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Catherine Lawrence
SUNY Albany

Nancy Claiborne
Yeshiva University

Wendy Zeitlin
Montclair State University, zeitlinw@mail.montclair.edu

Charles Auerbach
Yeshiva University

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Finish what you start: A study of Design Team change initiatives' impact on agency climate☆

Catherine Lawrence [a,*], Nancy Claiborne [a], Wendy Zeitlin [b], Charles Auerbach [b]

[a] School of Social Welfare, University at Albany, Albany, NY 12222, United States
[b] Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, 10033, United States

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a multi-site longitudinal design to examine the effect of a Design Team intervention on organizational climate. Thirteen private, not-for-profit child welfare agencies from one state participated in a Design Team intervention to address workforce needs. A total of 407 workers from those agencies responded pre and post intervention to a survey that measures worker perceptions of the psychological climate of their organization using the Parker Psychological Climate Survey. Workers in organizations that completed the Design Team intervention had statistically significant increases in three of the four dimensions of the Parker scale. On the role dimension, significant change was noted on all three subscales on the interaction between Time 1 and Time 2 (ambiguity: $p = 0.012$; conflict: $p = 0.04$; overload: $p = 0.05$). On the organization dimension, the justice and support subscales had significant differences in the desired direction (justice: $p = 0.05$; support: $p = 0.03$). On the supervisor dimension, significant change was observed in the desired direction for both the goal emphasis and work facilitation subscales (goal emphasis: $p = 0.02$; work facilitation: $p = 0.00$). Statistically significant improvements in the organizational climates of child welfare agencies suggest the benefit of future research to test the effectiveness of Design Team interventions in other service areas. These findings build on intervention research with organizations by linking the ability of an organization to fully implement a change initiative to their capacity to improve the workplace climate for employees.

1. Introduction and literature review

In recent years, research to address workforce issues in child welfare has focused on the organizational environment. Indeed, organizational environment can impact individual workers in measurable ways, including their commitment to their agency (Claiborne et al., 2011) and their intent to stay or leave their job (Claiborne, Auerbach, Zeitlin, & Lawrence, 2015; Strolin-Goltzman, 2010). Efforts to achieve desired levels of workforce effectiveness and stability thus include interventions to improve the organizational factors associated with workforce outcomes (Lawson et al., 2006; Potter, Comstock, Brittain, & Hanna, 2009). One such factor is the workplace climate, which is associated not only with workforce outcomes but also with an organization's readiness to change, its capacity to implement new initiatives, and outcomes for the families they serve.

Research on agency climate in the U.S. child welfare system is also part of understanding the broader scope of concerns present in the publically funded organizations charged with the safety, permanency and well-being of children. As laid out in Lipsky's dimensions of street-level bureaucracy in human service delivery (Lipsky, 2010), front-line workers negotiate a complex work environment. Their psychological experience of that work environment reflects challenges identified by Lipsky decades ago: street-level bureaucrats work with non-voluntary clients in systems with constant resource constraints (1980). Child welfare's frontline case managers witness deeply distressed families. At the same time, the services mandated and delivered through workers' case management efforts do not always meet the needs of children and families on their caseload. This dilemma of mandated high-needs clients, yet limited resources to effectively meet those needs, is the backdrop for U.S. child welfare workers on the front lines.

Despite these dilemmas, many workers remain committed to their job and persist in the field of child welfare (Westbrook, Ellis, & Ellet, 2006). Yet far too many leave, and the departure of so many puts vulnerable children at further risk (Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005; Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, 2010). If, however, the organizational climate of an agency is a support rather than a hindrance for front-line staff, it may contribute to employee effectiveness and retention. For child welfare agencies willing to make organizational level changes to

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* Corresponding author at: School of Social Welfare, University at Albany, Albany, NY 12222, United States.
E-mail address: CLawrence@albany.edu (C. Lawrence).

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support workforce needs, can their efforts improve the climate for employees? To answer that question, this study explores the ability of the Design Team intervention to improve the psychological climate of an agency. The study also adds to the literature on organizational interventions by assessing the degree which agency Design Teams were able to implement change initiatives in their organization.

1.1. Psychological climate in child welfare agencies

The environment in which one works matters in many ways, from how one thinks about their job and professional identity to the type and frequency of organizational citizenship behaviors. In the field of child welfare, research continues to deepen our understanding of how organizational conditions and work environments impact the child welfare workforce, especially those who work directly with families. A particular focus is the psychological climate, defined broadly as employees' shared perception of their work environment's impact on workers' well-being (Glisson, 2002; James & James, 1989; Parker et al., 2003). While the experience of working in an agency is more than just the perceived psychological climate, it is nevertheless an important construct for understanding workforce outcomes such as turnover. Indeed, workers themselves identify a supportive organizational environment as important to retention (Johnco, Salloum, Olson, & Edwards, 2014).

Recent research indicates psychological climate affects workers' organizational commitment and their job status, including their decisions to stay or leave their job as well as their satisfaction with support from their supervisor, their workload and their salary (Claiborne et al., 2011; DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Flower et al., 2005; Hopkins, Cohen-Callow, Kim, & Hwang, 2010). Organizational climate is furthermore associated with the ability of an agency to successfully implement new innovations (Claiborne, Auerbach, Lawrence, & Zeitlin Schudrich, 2013), including evidence-based practice models (Glisson, Green, & Williams, 2012). In other research, Glisson and colleagues found organizational climate is a significant predictor of service quality and is positively associated with improved youth outcomes in child welfare systems (Glisson & Green, 2011; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998).

1.2. Organizational interventions

With organizational climate tied to both workforce and service outcomes, several studies explore how organizational-level interventions can improve the agency environment. Research indicates that Glisson's ARC model can affect changes in organizational culture and climate that impact performance (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). Other research shows the Design Team intervention supports positive organization-level factors that contribute to workforce stability. Quasi-experimental evaluations of this intervention show significant positive outcomes for worker intent to leave, actual turnover and other factors associated with workforce stability such as job satisfaction and burnout (Potter et al., 2009; Strolin-Goltzman, Lawrence, Auerbach, Caringi, Claiborne, Lawson, McCarthy, McGowan, Sherman & Shim, 2009).

The design team intervention is a facilitated approach to organizational change based on organizational learning theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978) and the organizational development of a shared vision (Senge, 1990) as well as principles of action research and community of practice theory (Caringi, Strolin-Goltzman, Lawson, McCarthy, Briar-Lawson, & Claiborne, 2008). These theoretical principles provide the foundation of an intervention that strives to create coherency and unify practice within agencies by building a shared vision, fostering leadership across the agency, employing solution-based inquiry, focusing on team learning, and implementing solution-based decisions.

The Design Team intervention targets learning and development at the individual, group, and organizational level. During the intervention, organizations identify a change initiative related to organizational function rather than a change in service model or practice approach, and a Design Team of employees works with an external facilitator to design and implement the change initiative. As a team of employees are empowered to propose and implement a change to how the organization functions, the Design Team intervention, in theory, may increase organizational change (Lewin, 1997).

Change in organizations, as in other social structures, requires not only a new idea or target for change, but also the implementation of that new idea. From public policy (i.e., Brodkin, 1990; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1980) to adopting evidence-based practice models (Barbee, Christensen, Antle, Wandersman, & Cahn, 2011; Bertram, Blase, & Fixsen, 2015), many fields of social science and areas of human service study the implementation of new rules, policies and practices. For the Design Team intervention, the degree to which the team is able to fully implement its change initiative is likely to impact workforce outcomes. Research suggests that agency Design Teams must work through multiple stages of an implementation process before a change initiative is fully embedded in the organization (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009).

2. Study methods

This research was conducted as part of a larger project funded by the U.S. Children's Bureau to address the comprehensive needs of the child welfare workforce. The study employed a multi-site longitudinal design to tests the effect of the Design Team intervention on agency climate while also assessing implementation completion of each Design Team's change initiative. Working with a statewide partner, project staff recruited thirteen private, not-for-profit child welfare agencies from one state to participate in a Design Team intervention to address workforce needs. All participating agencies had contracts with the state to provide a wide-range of child welfare services (e.g., prevention, foster care, residential, and community based services) and the sample included agencies serving urban, suburban, and rural communities. The Institutional Review Board of the Principle Investigators' home institution approved all components of the research project.

2.1. Data collection and sample

Employees at each participating agency were invited but not required to complete an on-site pen and paper survey at a “kick-off” event prior to the commencement of the intervention. Following baseline data collection, each agency initiated the Design Team intervention. For this study, the intervention followed established protocols for Design Teams (Lawrence, Zeitlin, Auerbach, & Claiborne, 2015). Each agency worked with an external facilitator for approximately 18 months through four phases of work to identify and implement a change initiative to address workforce needs at their organization. The facilitators for this project had graduate degrees as well as expertise and direct experience in organizational development. Facilitators met with the teams a minimum of four hours a month and participated in monthly calls with the Principal Investigator.

During the intervention, each Design Team facilitator submitted monthly reports to project researchers. These detailed reports use a structured, uniform format to capture Design Team agendas, meeting notes, and facilitator assessment of the team progress as they planned and implemented their organizational change initiatives. In addition, the design team completed a focus group at the end of the intervention. On the final day of the Design Team project, workers who had completed the baseline survey were asked to participate in the post-project survey.

2.2. Measures

The survey collected data on participant demographics and work-related questions including workers' role in the agency, their employment intentions and their perceptions of the psychological climate of the agencies. The scales used in this survey have been used extensively

in other child welfare research and have been validated in human resource and child welfare settings (Auerbach, Schudrich, Lawrence, Claiborne, & McGowan, 2014; Parker et al., 2003; Zeitlin, Claiborne, Lawrence, & Auerbach, 2014).

This study is primarily concerned with employee's perception of the psychological climate of their workplace. Organizational climate was measured using the Psychological Climate Survey (PCS) (Parker et al., 2003), a forty-eight item 5-point Likert scale comprised of four dimensions: *Role*, *Job*, *Organization*, and *Supervisor*. Each of the four dimensions contains three subscales. Coefficient alpha for the subscales ranged from .60 (*challenge*) to .82 (*support*).

Subscales associated with the *Role* dimension measure *ambiguity*, *conflict*, *and overload*. The *ambiguity* subscale assesses the degree to which workers have clarity in their job assignments. The *conflict* subscale measures the degree to which workers believe that conditions at the agency impede their work. This, for example, could include receiving contradictory instructions for how to do their job. The *overload* subscale measures workers' perceptions of how excessive responsibilities may interfere with doing quality work. An example of an item from the *Role* dimension is, "It is often not clear who has the authority to make decisions regarding my job."

Subscales associated with the *Job* dimension measure *autonomy*, *challenge*, and *importance*. The *autonomy* subscale evaluates the degree to which workers have the freedom to do their jobs. The *challenge* subscale measures the degree to which workers use the full range of their knowledge and skills in completing their work. The *importance* subscale measures workers' perceptions of how valuable their work is to others both within and outside the agency. An example of an item from the job dimension is, "I have a great deal of freedom to decide how to do my job."

Subscales associated with the *Organization* dimension measure *innovation*, *justice*, and *support*. The *innovation* subscale assesses the degree to which workers believe they can use new ideas and creativity to do their jobs better. The *justice* subscale measures how fairly workers believe they are treated. The *support* subscale measures workers' perceptions of how much they believe the agency cares about them. An example of an item from the *organization* dimension is, "I am encouraged to develop my ideas."

Subscales associated with the *Supervisor* dimension measure *trust and support*, *goal emphasis*, and *work facilitation*. The *trust and support* subscale assesses the degree to which workers feel respected by their supervisor. The *goal emphasis* subscale measures the degree to which workers believe that their supervisors set clear and measurable work goals. The *work facilitation* subscale measures workers' perceptions of how much they think their supervisor helps them with challenges in the work environment. An example of an item from the *supervisor* dimension is, "My supervisor shows me how to improve my performance."

In addition to measuring the organization's psychological climate, researchers accessed the degree to which agency Design Teams implemented their change initiatives. Qualitative data from facilitator reports were converted into primary documents for analysis with Atlas.ti software. The data were analyzed for major themes and process markers. Researchers completed an agency case study that examined the agency history, services and population served, recent financial and leadership changes, reason for participating in the intervention, the make-up the design team, internal and external implementation drivers, and the nature of the team's initiative.

Qualitative data were then applied to intervention process evaluation (IPE) concepts gathered from multiple scholars and outlined by Biron and Karanika-Murray (2013) to assess the context and process of the agency change initiative at each phase of the intervention. To assess if agency teams had implemented their change initiative, the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) definition for the implementation was applied to the qualitative process analysis of each case to measure implementation completion (Fixsen et al., 2009). Agencies fully implemented their change initiative if they met the definition of the fourth NIRN stage, full implementation. Full implementation occurs when the new learning and organizational changes become integrated into practice, and new procedures and processes are routinized.

During the 18 months of the intervention for this study, three of the thirteen participating agencies achieved full implementation. Of the remaining ten agencies, three were unable to garner crucial realignment supports to make actual organizational changes. The other seven agencies were engaged in implementation but did not achieve full implementation at the end of the 18 month Design Team intervention. For these agencies, garnering supports and resolving barriers to organizational change proved to be more time-consuming than expected. Thus, while the Design Teams in these seven organizations were still moving forward with their change initiatives at the end of the project intervention, their implementation is considered incomplete for the purposes of the study.

2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis using Stata 14 software employed a two-way analysis of variance with the variables *time* and *impl* (i.e., whether the individual was employed at an agency that reached implementation completion) to assess both main effects and the interaction of the two on each of the Parker subscales. Use of ANOVA was selected as an appropriately powerful test of significant group differences (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) for the hypothesis that workers in agencies that fully implemented their Design Team change initiative would show improved climate scores between Time 1 and Time 2 compared to workers in agencies that failed to fully implement their change initiative. The significance of change was tested using contrast. That is, researchers compared the change at baseline and upon completion of the project between the two categories of agencies.

3. Results

3.1. Sample demographics

Across the thirteen agencies participating in the Design Team intervention, a total of 517 staff completed the survey at baseline. Table 1 displays characteristics of the sample. Similar to other agencies in child welfare, workers were more likely to be female (66.92%), white (74.37%), and not possess a social work degree (83.76%). The average

Table 1
Sample demographics (n = 517).

Demographic	n	%	Mean	SD
Age			42.28	12.41
Gender				
Female	346	66.92		
Male	171	33.08		
Race/ethnicity				
White	383	74.37		
Black	78	15.15		
Hispanic	24	4.66		
Asian	4	0.78		
Other	26	5.06		
Education				
Social work degree	84	16.24		
No social work degree	433	83.76		
Job				
Supervisor	198	40.57		
Not a supervisor	290	59.43		
Administrator	133	27.54		
Not an administrator	350	72.46		
Thought about looking for a job in the previous year				
Yes	270	52.22		
No	247	47.78		
In agency with implementation completion	190	23.34		

age of workers was just over 42 years old (sd = 12.41). The sample mostly consisted of those neither in supervisory positions (59.43%) nor administrative positions (72.46%). Of the total sample, over half the workers had considered looking for a job in the past year (52.22%). A total of 407 workers completed both waves of the survey. Of those, 190 (23.34%) were employed in agencies that fully implemented their change initiative through the Design Team intervention.

3.2. Changes in agency climate

Results show significant differences in three of the four dimensions of the Parker scale: *Role*, *Organization* and *Supervisor*. In each of these dimensions, several subscales show statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level or lower, as summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

3.2.1. Changes in the Role dimension

In the *Role* dimension, significant change was noted on all three subscales (overload: p = 0.05; conflict: p = 0.04; ambiguity: p = 0.012). For *overload*, there was no significant difference for the main effects of implementation or time. However, the interaction between these was statistically significant (p = 0.050). Those in the fully implemented group saw a significant average rise in score of 0.257 points (p = 0.021) while the decrease in scores for those in the incomplete implementation group was not significant. Looking at the graph in Fig. 1 for the adjusted predictions, those in the fully implemented group had lower baseline scores than those in the incomplete implementation group. Those in the fully implemented group saw an increase in predicted scores while those in the incomplete implementation group saw a decline in predicted scores. For the *conflict* subscale, there was no significant difference for the main effects of implementation or time, however the interaction between these was significant (p = 0.039). Those in the not implemented group saw a significant average decrease in score by 0.216 points (p = 0.021) while the increase in scores for those in the fully implemented group was not significant. Looking at the graph in Fig. 1 for the adjusted predictions, both groups had similar baseline scores with those in the implementation completion group rising and those in incomplete implementation group falling. For *ambiguity*, there was no significant difference for the main effects of implementation or time. The interaction between the two, however, was significant (p = 0.012). Those in the fully implemented group saw an average rise in score of 0.156 points, and there was a decrease in scores for the incompletely implemented group of 0.163 points, although neither of these was significant. Looking at the graph in Fig. 1 for the adjusted predictions, those in the fully implemented group had lower baseline scores than those in the not fully implemented group. Those in the fully implemented group saw an increase in predicted scores while those in the not fully implemented group saw a decline in predicted scores.

Table 2
Analysis of variance of Parker subscales by treatment and time.

Subscale	Mean square	*df*	F	p
Role				
Overload				
Impl	1.507	1	1.69	0.194
Time	0.002	1	0.00	0.960
Impl × time	3.444	1	3.87	0.050
Total	0.891	804		
Conflict				
Impl	0.908	1	1.45	0.228
Time	0.004	1	0.01	0.936
Impl × time	2.666	1	4.27	0.039
Total	0.628	803		
Ambiguity				
Impl	0.002	1	0.00	0.956
Time	0.072	1	0.13	0.723
Impl × time	3.632	1	6.33	0.012
Total	0.577	805		
Organization				
Support				
Impl	1.758	1	1.99	0.159
Time	0.550	1	0.62	0.431
Impl × time	2.476	1	2.80	0.095
Total	0.890	800		
Justice				
Impl	0.012	1	0.02	0.887
Time	0.028	1	0.05	0.830
Impl × time	4.12	1	6.76	0.010
Total	0.615	796		
Supervisor				
Goal emphasis				
Impl	1.170	1	1.97	0.161
Time	0.005	1	0.01	0.924
Impl × time	2.431	1	4.09	0.043
Total	0.598	801		
Work facilitation				
Impl	4.710	1	6.45	0.011
Time	0.416	1	0.57	0.451
Impl × time	1.986	1	2.72	0.100
Total	0.739	799		

Table 3
Change over time for Parker subscales for complete and incomplete implementation.

Subscale	Δ for complete implementation	p	Δ for incomplete implementation	p
Overload	0.257	0.021	−0.052	0.638
Conflict	0.057	0.545	−0.216	0.021
Ambiguity	0.156	0.083	−0.163	0.069
Support	0.241	0.029	−0.021	0.853
Justice	0.160	0.083	−0.179	0.053
Goal emphasis	0.040	0.662	−0.221	0.016
Work facilitation	−0.064	0.530	−0.299	0.003

3.2.2. Changes in the Organization dimension

Looking at results on the *Organization* dimension, the *support* and *justice* subscales had significant differences in the desired direction (i.e., those with incomplete implementation deteriorated while those with implementation completion improved) (support: p = 0.03; justice: p = 0.05). For *support*, there was no significant difference for either main effects or the interaction between implementation and time; however, those in the fully implemented group showed a significant increase in *support* score by an average of 0.241 points (p = 0.029). Looking at the graph in Fig. 1 for the adjusted predictions, those in the completed implementation group had lower baseline scores and these increased slightly over time while those in the incomplete implementation group started with higher baseline scores that decreased over time. With regard to *justice*, there was no significant difference for the main effects, but the interaction between implementation and time was significant (p = 0.010). Those in the incomplete implementation group showed a significant decrease in score by an average of 0.179 points (p = 0.053). Looking at the graph in Fig. 1 for the adjusted predictions, those in the fully implemented group had lower baseline scores that increased slightly with time while those in the incomplete implementation group started with higher baseline scores that decreased over time.

3.2.3. Changes in the Supervisor dimension

For the *Supervisor* dimension, significant change was observed in the desired direction for both the *goal emphasis* and *work facilitation* subscales (work facilitation: p = 0.00; goal emphasis: p = 0.02). For *work facilitation*, there was a significant difference between those in agencies that completed the implementation of their change initiative compared to those who did not (p = 0.011). There was no significant difference for all participants between baseline and follow-up nor was there an interaction between implementation and time. Looking at Fig. 1 graphs for the adjusted predictions, the predicted values actually declined for those not in the implementation completion group. The

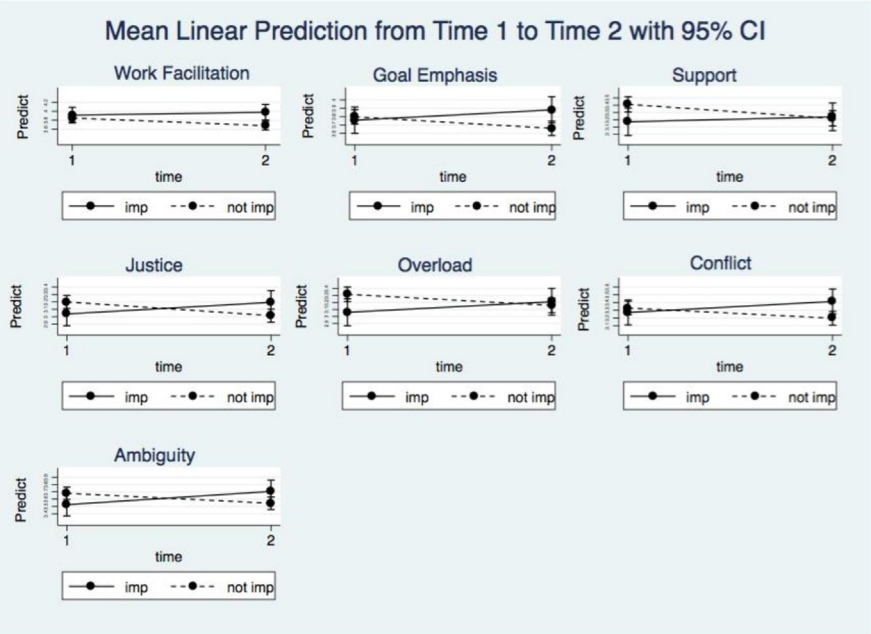

Fig. 1. Graphical depiction of change over time in Parker subscales.

actual change for those not achieving full implementation was a decrease of 0.299 points ($p = 0.003$). Those in the implementation completion group had a slight increase in score, but this increase was not significant.

In terms of *goal emphasis*, there was no significant difference for the main effects; however, the interaction was significant between implementation and time ($p = 0.043$). Fig. 1 shows the predicted values for both groups started in nearly the same place. However the interaction showed an increase in predicted scores for those in agencies that completed implementation and a decline for those not. The actual change for those in agencies that did not complete implementation was a decrease of 0.221 points ($p = 0.016$). Those in the implementation completion group had an increase in score, but this increase was not significant.

3.3. Patterns of change

Study findings show important patterns of change in climate scores for agencies participating in the Design Team intervention that are distinct between two groups of workers: those in organizations that fully implemented their agency Design Team change initiative, and those in agencies that did not. The analysis of variance between the two groups of workers show significant differences across a number of climate subscales, suggesting support for the hypothesis that full implementation of the Design Team's identified change initiative is required for the agency to benefit from the organizational intervention.

It is important to note that workers in those organizations that fully implemented their change initiative showed climate scores with significant improvement for only two climate subscales: *support* and *overload*. In contrast, workers in agencies that failed to completely implement their change initiative showed significant decline in climate scores in four different subscales that range across three of the Parker scale dimensions: the *conflict* subscale from the *Role* dimension, the *justice* subscale from the *Organization* dimension and the *work facilitation* and *goal emphasis* subscales from the *Supervisor* dimension.

The finding that workers in the agencies that failed to implement their change initiative showed a decline in three dimensions of organizational climate was unexpected and important to consider. For this project, agencies were recruited through a statewide partner and all the organizations that volunteered were able to participate in the Design Team intervention. Indeed, although the workforce survey included a measure of readiness for change, the scale proved an inadequate measure, and agencies were not screened out based on their degree of readiness to change or any other criteria.

When looking at the interaction effects, not all the dimensions of the Parker scale showed similar change. Interestingly, none of the subscales in the *Job* dimension showed statistically significant between group differences. This dimension, which includes the subscales *importance*, *autonomy* and *challenge*, measures how important workers feel their job is for themselves and others and asks if workers feel sufficiently challenged by their job in ways that allow them to apply their knowledge and skills with some discretion. On the other hand, all of the subscales measuring worker's perception of their *Role* in the agency did show statistically significant between group differences. This dimension includes subscales of *overload*, *conflict* and *ambiguity* and measures the clarity workers feel about the objectives and expectations of their job, the workload and job pressure, and if rules, regulations, and those in authority support them or interfere with them doing a good job. The *Organization* dimension was mixed, with the *support* and *justice* subscales showing interaction effects while the *innovation* subscale did not.

3.4. Limitations

There are several limitations in this study when considering its findings. First, random selection of participating agencies was not possible due to the scope and design of the project. Thus, while the findings support the hypothesis, the lack of an experimental design limits the degree to which these findings can be generalized beyond the sample of workers. Second, the research design includes only two waves of data collection, one at baseline and a second at completion of the intervention. A third wave of data collection six or more months after the Design Team intervention ended would allow researchers to test the sustainability of changes in climate dimension and explore the possibility of lagged impacts on organizational climate. In addition, the Design Team intervention delivery was staggered the across the participating agencies. Four agencies participated at a time, with new agencies beginning the intervention as others completed it. As such, the contextual factors for participating agencies, such as major economic or policy changes, could differ. The study did not test for such factors, which could have an impact on results.

Further limitations may stem from the focus of the study on testing the impact of the Design Team intervention on agency climate irrespective of the change initiative the teams chose. This study does not categorize the individual agency change initiatives, nor does it measure and account for other organizational characteristics, such as the role of agency leaders, the financial health of the agency, or the stability of the service array and practice model. Finally, the study does not include any measure of improved service or client outcomes, thus limiting its ability to build on research that connects organizational factors to outcomes for children and families.

4. Discussion of findings and implications

This study tested the impact of the Design Team intervention on the psychological climate of an organization. Each agency's Design Team planned and attempted to implement a change initiative. Researchers compared agencies that achieved full implementation of their organizational change initiative to agencies that failed to fully implement their change initiative. The findings support the hypothesis that implementation of the Design Team's change initiative is required for the agency climate to benefit from the organizational intervention.

This study also highlights the significance of climate factors in child welfare organizations. Employees at agencies that reached full implementation reported significantly less role ambiguity, conflict and overload. They also had significantly higher perceptions of their agency being fair to and supportive of employees. Such climate improvements indicate workers in these agencies were more effective in attending to organizational structures that supported the Design Team's change initiative goals, such as developing communication systems to clarify the purpose and the process of the change initiative. Organizational communication that also addresses individual staff concerns is especially important in reducing resistance and adopting change efforts within an agency. Attempting organizational change without establishing these actions has long been recognized as a barrier to successful implementation (Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou, 2004; Rogers, 1995).

Interestingly, workload levels were not reduced for employees in any of the agencies participating in the Design team intervention, yet workers in organizations that fully implemented their change initiative reported feeling significantly lower levels of work pressure that interfered with job performance. This is especially important in light of concerns that staff sometimes view change efforts as pointless and creating extra work. Workers in the implementation completion agencies reported greater role clarity, which indicates that the Design Team change initiative goals and objectives in those agencies were likely more coherent with job responsibilities and stated performance expectations for employees. Similarly, Preston's recent study supports the job demand–control (JD–C) model, which holds that perceived job demands and perceived job control have an opposite relationship with job strain (Preston, 2015). Thus, perception of job stress due to new knowledge and the use of new problem-solving skills because of the Design Team's implementation process are facilitated by workers' perception of control and goal-related information. In initial team meetings, members often express skepticism that previous changes created more stress in their jobs and resulted in no sustained improvement. However, this sentiment changed as they experienced the commitment of the intervention for Design Teams having full authority to explore and conduct the implementation as an equal partner with the agency leadership. Such control may contribute to reduced strain in an already demanding job environment.

One implication of these findings is that an effective and comprehensive approach to implementing organizational change reduces staff confusion and organizational turmoil. In addition, study findings suggest that involving staff meaningfully in the organizational change creates conditions for their active engagement in the work. Those agencies that did not progress very far through the implementation phases may have experienced greater barriers in negotiating equal partnerships or more difficulty in establishing clarity and control. Successfully problem solving and effecting change appears to reduce the perception of workload burdens as a barrier to organizational change.

The increase in role clarity in agencies with implementation completion also indicates decision-making authority that was transparent and clearly delineated, which contributes to reduced role conflict. Role conflict can come from numerous rules and people directing staff, who are then held responsible for outcomes beyond their control. The Design Team intervention intentionally includes members representing all hierarchal staff levels and units of service so that goals and objectives are coherent, decision-making is transparent, and planning considers all possible impacts of the implementation. Thus, the ability of the agency to fully implement a change initiative by using data-driven decisions that are performance-oriented and responsive to staff and clients furthers organizational capacity that improves the workplace climate.

Organization support is an essential factor for successful implementation. Staff perceptions of the organization caring about their well-being, opinions, and general satisfaction were greater for those working in agencies that achieved full implementations. These staff also reported significantly greater sense of organizational justice, which suggests that decisions about jobs were made fairly, all concerns were heard before decision were made, accurate and complete information was collected before decisions are made, and staff were able to obtain additional information when decisions were unclear. A possible factor operating here is the juxtaposition of the leadership and organization implementation drivers that have been found to be essential for the agencies reaching full implementation (Bertram et al., 2015). Within the NIRN framework, leadership and organization implementation drivers establish the infrastructure elements required for effective implementation. An environment for supporting change occurs when leadership actively facilitates system level interventions, and this active facilitation goes on throughout the change process. The agencies in this study that did not reach full implementation may have experienced difficulty in finding consensus among widely diverse perspectives, or agency leaders may not have fully understood or engaged in ameliorating presenting challenges.

This study also provides insight into the process of organizational change for agencies that did not achieve full implementation. At the end of 18 months, employees at these agencies reported a significant increase in organizational conflict and a significant decline in organizational justice, supervisor work facilitation and supervisor goal emphasis. Goal facilitation involves supervisors emphasizing high performance standards and setting measurable goals. Staff in these agencies may have experienced greater confusion about the change initiative and lack of consensus regarding important decisions and performance expectations. Supporting this assumption, supervisors in agencies that did not reach full implementation were perceived as providing less assistance with job-related problem solving. These agencies may have relied on a supervisor-focused approach to facilitate the change process without first setting in place organizational infrastructures that support change efforts.

5. Conclusion

This research adds to the literature on effective interventions to improve organizational climate in child welfare agencies. Although private, not-for-profit agencies often operate in an environment of scare resources, study findings indicate that Design Teams are worth the investment of additional staff time and outside consultation. Agencies can and should work towards positive organizational changes that matter to the individual worker's experience of being employed by that agency and working in a psychologically stressful service area.

The study also links the ability of an organization to fully implement a change initiative to their capacity to improve the workplace climate for employees. In addition, statistically significant improvements in the organizational climates of child welfare agencies suggests the

benefit of future research to test the effectiveness of design team interventions in other service areas.

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