
The Evidence for Using Evidence

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Final Word First

- The rise of evidence use is inevitable
- How will you meet the challenge?
- Public / private / philanthropic / agency / academic partnerships in the production and use of evidence
- With gratitude

Paraphrasing William Rainey Harper

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Whenever I feel like using research evidence . . .

I lie down until it goes away

Four Goals Today

- Describe the Project on Research Evidence Use in Child Welfare
- Ask and answer the question - does the use of research evidence affect outcomes
- Link the use of research evidence to the science of improvement
- Propose a strategy for increasing the use of research evidence *and* improve outcomes because you did

Project on Research Evidence Use by Child Welfare Agencies

- ▶ Funded by W. T. Grant Foundation
- ▶ Collaborators
 - ▶ Larry Palinkas, USC
 - ▶ Laura Pinsonault, Alliance for Children and Families
 - ▶ Implementation Methods Research Group (Gibbons, Brown, Chamberlain, Aarons, Palinkas, Landsverk, and Hurlburt)
- ▶ W.T. Grant research program predicated on the idea that funded research has limited (marginal) impact on services delivered
 - ▶ A critique that is widely relevant: health care delivery, education, mental health, and child welfare

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- How would you change outcomes?
- What has to happen?
- Does evidence fit in your model of change? If so, how? And, what exactly is evidence?
- What do you think influences the use of evidence?
- Who thinks it's complicated?

Project on Research Evidence Use

- ▶ Our study has these components relative to research evidence use (REU)
 - ▶ Understand the variation in REU at the worker level
 - ▶ Understand the variation in REU at the agency level
 - ▶ Understand whether agency context affects worker level REU
 - ▶ Understand how the eco-political context affects REU
 - ▶ Understand whether REU is linked to outcomes at the child level

What is Research Evidence Use (REU)?

- Types of research evidence
- How is research evidence used?
- Research evidence use as process
- Tacit but untested assumption:
 - Of all the investments a child welfare agency can make, investment in REU is the surest way to improve outcomes

What is research evidence?

- Diverse and more than evidence-based interventions
- Systematically gathered
- Different than data
- Evidence is possessed of narrative; data lacks narrative; changing data to evidence brings meaning

Research Evidence Defined

- ▶ Research evidence is defined as findings derived from **systematically applied research methods and analyses**. Research evidence can be quantitative or qualitative. **Anecdotal information, word of mouth, professional opinions, and other types of informally gathered knowledge would NOT be considered research evidence.**
- ▶ **Research evidence** can be **generated** by child welfare agencies themselves, university researchers, research organizations, think tanks, government agencies, consultants, foundations, and others.
- ▶ Common types or sources of research evidence include:
 - ▶ Administrative data
 - ▶ Process or quality data
 - ▶ Program evaluations
 - ▶ Case record reviews
 - ▶ Interviews or focus groups
 - ▶ Findings published in scientific journals
 - ▶ Findings based on cost benefit or other fiscal analyses

When you use research evidence what do you use it for?

- ▶ Carol Weiss' taxonomy is a nuanced conceptualization (1979)
 - ▶ Knowledge-driven: Knowledge finds application
 - ▶ Problem solving: Use knowledge to solve a problem
 - ▶ Interactive: actors engaged in policy seek out knowledge
 - ▶ Political: Decision is made; research is used to substantiate
 - ▶ Tactical: Research is being done and the decisions have to wait
 - ▶ Enlightenment: Knowledge improves discourse
- ▶ More economical taxonomy
 - ▶ Instrumental, imposed, conceptual

Research evidence use - what do we mean?

- Acquire / Generate
 - Getting your hands on evidence
 - Evidence is role dependent as is the means by which it is acquired
- Process
 - Interpret / give meaning to the evidence
- Apply
 - Use evidence in a decision-making context

Study Highlights - I

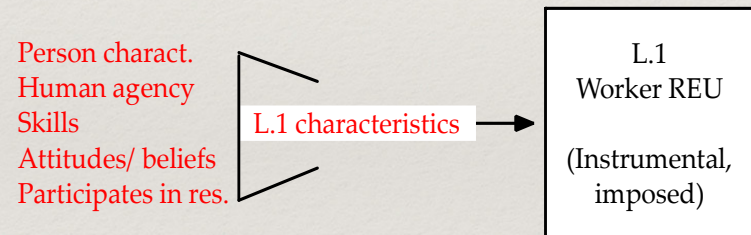
- Level 1: Person as caseworker, supervisor, middle manager, executive
- Level 2: Agency as a private (NGO) entity operating foster boarding homes, group homes, and / or residential care facilities

Conceptual Framework for REU

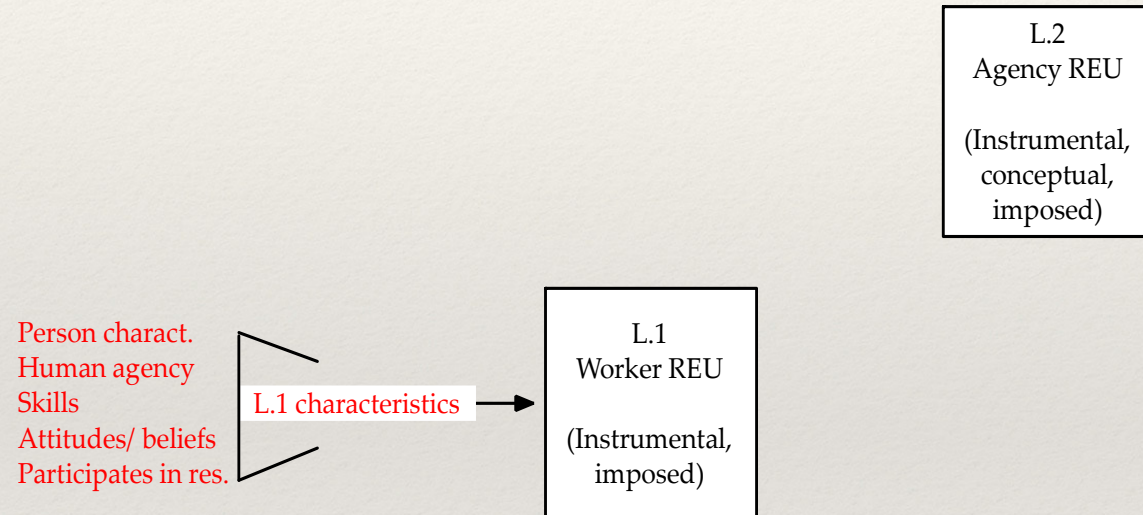
Conceptual Framework for REU

L.1
Worker REU
(Instrumental,
imposed)

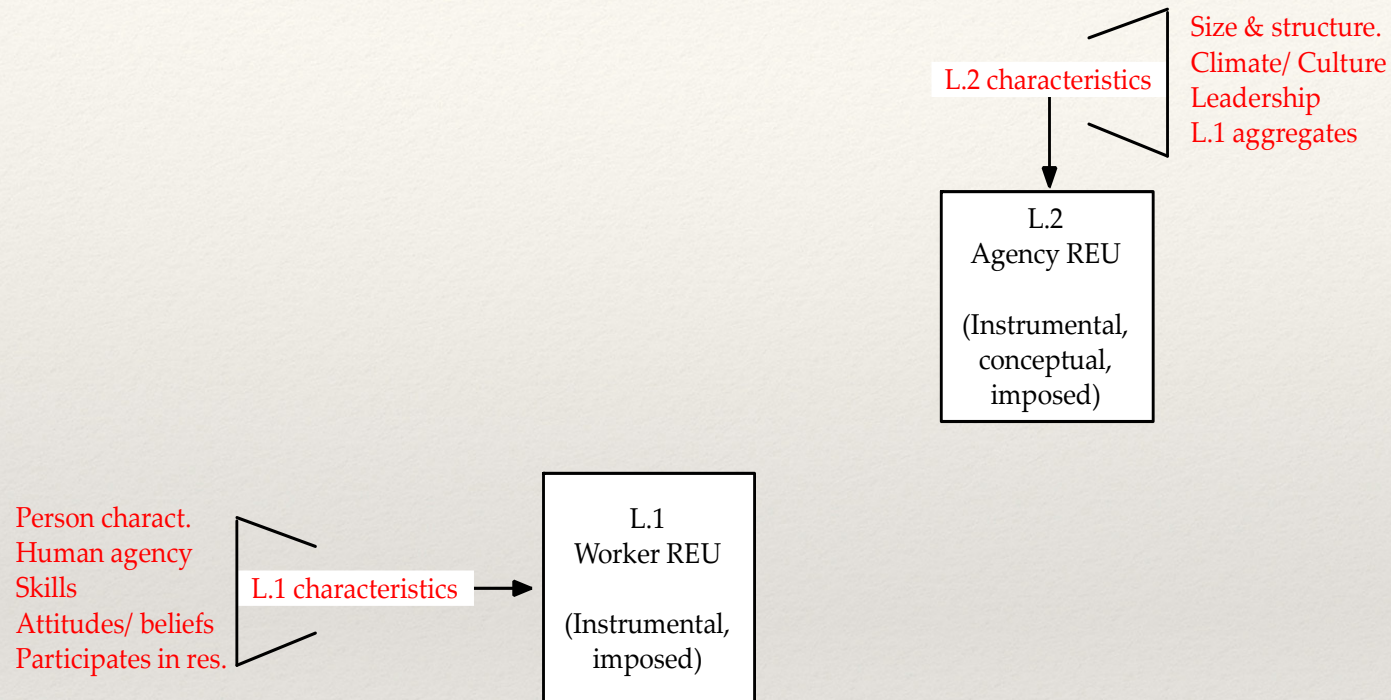
Conceptual Framework for REU



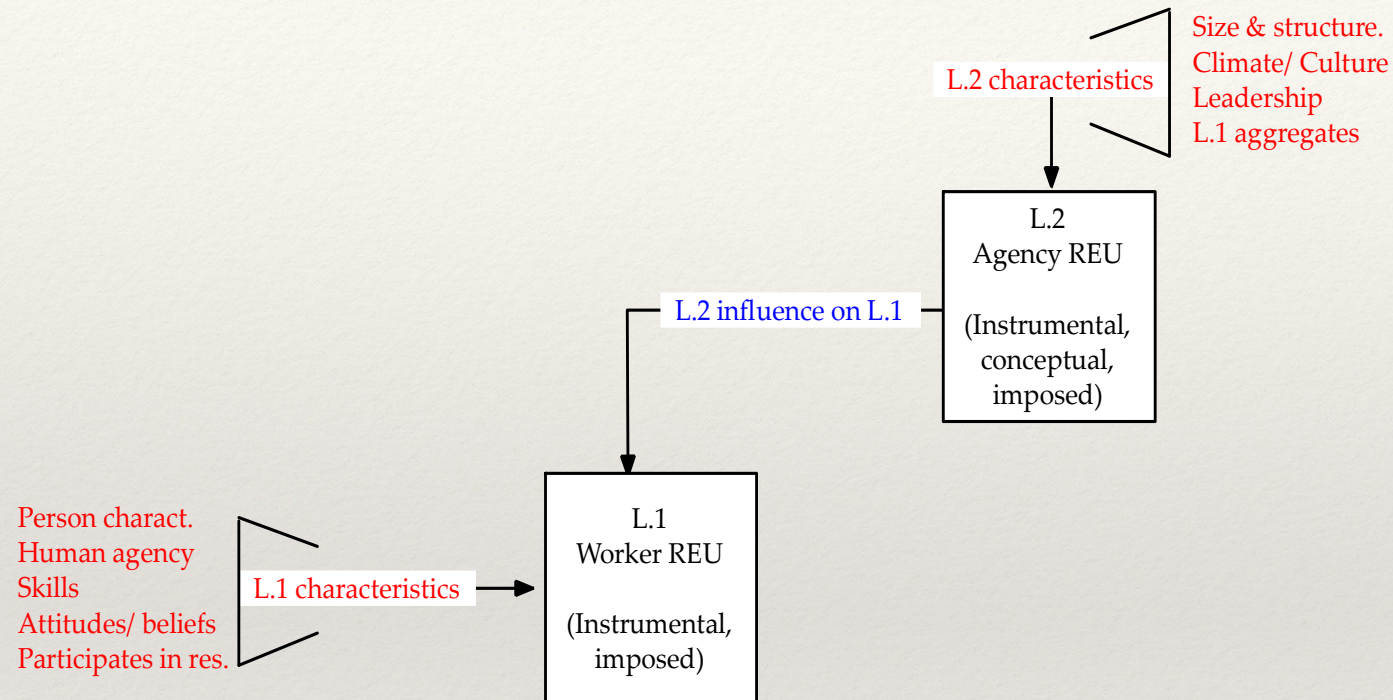
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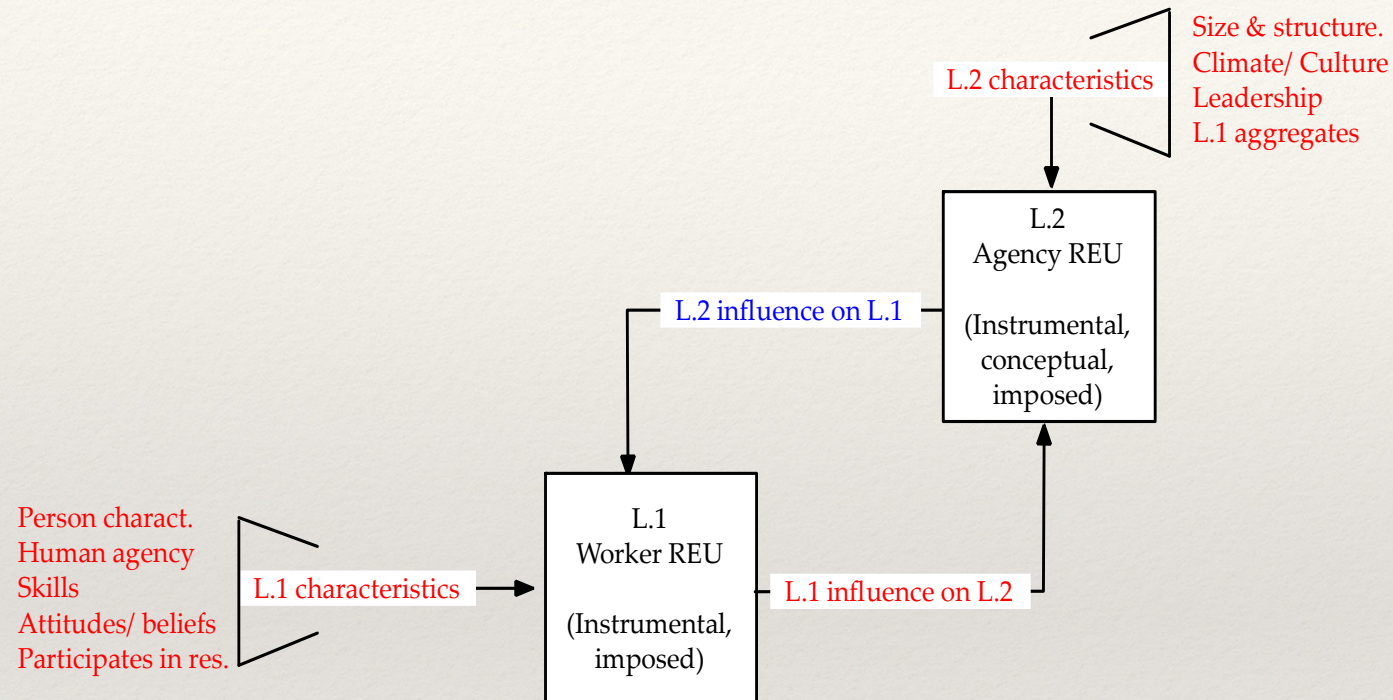
Conceptual Framework for REU



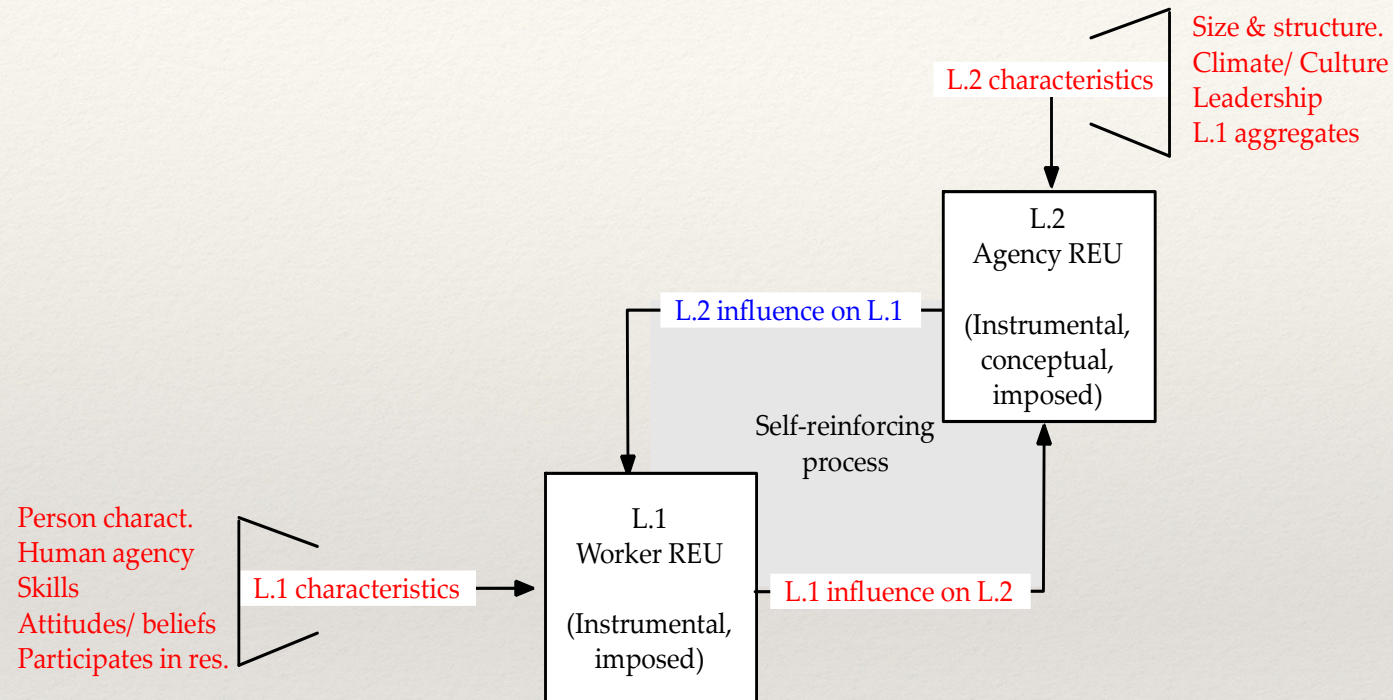
Conceptual Framework for REU



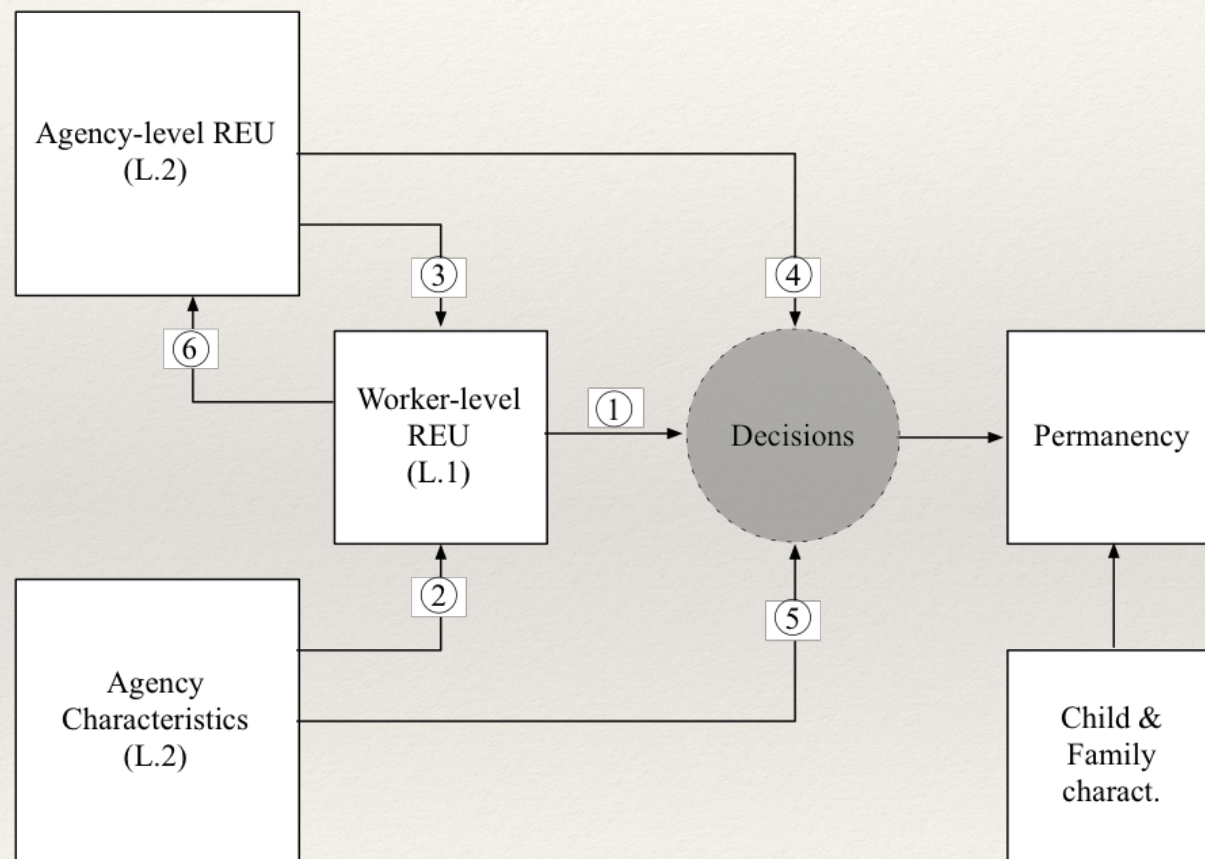
Conceptual Framework for REU



Conceptual Framework for REU



Evidence Use and Outcomes



Study Highlights - II

- A sample of NGOs and county public child welfare agencies
- Self-administered web-survey
- Questions about
 - Person
 - Agency
 - People in those organizations

Questions We Asked of People

- Are there times when you need to use evidence?
 - Do you use academic journals?
 - Search on the web?
 - Contact experts
- Human agency
 - I make decisions; I have the chance to test ideas
- Agency climate
 - Leadership encourages REU
 - Agency would send me to a conference
 - I have access to journals
- Worker characteristics
 - Years on the job, education, licensure

Questions We asked of People

- ▶ Person level perception of their agency
 - ▶ Meet with stakeholders to discuss research evidence
 - ▶ Conducts case record reviews
 - ▶ Monitors fidelity
 - ▶ Conducts research itself
 - ▶ Disseminates findings it self generates

Questions We Asked About Organizations

- What type of agency is your organization?
 - Size and structure
 - Service population
 - Accreditation
 - Own electronic record system (clinical)
 - Turnover
 - QA department
 - Budget
 - Professional development budget
- Is your organization implementing an EBI
 - Clinical
 - Administrative
 - Fiscal

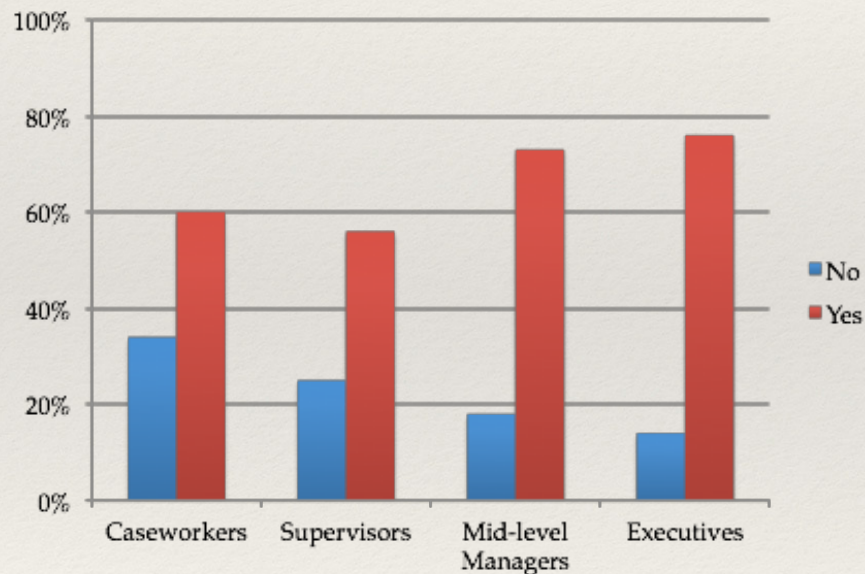
Questions We Asked About Context

(from the people who lead local, public agencies)

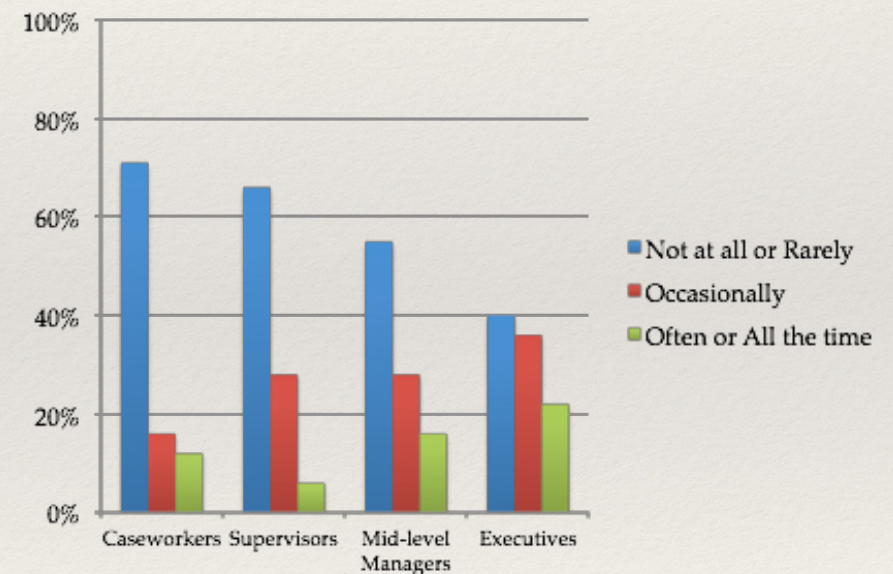
- About your agency
 - Does your public agency use research evidence (in its different forms)?
 - Does your agency hold meetings with stakeholders to discuss evidence?
 - Does your agency disseminate research evidence?
- About you
 - If and how do you generate/ acquire research evidence?
 - If and how do you use evidence to make a decision?
 - To make policy choices
 - To choose program models
 - To choose service providers
 - Do you make decisions? Can you test out ideas?
 - Background
 - Age, experience, education
- Creating context
 - Any performance based contracting
 - Asking agencies to implement EBIs

Generate Research Evidence

- Are there times when you need information about outcomes?

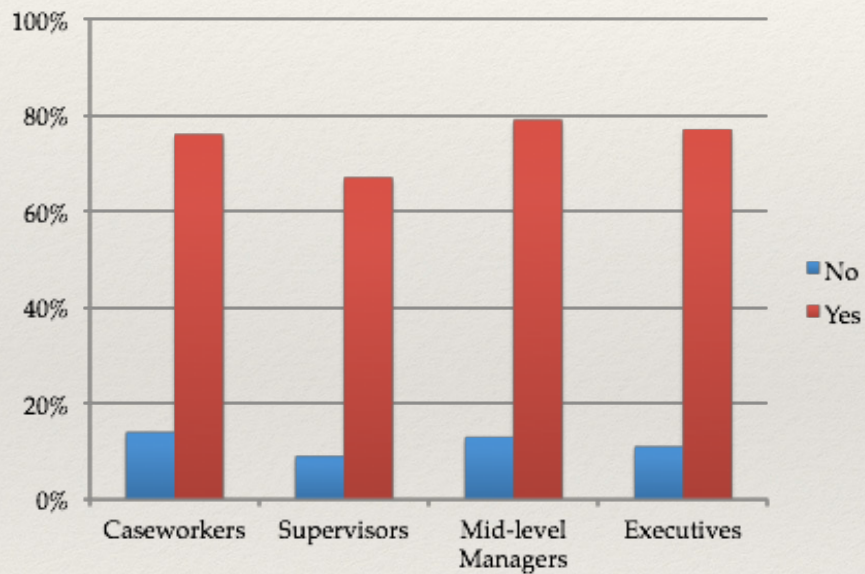


- When I need information, I conduct statistical analysis

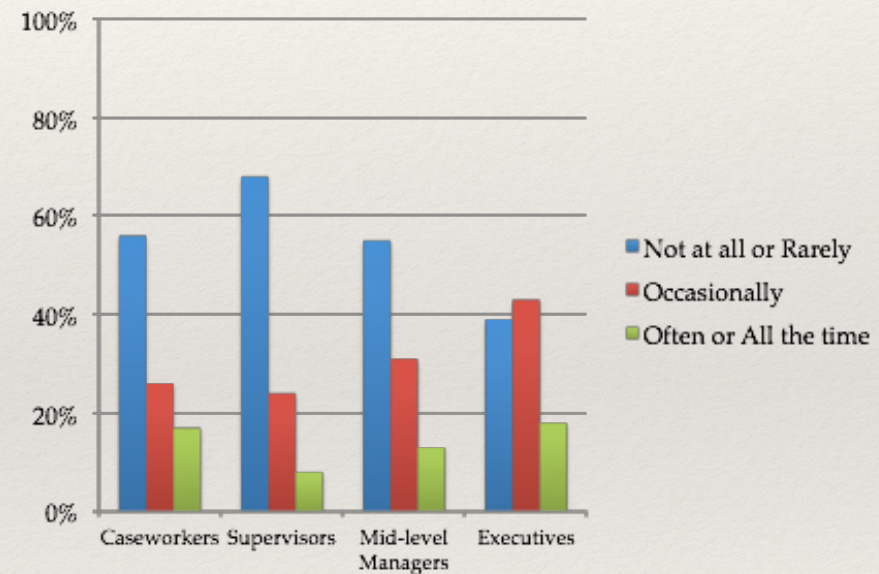


Acquire Research Evidence

- Are there times when you need to identify a policy or practice that could improve outcomes for children?

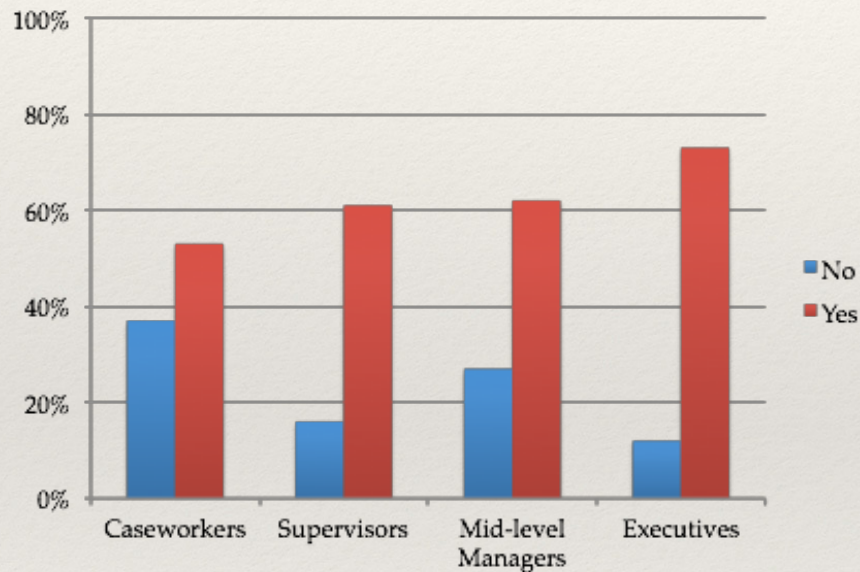


- When I need that information, I search academic journals



Process Research Evidence

- Are there times when you need to identify a policy or practice has the potential to improve outcomes for children?

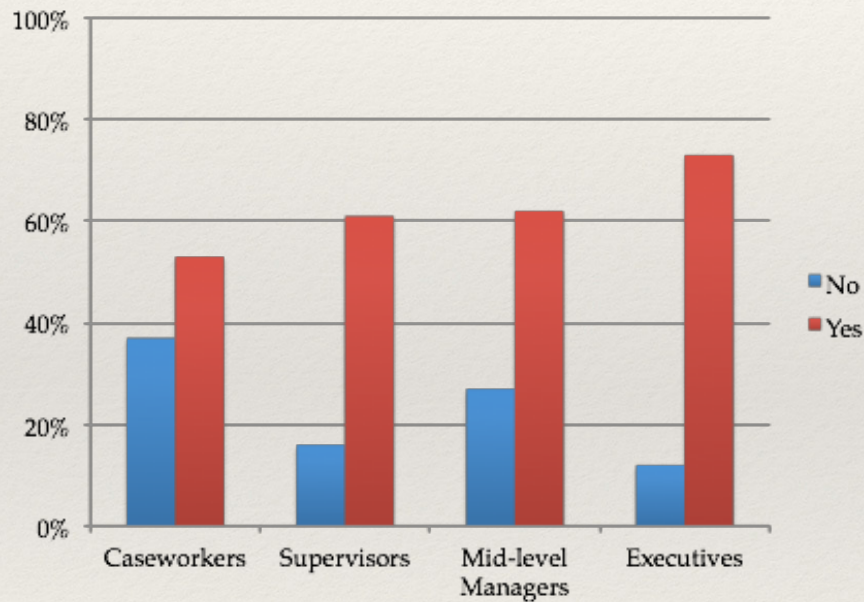


- When I need that information, I compare my clients with needs of clients in research studies

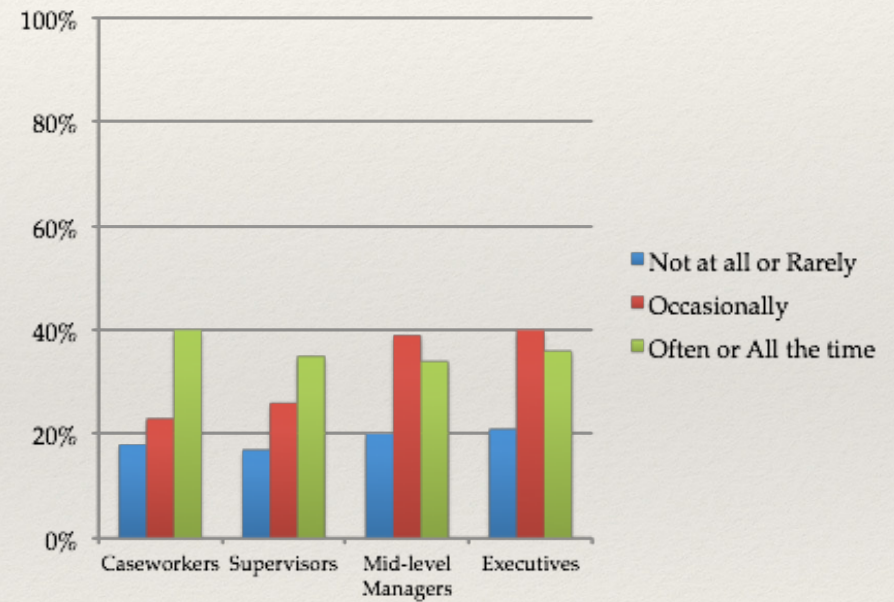


Apply Research Evidence

- Are there times when you need to make a decision about whether to implement a policy or practice?

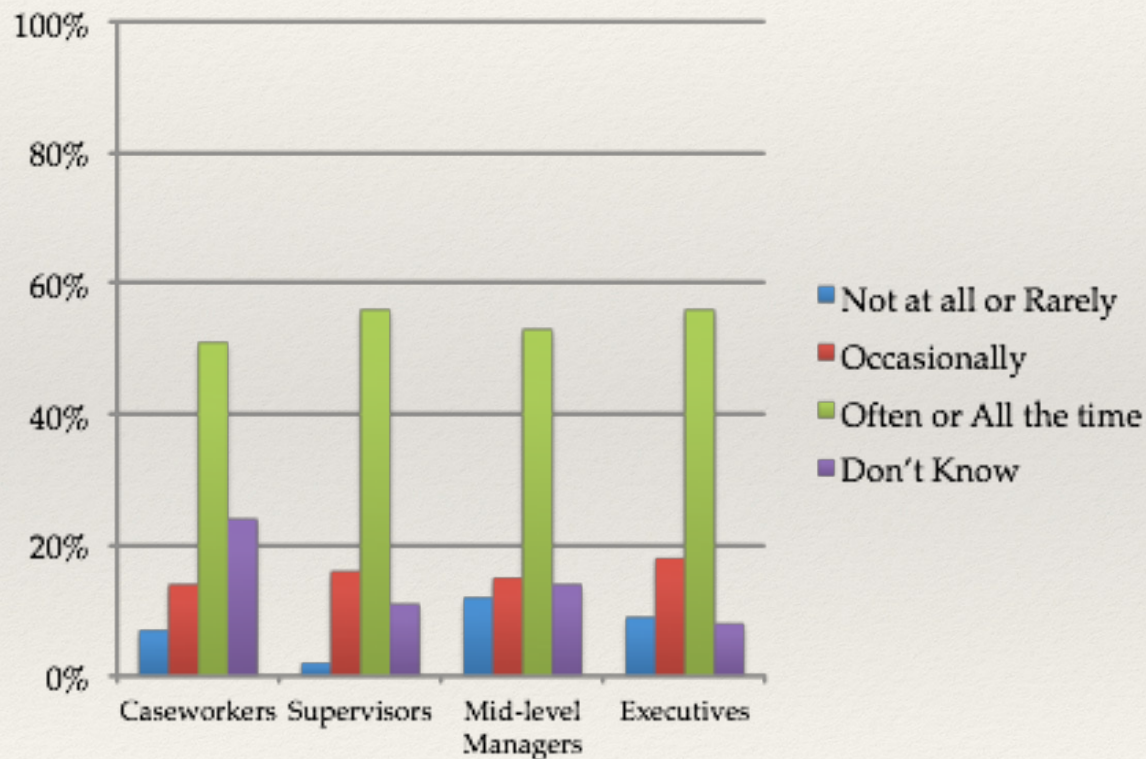


- When I make that decision, I use research evidence to set baseline and target goal for improvement?



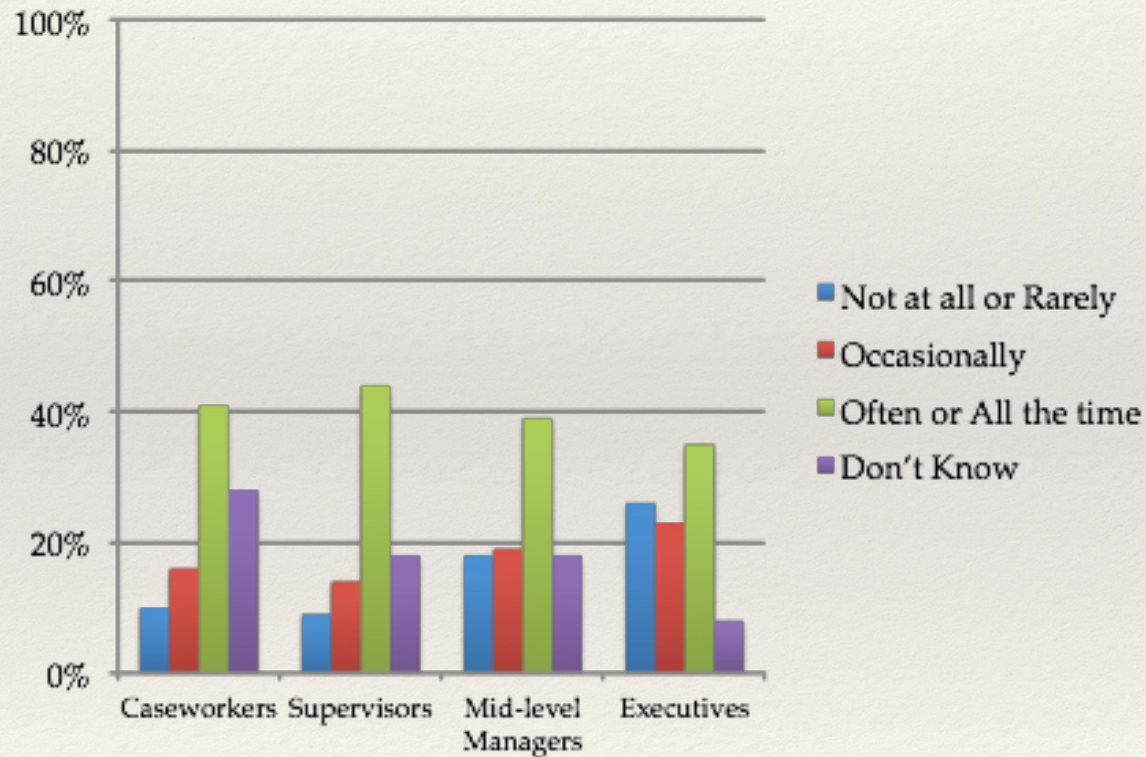
Agency Research Evidence Use

- My agency conducts statistical analysis of outcomes for children served by our program



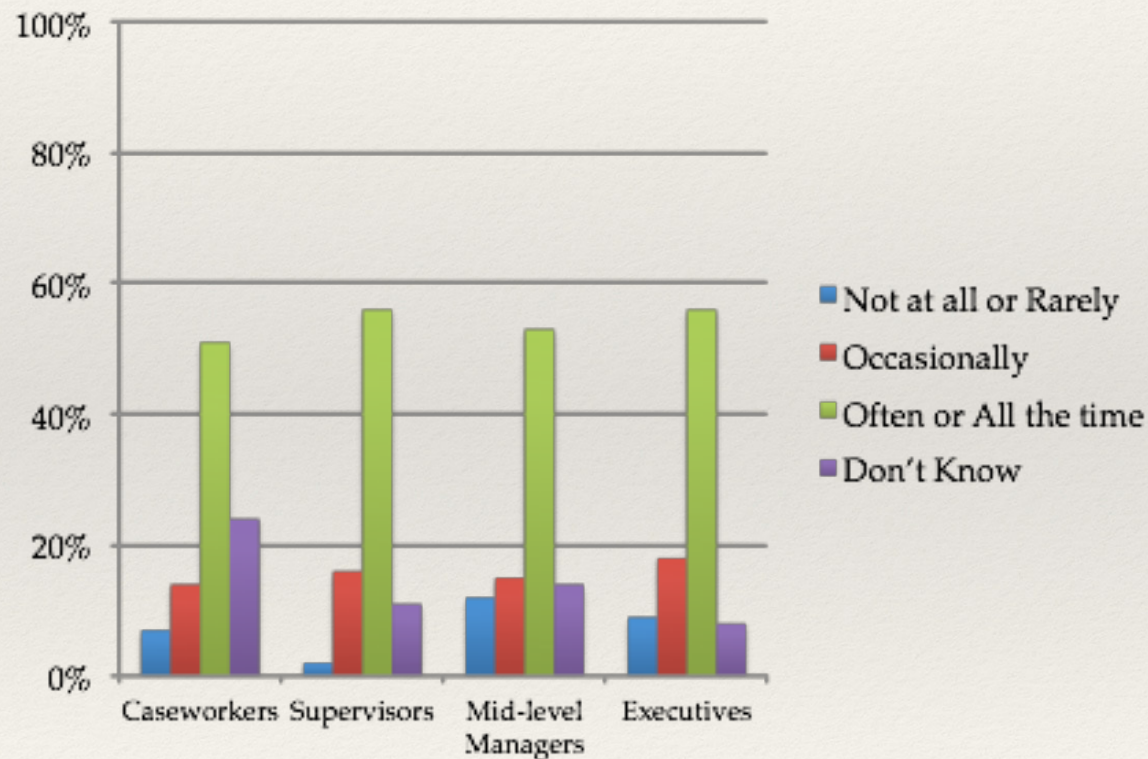
Agency Research Evidence Use

- My agency conducts research on the effectiveness of the agency's foster care program



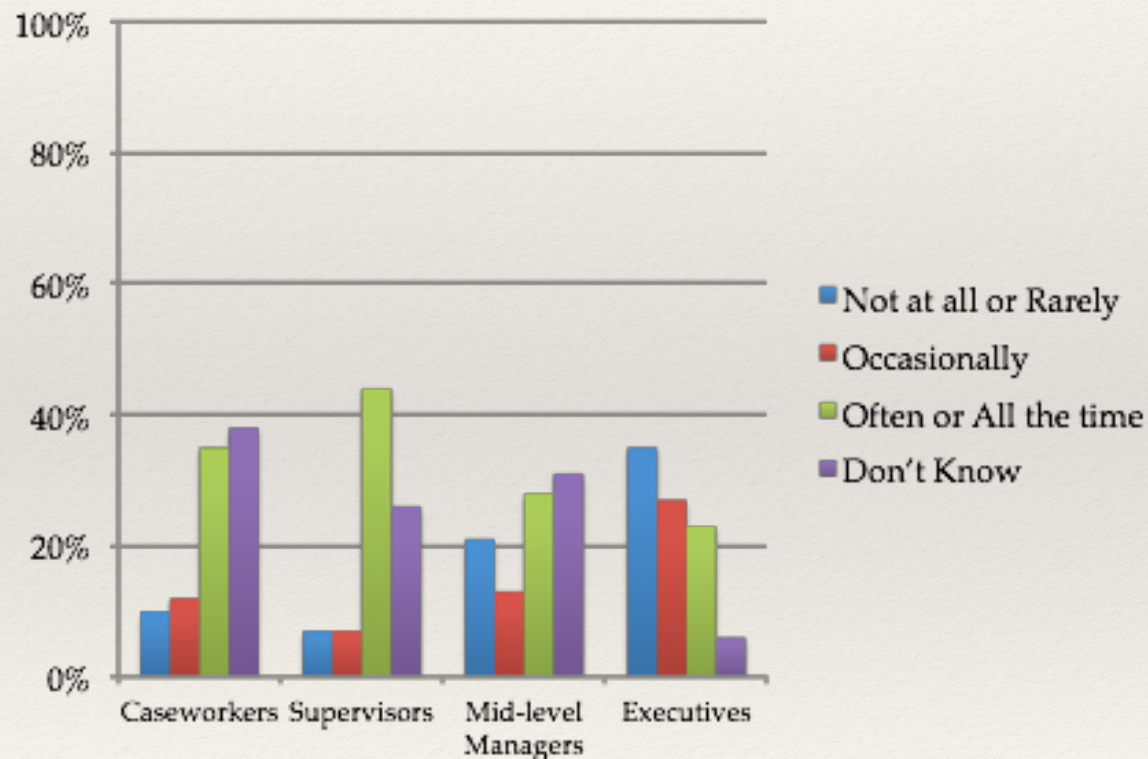
Agency Research Evidence Use

- My agency produces statistical reports on the outcomes for children served by our program



Agency Research Evidence Use

- My agency conducts cost-effectiveness studies of the agency's policies and programs



Person-level Relevance of Research Evidence Use

- Relevance was based on an index created from the answers to these questions:
 - Are there times when you need information on outcomes for the children you serve?
 - Are there times when you need information about what might be causing a certain outcome for children in care?
 - Are there times when you need to identify a policy or practice that could improve outcomes for the children you serve?
 - Are there times when you need to determine whether a given policy or practice has the potential to improve a particular outcome for the children you serve?
 - Are there times when you need to make a decision about whether to implement a specific policy or practice?
 - Are there times when you need information about the effect of a specific policy or practice on the children you serve?
 - Are there times when you need to make a decision about whether or how to continue implementing a certain policy or practice?

Person-level Relevance

- Role matters
 - Mean relevance score for executives is 5.8; for caseworkers it is 4.6
- Experience matters
 - Persons with more than 10 years have a mean relevance score of 5.3; 4.6 for all others
- Human agency matters
 - For people with a sense of efficacy, mean relevance of evidence is 5.5 and 4.3 for all others

Agency-Level Relevance of REU

- REU is positively associated with:
 - Accreditation
 - Access to peer reviewed journals
 - Implementation of an EBI
- REU is not higher among agencies with:
 - Electronic case management system
 - Dedicated QA, CQI, or research department

REU and Outcomes

- ▶ Considered the acquire phase
- ▶ Asked whether worker level characteristics are related to REU
 - ▶ Attitudes - don't privilege experience over research evidence
 - ▶ Behavior - know where to find evidence
 - ▶ Experience - time on the job
- ▶ Outcomes
 - ▶ Agencies whose staff have positive attitudes toward research evidence, the know-how to find research evidence, and have more experience . . .
 - ▶ Achieve better outcomes (permanency in this case)
 - ▶ Provided they use research evidence

Summary

- ▶ Child welfare not much different than other professions
- ▶ Significant sums are spent developing research evidence of all types
- ▶ Research evidence has minimal penetration
 - ▶ People with the most client contact appear to rely on evidence the least
- ▶ Research evidence - aka evidence-based interventions - is defined too narrowly
- ▶ Significant training opportunity and an even bigger training challenge

First Steps First

First Steps First

Evidence use will improve outcomes

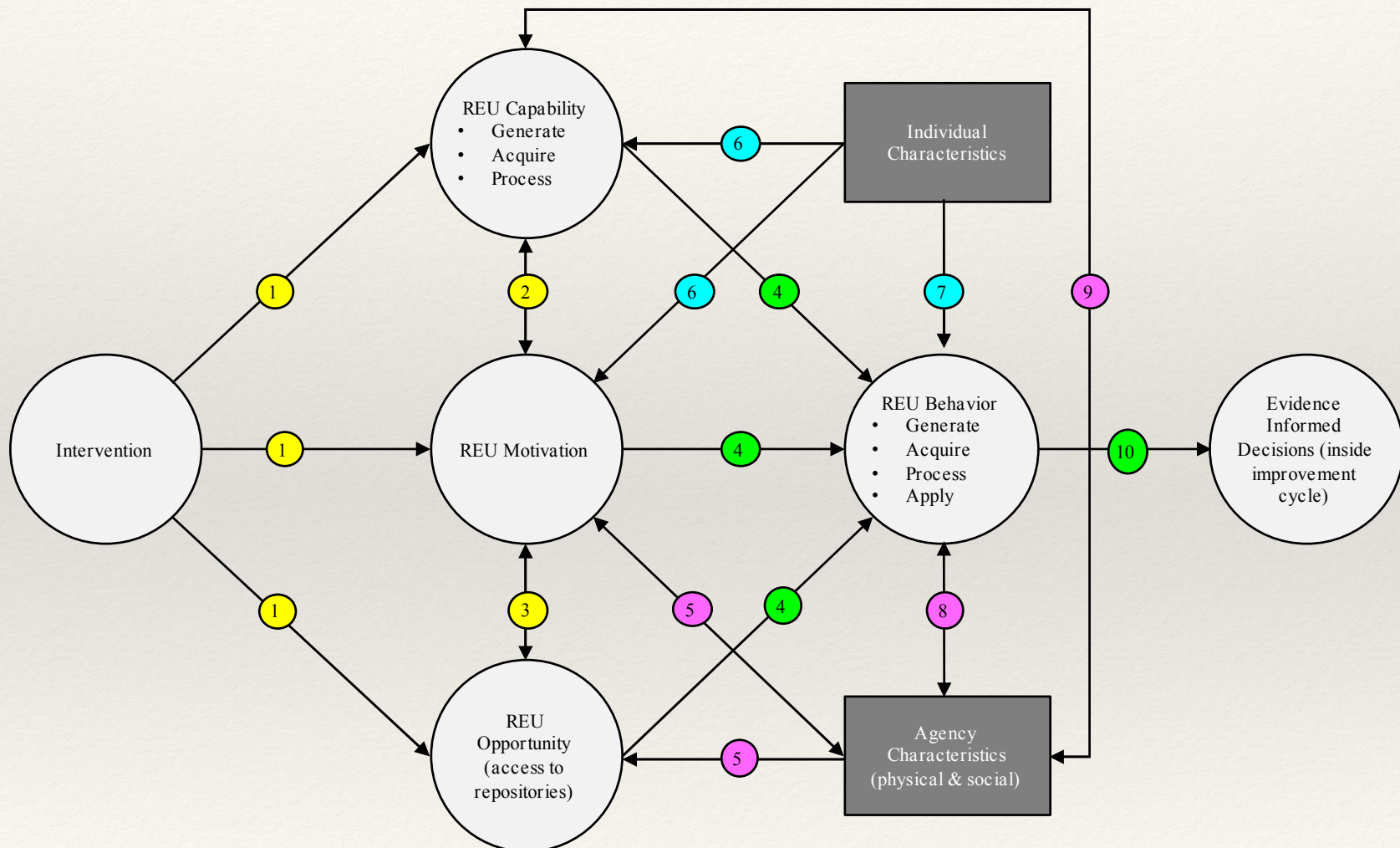
First Steps First

Evidence use will improve outcomes

We may need to unpack this a little bit

Building the Evidence the Evidence Matters Theory of Change

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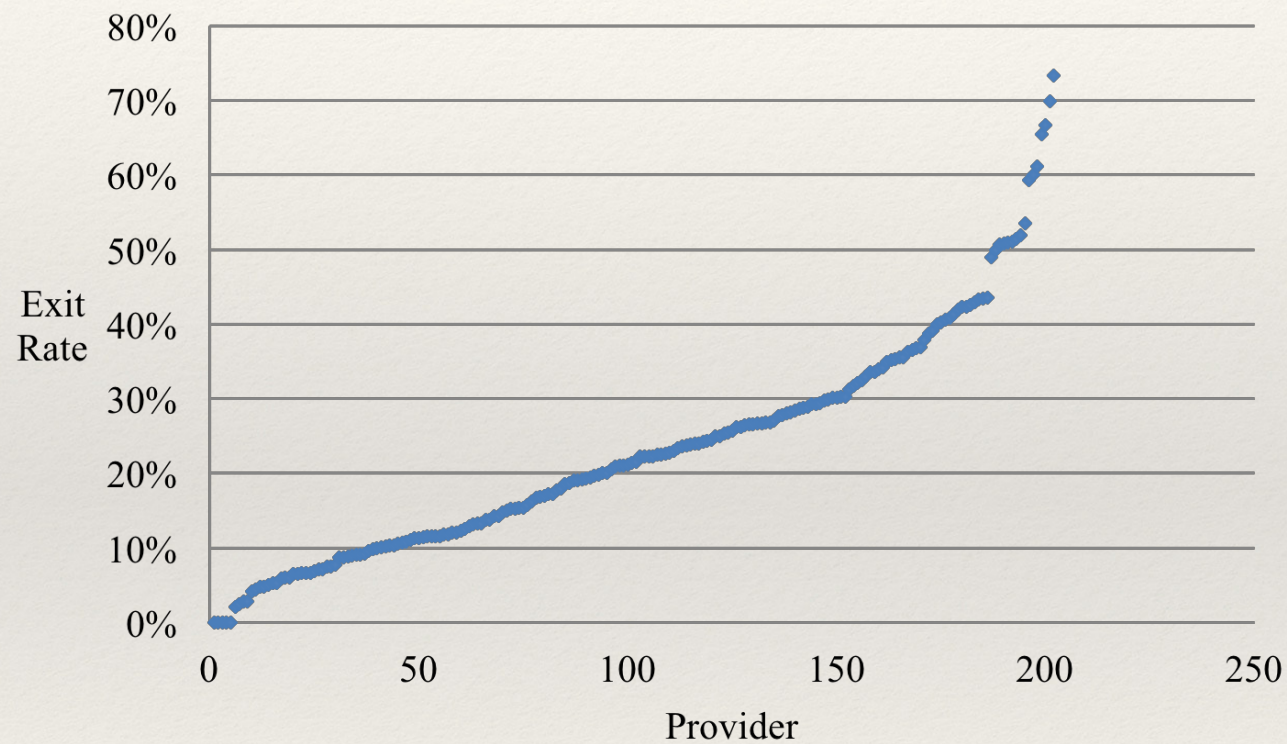


Evidence and the Science of Improvement

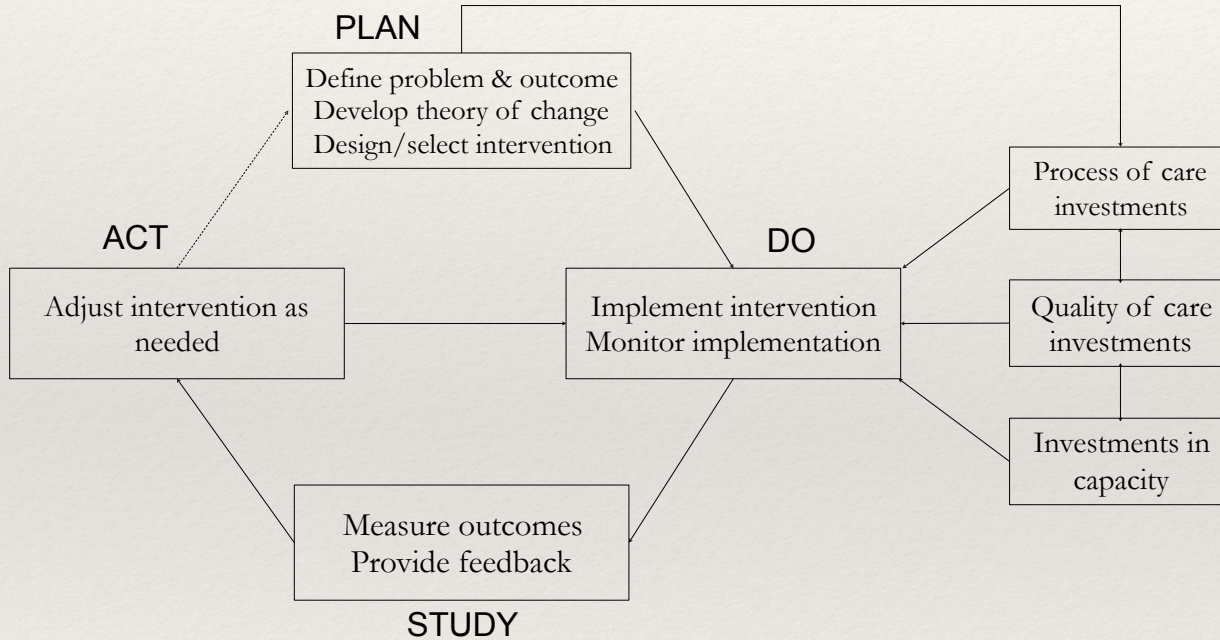
- The Science of Improvement - you know it as CQI
- CQI is a process that involves the deliberate use of evidence
 - Plan, do, study, act
 - Plan - what is the problem? What is the evidence that establishes you have a problem to solve
 - Do - what is the evidence the solution you're going to use will solve the problem
 - Study - what is the evidence the solution you selected is moving the needle
 - **Requires** a theory of change
 - Improvement starts with a **question**
 - **Variation** is the central concern

Variation in Permanency by Agency

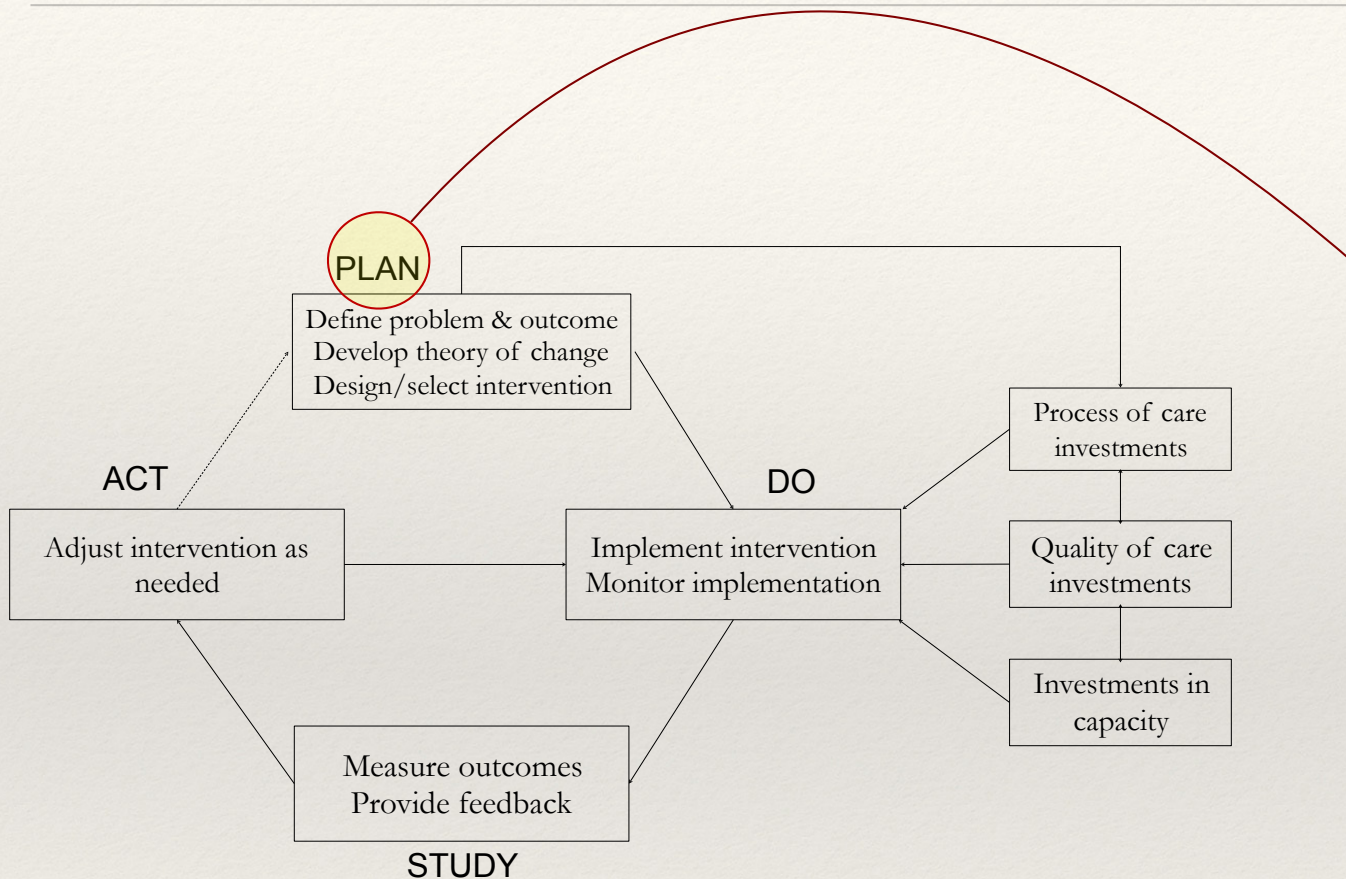
(could be a county or a state)



The process of improvement



The process of improvement



I observe [**some outcome that I want to improve**].

I think it's because [**of this reason**].

So I plan to [**implement this intervention**],

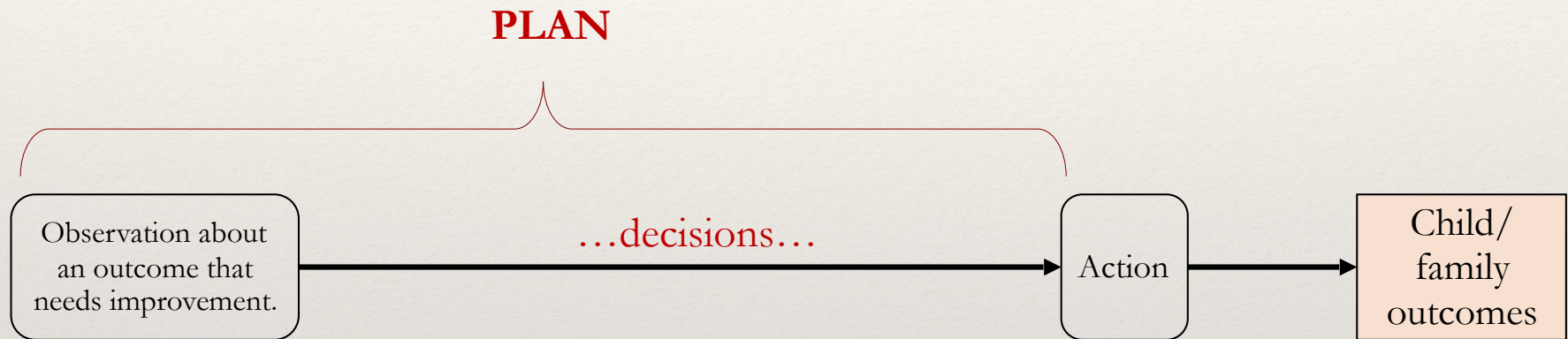
which I think will result in [**an improved outcome**].

The process of improvement

The process of improvement

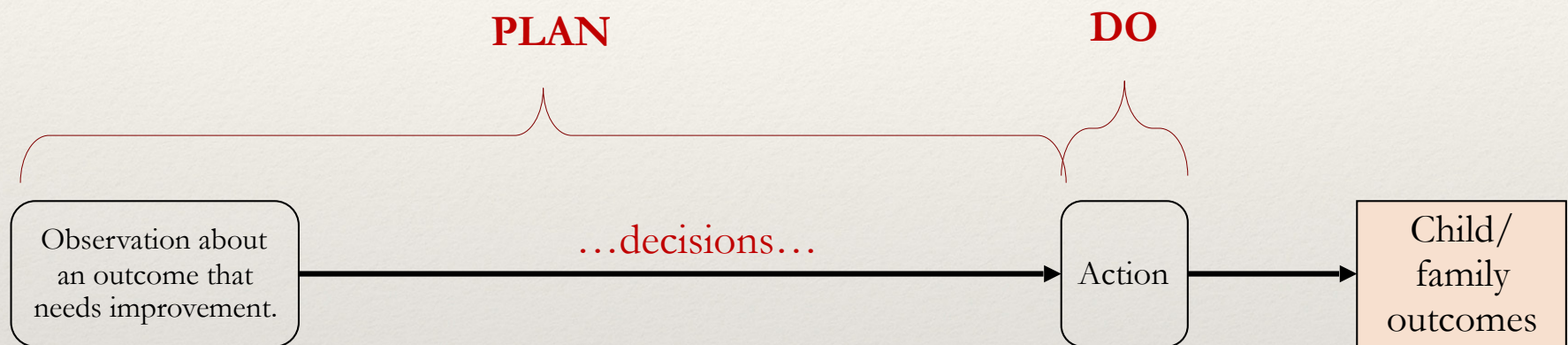


The process of improvement



Plan: Observing an outcome and determining what to do

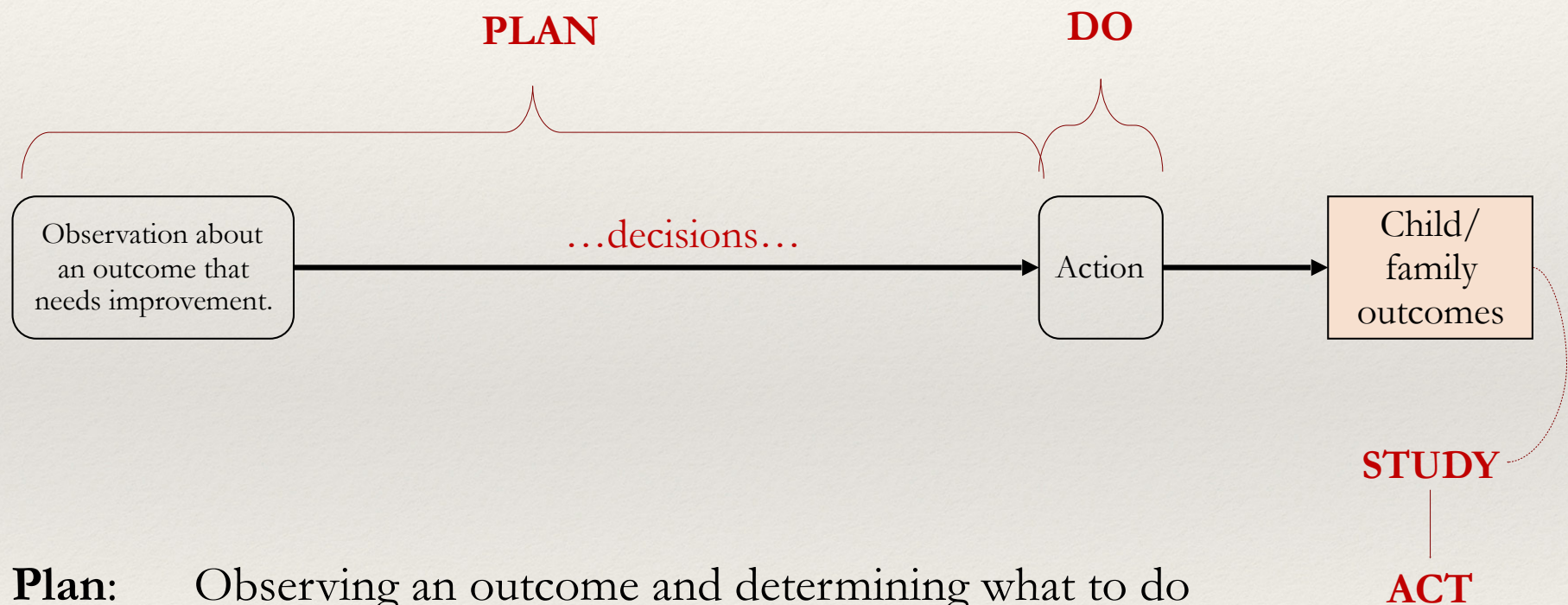
The process of improvement



Plan: Observing an outcome and determining what to do

Do: Implementing the improvement plan

The process of improvement



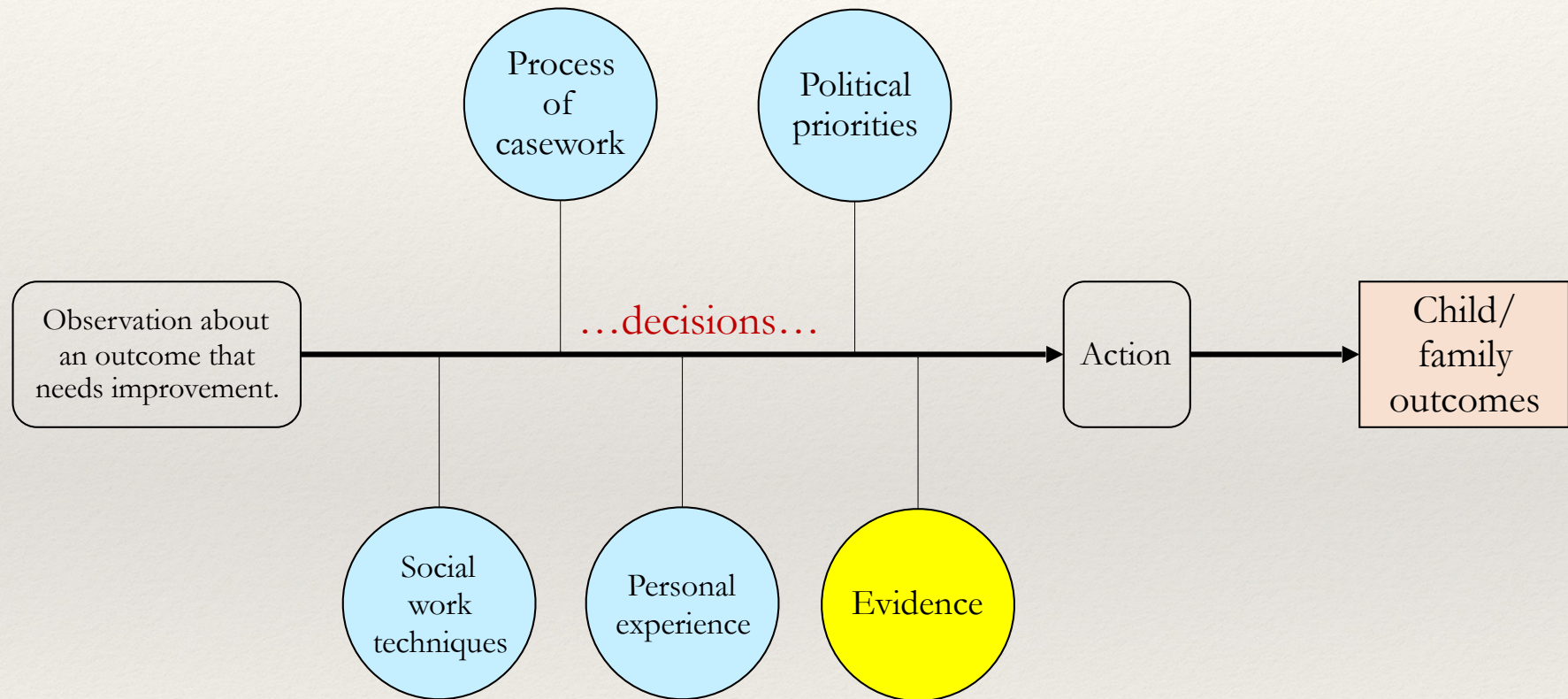
- Plan:** Observing an outcome and determining what to do
- Do:** Implementing the improvement plan
- Study:** Measure the effect on the outcome of interest
- Act:** Decide what next step to take in light of those effects

Incorporating evidence into working knowledge & decision-making

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Incorporating evidence into working knowledge & decision-making



Next Question and an Invitation

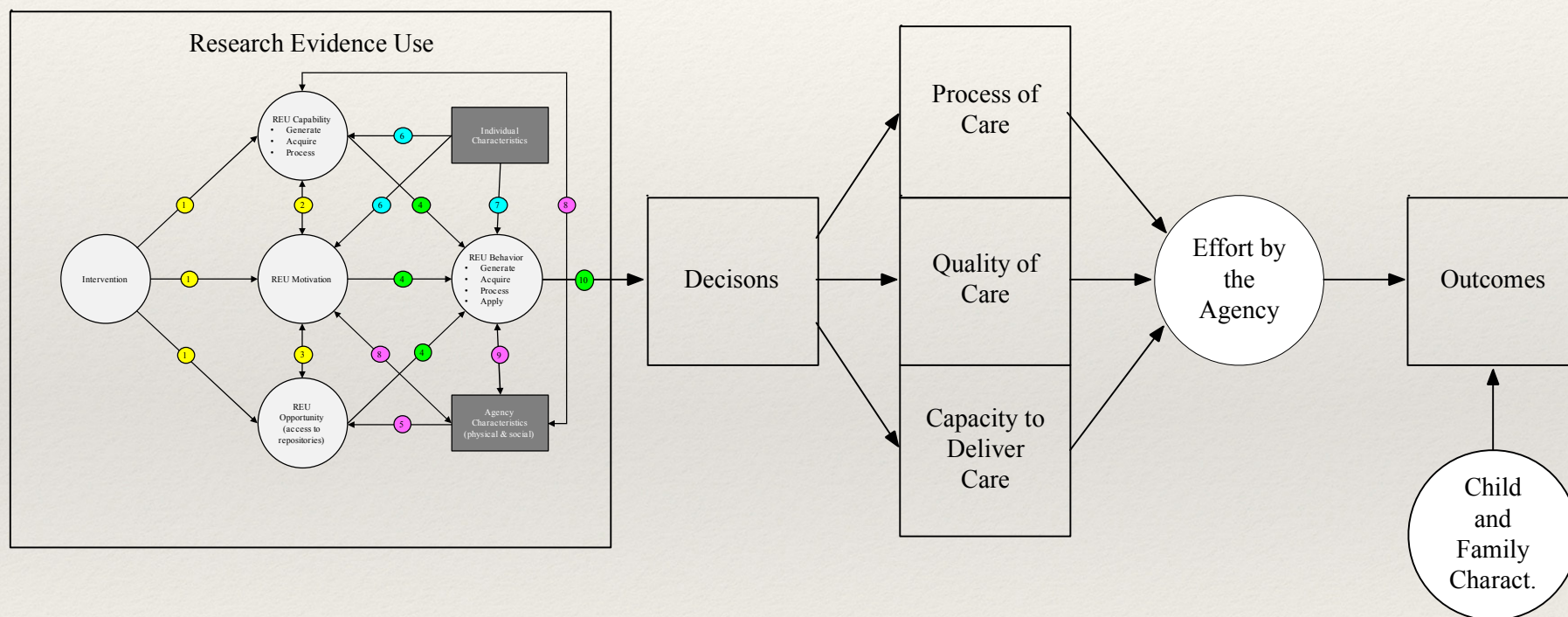
- Is it possible to deliberately change the use of research evidence *and* improve outcomes?
- Do want to help us build the evidence that evidence matters?

Building Research Evidence Skills

- Best practices
 - Opportunity
 - Access to evidence - repositories, performance data
 - Motivation
 - Incentive structures, supportive agency contexts
- Capability
 - Acquire/generate
 - Process - make meaning
 - Apply - using evidence to influence a decision

Building the Evidence that Evidence Matters

Theory of Change



Final Word - Again

- The rise of evidence use is inevitable
- How will you meet the challenge?
- Public / private / philanthropic / agency / academic partnerships in the production and use of evidence