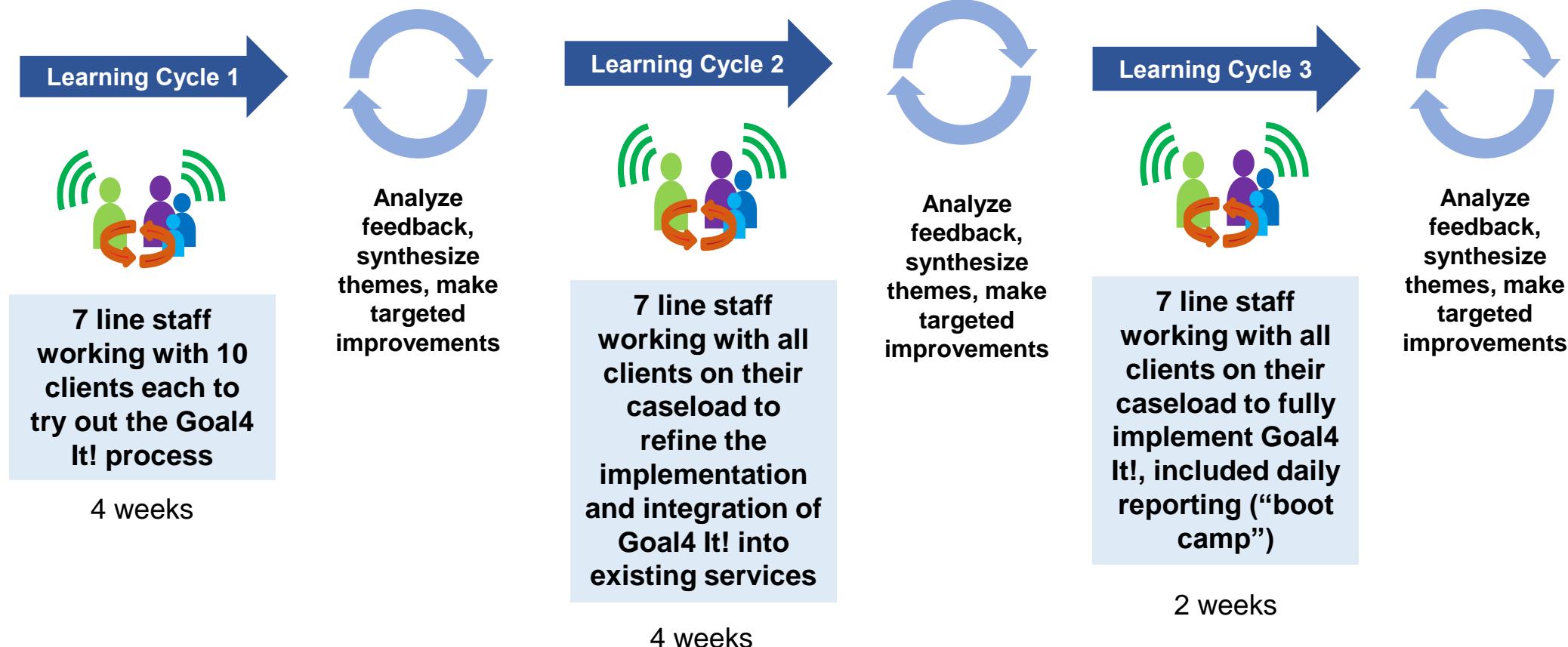


improve (cont.)

Methods:

- **Road tests**
 - Segment and test targeted aspects of the intervention
 - Collect feedback: staff surveys, focus groups, client interviews
 - Analyze feedback and administrative data to identify what works, for whom, and under which circumstances
 - Use the results to refine the intervention
- **Rapid cycle and opportunistic experiments**
 - Analyze existing administrative data to assess progress toward expected targets and outcomes
 - Use the results to refine the intervention

JeffCo road test



Data collection: staff online surveys, telephone interviews with supervisors and staff, summaries from weekly Goal4 It! practice groups, and client surveys

select findings from the road test

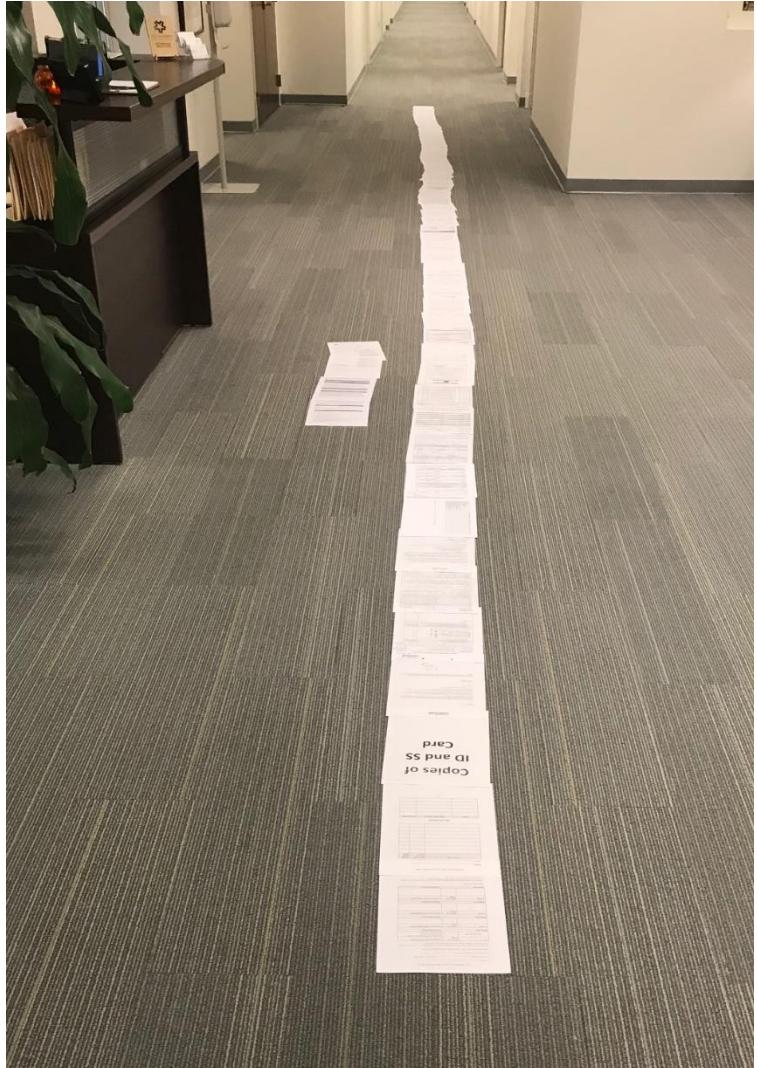
- **Implementing Goal4 It! in a public agency with complex regulatory requirements is complicated**
 - **The fix:** Align the curriculum to meet state requirements and eliminate redundant paperwork and processes (for example, required assessments)
- **Policies, procedures, and performance measures are not well-aligned with an individualized approach and create mixed messages for staff and customers (e.g., TANF WPR)**
 - **The fix:** Provide staff with guidance for managing the WPR and develop performance measures that encourage client accountability and progress
- **For maximum benefit, encourage goal-directed behaviors at all levels within the organization, especially in supervision**
 - **The fix:** Implement Goal4 It! Professional (Pro), a parallel process where supervisors work with staff on their personal and professional goals

**JeffCo is now a site in OPRE's
Employment Coaching
Evaluation!**



afterward...

- Anna's obsession with using rapid learning methods to improve program efficiency
- Staff pretended to be participants for a day in Philadelphia's TANF program
- Paperwork before rapid learning (right)
- Paperwork after (left)
- Approximately 20,000 hours per year of client and staff time saved



for more information

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