Using a Delphi Study Process to Refine a Model of Technical Assistance

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Motivation Behind the Project

• Technical Assistance (TA) is an integral part of the implementation of health-related policies, programs and services (grown substantially since the 1990s)

• At national, state and local levels, the development and delivery of service and system-change initiatives for children and youth in areas of education, welfare and health are routinely provided with some type of support designed to build the capacity of individuals and organizations to achieve desired outcomes.

• Despite its key role in translating knowledge into policy, programs and practice, there have been few attempts to systematically identify key components of successful TA and even fewer rigorous attempts to evaluate its effectiveness.
Suggested Key Principles of TA

• A continuum with scope, intensity and content varying based on need and outcomes
• Tailored to recipient’s unique needs and objectives
• Awareness of the context/environment
• Specification of measureable goals to monitor progress
• Emphasize empowerment and motivation

There is little research confirming the importance of these principles of TA nor associated effective strategies
Challenges of Evaluating Impact

• Confounding contextual factors

• Difficulty of applying basic principles of evaluation design to TA (e.g. comparable pretest-posttest design, control groups, random selection)

• Lack of clear specification of models

“More research is needed that incorporates a theoretical framework for the technical assistance activities” (Chinman et al., 2005)
Research Questions

• What do we mean by TA?
• What do we know about TA strategies/components?
• What is the process by which it occurs
• What are the relevant outcomes/impact
Project Steps

**Step 1**: Use key informant interviews with experienced TA providers to model how TA is defined, delivered, and evaluated

**Step 2**: Use modified Delphi procedures to validate components of model identified in Stage 1

**Step 3**: Develop evaluation methodology to determine effectiveness of TA based on results from Stage 1 and 2

**Step 4**: Use results of Stage 1 and to develop a curriculum to train individuals in the provision of effective TA
Items for Discussion

- Does the continuum of TA make sense?
- What adaptations could be made?
- What are the implications for evaluating and assessing impact?
- What are the implications for practice/training?
- How does it fit with your work?
Step 1: Key Informant Interviews & Analysis

- Developed a 12 item, multi-part interview
- Interviewed 14 experienced GUCCHD TA providers
  - ranging from 14 – 40 years of experience
  - majority have been direct service providers
- Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed
- Conducted data analysis using ATLAS-ti
- Used analysis to construct a model of TA provision
Step 1: Findings

• A Continuum of TA
  – Goals
  – Process
  – Scope
  – Challenge

• A Model of the Relationship-Based Technical Assistance Process
  – Context
  – Partnership
  – Three Phases of TA Provision
Defining TA

• Analysis revealed a complex and nuanced definition of TA & a wide range of recipients, modes of delivery, activities, and desired outcomes.
  – **Who**: individuals, groups, communities, organizations, and states
  – **How**: in-person contact, telephone calls, email exchanges, and web-based technologies.
  – **What**: wide range of activities, from responding directly to requests as stated to creating a space for strategy development; could include training and consultation
  – **Why**: wide range of desired outcomes, from capacity and knowledge building to affecting behavior and systems change
Describing TA Provision: A Continuum of TA

• Across responses, a pattern emerged that is best described as a conceptual continuum of TA
• The continuum describes variation in a range of characteristics used to describe approaches to TA provision
• The continuum is anchored by an approach that is primarily “content-driven” and one that is primarily “relationship-based"
• Content-driven TA was primarily information transfer and referral
• Relationship-based TA was more explicitly the facilitation of change through a partnership
A Continuum of TA (cont’d)

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<tr>
<th>Technical Assistance (TA) Continuum</th>
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A Continuum of TA (cont’d)

• Informants provided TA across the continuum
• There is no greater value to either end
• Each type of TA serves a valuable and distinct purpose
• They are not mutually exclusive
• Choosing an approach that is consistent with the unique aspects of each TA situation is the key to success
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Describing the TA Process: Developing a Conceptual Model

- Respondents described a range of TA strategies needed to accomplish multi-level change
- Information transfer is necessary in all TA interactions
- There was consensus among interviewees that relationship-based TA was necessary to achieve behavior and systems change
- Because the majority of respondents’ work focused on systems change, we have begun to develop a conceptual model of relationship-based TA based on interview data
Relationship-Based TA: A Conceptual Model

• The model of relationship-based TA is conceptualized as a 3 phase set of activities
  – informed by the context of the TA provider and recipient
  – supported and sustained by an effective partnership between the TA provider and recipient

• This model represents an approach to TA and is not meant to be all encompassing
Relationship-Based Technical Assistance Process

Phase I: Decision-Making Process
Phase II: TA Process/Implementation
Phase III: Evaluate Impact
Relationship-Based Technical Assistance Process: Context
Context in Relationship-Based TA

- Contextual dimensions surround and affect the development of the relationship and the provision of TA
- The TA process is influenced by the context of the provider and recipient
- Context includes personal, organizational, and environmental dimensions
- It is important to recognize which dimensions are stable and which are modifiable targets of TA
## Context in Relationship-Based TA (cont’d)

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Relationship-Based Technical Assistance Process: Partnership
Partnership in Relationship-Based TA

• Developing an effective partnership between TA provider and recipient is the goal of relationship-based TA and is the most essential component of the TA process

• An effective partnership is one that facilitates change and leads to multi-level outcomes

• Relationship constructs help enable the building of a partnership

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Relationship-Based Technical Assistance Process: A Three-Phase Model

Phase I: Decision-Making Process
Phase II: TA Process/Implementation
Phase III: Evaluate Impact
Relationship-Based Technical Assistance Process: A Three-Phase Model

Phase I: Decision-Making Process
- Identify the TA need
- Determine fit with need, resources, mission, and expertise
- Determine readiness
- Determine payoff
- Determine TA approach

Phase II: TA Process/Implementation
- Implement TA approach and action plan
- Facilitate and build collaborative alliances
- Focus on and track outcomes
- Work as an agent of change to affect multi-level changes

Phase III: Evaluate Impact
- Assess increased capacity
- Assess changes in attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions
- Assess changes in behavior
- Monitor increase in collaborative alliances
- Monitor changes in organizations
- Assess impact on the TA provider and TA organization
- Assess short, immediate, and long term individual, group, and system level changes

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Relationship-Based Technical Assistance Process: Phase 1: Decision-Making Process

Phase I: Decision-Making Process

- Identify the TA need
- Determine fit with need, resources, mission, and expertise
- Determine readiness
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Relationship-Based Technical Assistance Process: Phase II: TA Process/Implementation

Phase II: TA Process/Implementation

- Implement TA approach and action plan
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Step 2: Delphi Technique

• Purpose
  – To reach consensus in a given area of uncertainty or lack of empirical evidence (Delbecq et al. 1975)

• Procedure
  – Series of sequential questionnaires (“rounds”)
  – Respondents are considered experts in the topic of interest
  – Controlled feedback between rounds
Methodology

• Experts chosen
  • Combination of TA providers and recipients
  • Wide array of disciplines
  • Geographical diversity
  • Broad range of experience

• Initial round based on our findings from Step 1
  • 117 questions: 5-point Likert scale, yes/no, and open-ended
  • Collected between Aug-Oct 2011

• 2\textsuperscript{nd} round rarefied version of the first
  • 31 questions: 5-point Likert scale, yes/no, and open-ended
  • Collected between Jan-Feb 2012

• Questionnaires distributed via SurveyMonkey
• Pilot tested initial round with 4 participants (July 2011)
Data Analysis

• Median/Mode
  – Shows central tendency of responses
  – Depending on the distribution of responses

• Inter-Quartile Range (IQR)
  – Shows distribution of responses
  – Used with Likert scale questions
  – Middle 50% of responses

• Variation Ratio (VR)
  – Shows distributions of responses
  – Used with yes/no questions
  – Proportion of cases that did not agree with the majority

• Consensus
  – IQR ≤ 1
  – VR ≤ 0.25
# Findings

## Round 1
- 33 invited
- 30 respondents (91%)
- 117 questions

## Round 2
- 30 invited
- 17 responded (57%)
- 31 questions with more description in their introduction
## Findings: TA Definition

### Round 1
- **Consensus:**
  - Who, how, what, & why
  - TA should include consultation
- **No consensus**
  - TA should include training (VR: 0.37, no)

### Round 2
- **Consensus**
  - TA should include training (VR: 0.18, no)
## Findings: TA Continuum

### Round 1
- **Consensus:**
  - Concept of continuum
  - Descriptions of content-driven and relationship-based TA

- **No Consensus:**
  - Terms “content-driven” and “relationship-based” (IQR: 1.25, Agree)

### Round 2
- **Still no consensus:**
  - Terms “content-driven” and “relationship-based” (IQR: 2, Neutral)
# Findings: TA Continuum (Round 1)

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## Type of Challenge Being Addressed

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*Green = consensus  Red = no consensus  Yellow = agree to disagree or neutral with term*
# Findings: TA Continuum (Round 2)

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## Type of Challenge Being Addressed

- Green = consensus
- Pink = no consensus
- Yellow = agree to disagree with term

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## Findings: TA Continuum

### Round 1

- **No consensus:**
  - Other categories of the continuum not included (VR: 0.33, no)
  - Other components of content-driven TA (VR: 0.44, no)
  - Other components of relationship-based TA (VR: 0.36, no)

### Round 2

- **Consensus:**
  - Other categories of the continuum not included (VR: 0.7, no)
  - Other components of content-driven TA (VR: 0.14, no)
  - Other components of relationship-based TA (VR: 0.17, no)
Findings: Model of Relationship-Based TA Process (Round 1)
Findings: Model of Relationship-Based TA Process: Context
## Findings: Context in Relationship-Based TA (Round 1)

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**Green** = consensus  
**Red** = no consensus
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### Findings: Context in Relationship-Based TA

#### Round 1
- No consensus
  - Other contextual dimensions of a relationship-based approach to TA (VR: 0.30, no)

#### Round 2
- Getting closer to consensus
  - Other contextual dimensions of a relationship-based approach to TA (VR: 0.43, no)
Relationship-Based TA Process: Partnership
Partnership in Relationship-Based TA (Round 1)

• Trust
• Support
• Communication
• Validation

• Identification
• Empathy
• Confidentiality

Green = consensus  Red = no consensus
Partnership in Relationship-Based TA (Round 2)

- Trust
- Support
- Communication
- Validation
- Identification
- Empathy
- Confidentiality

Green = consensus
## Partnership in Relationship-Based TA

### Round 1
- No consensus
  - Other relationship constructs critical to the building and maintaining of a TA partnership (VR: 0.27, yes)

### Round 2
- Still no consensus
  - Other relationship constructs critical to the building and maintaining of a TA partnership (VR: 0.39, yes)
Findings: Phases of Relationship-Based TA (Round 1)

Phase I: Decision-Making Process
- Identify the TA need
- Determine fit with need, resources, mission, and expertise
- Determine readiness
- Determine payoff
- Determine TA approach

Phase II: TA Process/Implementation
- Implement TA approach and action plan
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- Work as an agent of change to affect multi-level changes

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- Assess increased capacity
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Green = consensus
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Continuum of TA practice

- Based on goals, scope, process and need of recipients
- Stretching from primarily content-driven approaches to primarily relationship-based approaches
- Content driven
  - Information transfer
  - Specific, time-limited, low-intensity
  - Focused on knowledge increase
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“Pure” Content Driven TA may not be a common service

• Lack of consensus on content-driven characteristics
  - Predefined
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  - One-dimensional - Scope
  - Technical - Challenge

Process
Adding Expertise

- Expert Consultation
- Systems Change
- Content-driven
- Relationship-based
- Requests for Resources
- Support Groups
Foundations of TA service delivery

• **Context**
  – Consensus on key aspects of context to consider
  – Some felt that other aspects might be important, but specific to respondent
  – The more the TA includes relationship-based approaches, the more important it is to consider a range of contextual factors
  – Factors may differ on how modifiable they are as targets of TA, i.e., personal (e.g., attitudes, intentions, vs organizational (structure, culture)/environmental (funding, higher level leadership)
Foundations of TA service delivery

• Partnership-building
  – Consensus on all key aspects (e.g., trust, support, empathy)
  – In the consensus phase, many respondents expressed the need to include mutual respect as a key aspect of partnership building
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- Consensus on all key strategies within each phase
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Thank you!
References

Step 2: Delphi Technique

• Purpose
  – To reach consensus in a given area of uncertainty or lack of empirical evidence (Delbecq et al. 1975)

• Procedure
  – Series of sequential questionnaires ("rounds")
  – Respondents are considered experts in the topic of interest
  – Controlled feedback between rounds
Methodology

• Experts chosen
  • Combination of TA providers and recipients
  • Wide array of disciplines
  • Geographical diversity
  • Broad range of experience

• Initial round based on our findings from Step 1
  • 117 questions: 5-point Likert scale, yes/no, and open-ended
  • Collected between Aug-Oct 2011

• 2nd round rarefied version of the first
  • 31 questions: 5-point Likert scale, yes/no, and open-ended
  • Collected between Jan-Feb 2012

• Questionnaires distributed via SurveyMonkey
• Pilot tested initial round with 4 participants (July 2011)
Data Analysis

• Median/Mode
  – Shows central tendency of responses
  – Depending on the distribution of responses

• Inter-Quartile Range (IQR)
  – Shows distribution of responses
  – Used with Likert scale questions
  – Middle 50% of responses

• Variation Ratio (VR)
  – Shows distributions of responses
  – Used with yes/no questions
  – Proportion of cases that did not agree with the majority

• Consensus
  – IQR ≤ 1
  – VR ≤ 0.25
# Findings

## Round 1
- 33 invited
- 30 respondents (91%)
- 117 questions

## Round 2
- 30 invited
- 17 responded (57%)
- 31 questions with more description in their introduction
### Findings: TA Definition

**Round 1**
- **Consensus:**
  - Who, how, what, & why
  - TA should include consultation
- **No consensus**
  - TA should include training (VR: 0.37, no)

**Round 2**
- **Consensus**
  - TA should include training (VR: 0.18, no)
## Findings: TA Continuum

### Round 1
- **Consensus:**
  - Concept of continuum
  - Descriptions of content-driven and relationship-based TA
- **No Consensus:**
  - Terms “content-driven” and “relationship-based” (IQR: 1.25, Agree)

### Round 2
- **Still no consensus:**
  - Terms “content-driven” and “relationship-based” (IQR: 2, Neutral)
## Findings: TA Continuum (Round 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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**Green** = consensus  **Red** = no consensus  **Yellow** = agree to disagree or neutral with term
## Findings: TA Continuum (Round 2)

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*Technical*

Green = consensus  Pink = no consensus  Yellow = agree to disagree with term
## Findings: TA Continuum

### Round 1

**No consensus:**
- Other categories of the continuum not included (VR: 0.33, no)
- Other components of content-driven TA (VR: 0.44, no)
- Other components of relationship-based TA (VR: 0.36, no)

### Round 2

**Consensus:**
- Other categories of the continuum not included (VR: 0.7, no)
- Other components of content-driven TA (VR: 0.14, no)
- Other components of relationship-based TA (VR: 0.17, no)
Findings: Model of Relationship-Based TA Process (Round 1)
Findings: Model of Relationship-Based TA Process: Context
## Findings: Context in Relationship-Based TA (Round 1)

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Green = consensus  
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## Findings: Context in Relationship-Based TA (Round 2)

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Relationship-Based TA Process: Partnership

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