Treatment Integrity and Program Fidelity: Necessary but Not Sufficient to Sustain Programs

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Goals

- Describe the relationship between treatment integrity, program fidelity, and sustainability.
- Review what we know about treatment integrity and program fidelity.
- Review what we do not know about treatment integrity and program fidelity.

Relationship Between Integrity/Fidelity and Sustainability

- Programs and practices are a set of complex behaviors that are prescribed by policy and protocols.
- To make claims that a particular program or practice has sustained, it is necessary to know to what extent policy and protocols were followed.
- By default, failure to implement with integrity/fidelity means that the program or practice has not sustained.

What We Know about Treatment Integrity/Program Fidelity

- Most of what we know has been developed at the level of individuals implementing a specific behavior intervention or teaching plan.
  - The most common method for increasing and maintaining high treatment integrity is direct observation and feedback about implementation.
    - ✓ Observation and feedback sessions are frequently completed by individuals who are external to the system.
    - ✓ May be too intensive to be accomplished in many service settings.

What We Know about Treatment Integrity

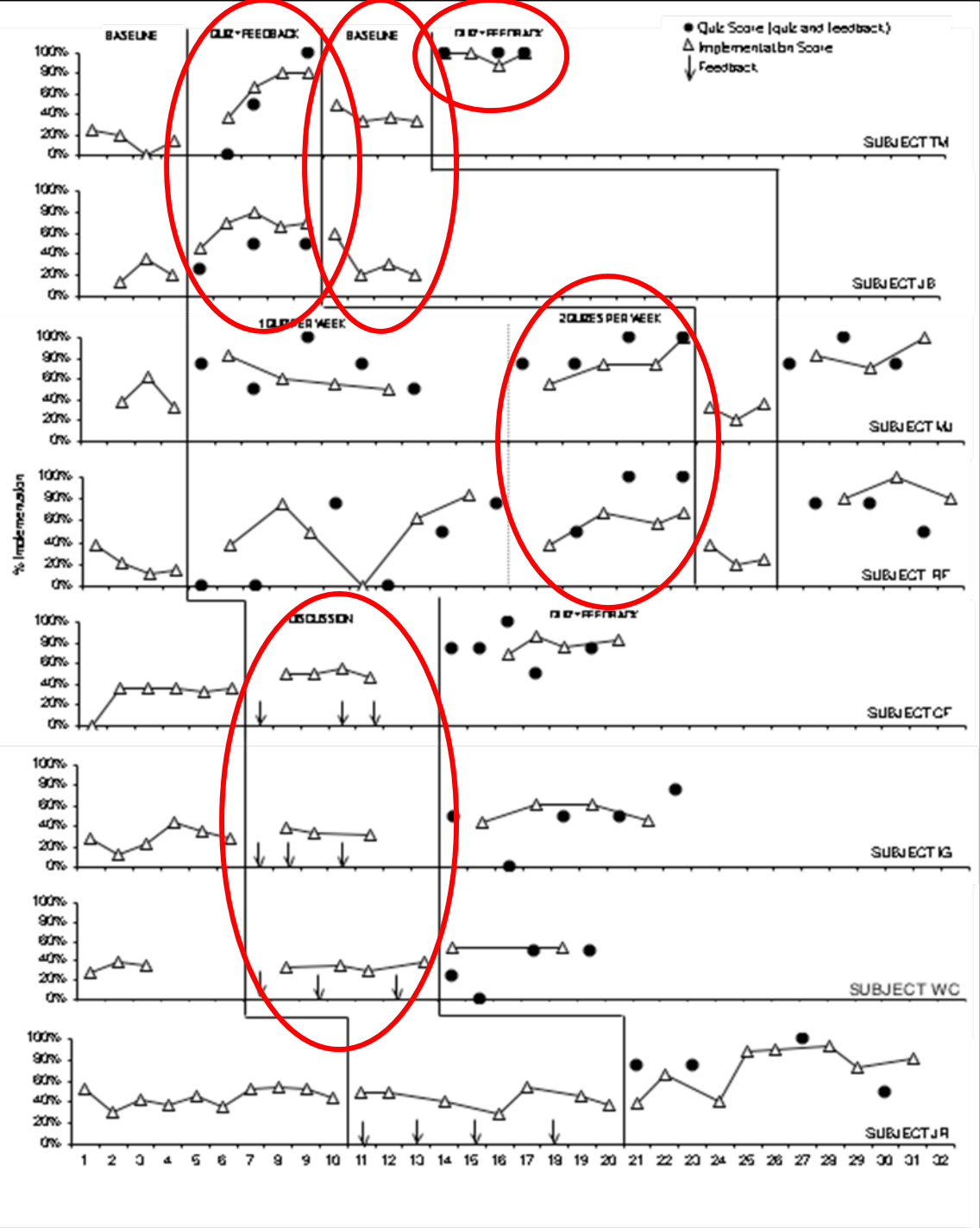
- If integrity checks are discontinued then integrity suffers.
  - ✓ Apparently integrity checks are always necessary.
  - ✓ Implies that it is necessary to have a system to assess the integrity of assessing integrity of implementation.

What We Do Not Know About Treatment Integrity

- How much integrity is enough to impact performance?
  - Some studies suggest that integrity can be "degraded" and still have positive impact on behavior *(Northup, Fisher, Kahang, Harrel, & Kurtz,1997; Vollmer, Roane, Ringdahl, & Marcus,1999; Wilder, Atwell, & Wine, 2006).*
    - ✓ Does everyone have to be at criterion or is it sufficient that overall implementers are at criterion?

What We Do Not Know About Treatment Integrity

- What are relatively easy methods for increasing and maintaining integrity?
  - Performance feedback systems are most common but may be too resource and time intensive for many large systems.
- How often do we need to assess integrity to maintain adequate levels?
- How to incorporate routine treatment integrity checks into an organization?


BASELINE
QUIZ+FEEDBACK
BASELINE
QUIZ+FEEDBACK
● Quiz Score (quiz and feedback)
△ Implementation Score
↓ Feedback
SUBJECT TM
SUBJECT JB
1 QUIZ PER WEEK
2 QUIZES PER WEEK
SUBJECT KJ
% Implementation
SUBJECT RF
DISCUSSION
QUIZ+FEEDBACK
SUBJECT CF
SUBJECT KG
SUBJECT WC
SUBJECT JR
100%
90%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

What We May Know about Program Fidelity

- Program fidelity is used to describe when large “packages” are implemented.
  - Laws.
  - Policy.
  - Practices such as school-wide intervention.

What We May Know about Program Fidelity

- We know much less about fidelity of implementation at the large systems level.
  - Much of what we know is descriptive rather than experimental.
  - Measures are usually at large unit (school-wide).
  - Fidelity measures usually taken less often than with treatment integrity.

What We May Know About Program Fidelity

- We have many “hints” about what is important to assure fidelity.
  - Most is drawn from retrospective interviews with individuals from successful, sustainable programs.
  - Much of the quantitative data is correlational.

Two Examples

- Kovalesi, Gickling, Morrow, & Swank (1999).
  - Evaluated high vs low implementation of Instructional Support Teams (IST).
    - ✓School-wide organizational change.
    - ✓Students benefited from IST processes only when implemented with high fidelity.
    - ✓Implementing with low fidelity resulted in no better outcomes for students than control group not exposed to IST processes.
    - ✓Having structures in place was not sufficient to assure high fidelity.
    - ✓Fidelity assessed one time per year.

Two Examples

- Horner (2005).
  - Effect of high fidelity vs low fidelity on office discipline referrals.
    - ✓ Schools that had high fidelity had 25% fewer office referrals for major rule violations than schools that did not meet fidelity criterion.
    - ✓ Fidelity measures taken 2 times per year.

What We Do Not Know About Program Fidelity

- With broad packages such as school-wide positive behavior support what are the core components of a program that have to be in place to have effect?
- What is the necessary level of fidelity to effect performance?
- How often is it necessary to assess program fidelity?
  - Can we decrease the frequency of checks over time?

Conclusions

- Integrity/fidelity is necessary to achieve sustainable programs but not sufficient.
- There is much more that we do not know than we do know about both treatment integrity and program fidelity, especially as it relates to sustainable programs.
- Viable, sustainable programs have to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining integrity and fidelity .

Thank you

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