

Self-efficacy: A Key Concept for Individual Evidence-informed Practice

We know that there are many important factors in the use of evidence-informed practice. Identifying barriers and facilitators to using evidence are definitely key factors to the sustained use of evidence-informed practice. Another important factor is self-efficacy. Much of the literature suggests that social workers are hesitant about the use of research and feel they do not have the knowledge or skills to be evidence-informed. This section will illustrate the importance of self-efficacy and how to build self-efficacy with the aim of utilizing evidence in practice. This information can be found in the PART guidebook, *Organizational Change in Child Welfare*.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the beliefs a person has in their ability to organize and carry out specific actions.

People tend to be more strongly influenced by their personal belief in their capability to perform tasks than objective facts. An individual's self-efficacy is related to both motivation and actual behaviour. Individual perceptions of self-efficacy in a work unit are not simply added together, instead those acting together with shared beliefs have 'collective efficacy.' Collective efficacy has been shown to be related to higher aspirations and motivation, persistence in the face of challenges, resilience to stressors, and performance accomplishments. In the unpredictable and challenging context of child welfare practice, strengthening the self-efficacy beliefs of professional staff is an important issue. Self-efficacy theory can provide the foundation in the context of child welfare supervision. Supporting staff with low self-efficacy is important for the practitioners, the organization as a whole, and the children and families they support. The four main types of experiences found to improve and develop self-efficacy are:

Enactive mastery: Successfully practicing a skill or behaviour.

For example, leaders should assign tasks that require some struggle, yet are achievable. Tasks should be progressively more challenging to promote motivation and a sense of accomplishment.

Vicarious experience: Observing valued role models.

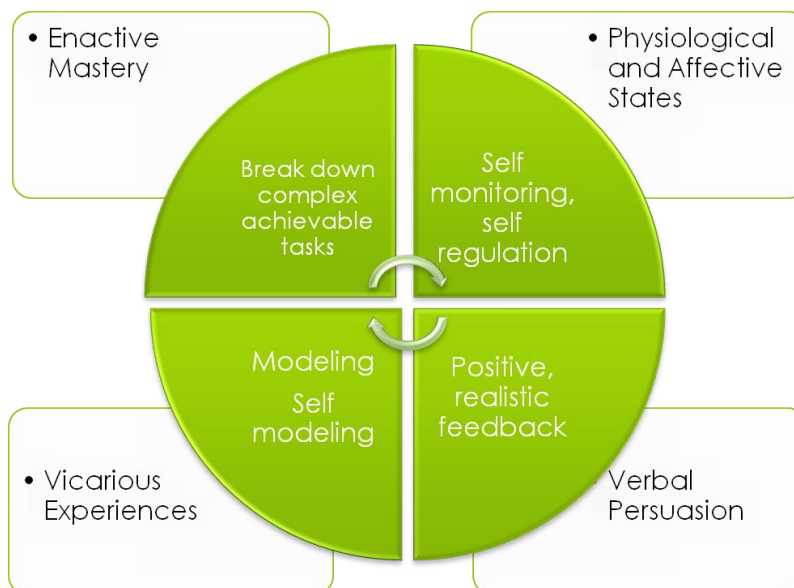
For example, leaders must create opportunities for people to observe experienced and motivated individuals in similar roles. The role model must be someone slightly more experienced, rather than an 'expert' in the field or someone with decades of experience.

Physiological and objective states: Learning to keep emotions and physiological arousal at a self-supporting level.

For example, during formal and informal discussions leaders must promote critical thinking for practitioners. They should explore how working with children and families within the context of child welfare influences their physical state, and how that may potentially affect decision-making processes.

Verbal persuasion: Receiving encouragement and support from valued others.

For example, setting high expectations of individuals and expressing the belief that they have the necessary skills provides a sense of motivation, pride, and desire to successfully achieve goals.



Developing Self-efficacy

Informal leadership is vital to the success of contemporary organizations, which must operate in environments that are more complex and ambiguous than ever before. Research suggests that groups and organizations operate more effectively when **leadership is shared across people and hierarchical levels**. Leadership therefore, is not reserved for people in hierarchically superior positions, but rather is a shared function that anyone can fulfil, regardless of job title or level.

Research suggests that individuals emerge as informal leaders in groups to the extent that they represent the prototypical member of the group, or are seen as possessing expertise, qualities and/or experience that can help the group successfully complete its

tasks. With this in mind, it makes sense to engage those informal leaders in efforts to support and enhance organizational growth and change. Informal leaders are well placed to:

- Share knowledge, viewpoints, and thoughts existing within the organization that top level management may be unaware of.
- Gain the trust of employees, share with them the vision of the future for the organization, inspire and energize staff, and ultimately generate change.

Informal leaders will be champions of evidence-informed practice. They will support others in their journey to engaging with evidence, listen to worries about the unknown, and model evidence-informed practice for those just getting started. Target informal leaders who are champions of evidence-informed practice and discuss their role as a leader in the organization. These informal leaders should understand how to develop self-efficacy and that not all people are comfortable with research, but that they can help build this confidence.

How can we develop self-efficacy through formal and informal leadership?

Create an Impetus for Change

As a leader, it is important to convey to potential followers and allies that maintaining the status quo is not an option. Leaders are in prime positions to make a persuasive case for change by marshalling facts and demonstrating need. Creating an incentive for change may involve rocking the boat by:

- Sharing current performance results and comparisons;
- Asking difficult questions about the acceptability of current ways of working and levels of professionalism;
- Setting standards that can't be achieved without change.

Role Model Positive Behaviours

Employees have been found to attend vigilantly to leaders' behaviour, even to the rather mundane aspects such as what leaders spend time on, put on their calendar, ask and fail to ask, follow up on, and celebrate. These behaviours provide employees with evidence about what counts and what behaviours are likely to be rewarded or punished, and convey much more to employees about priorities than do printed vision statements and formal policies. It is critical then that leaders pay heed to these seemingly insignificant behaviours and actions in order to ensure that they are continually conveying the message of change for which they are striving.

Demonstrate Self Knowledge & Regeneration

From self-knowledge comes the capacity to manage our own behaviour, recognize strengths and challenges in ourselves, and, from a repertoire of models and skills, select the most effective response to a situation. Effective leaders are regenerative in that they model continuous learning, and develop the capacity of others to lead and self-govern. The interdependence of leadership and management highlights the fact that leaders at all levels are involved in a constant balancing act between external and internal demands, action and reflection, control and flexibility.

Listen to Staff Concerns & Anxieties

Leaders are encouraged to create conditions where anxieties and concerns about a change initiative and the work involved can be openly aired. It is vital that leaders are able to demonstrate that they have heard and understood people's views. The ability to show genuine concern is one of the critical behaviours of effective leaders and is most strongly linked to staff motivation and satisfaction. Exhibiting concern may be done by:

- Making time to listen to any objections and worries
- Asking questions to fully understand their position, perspectives, and ideas
- Making changes and compromises that respond to concerns
- Having high expectations of what staff can achieve

Create Learning Organizations

Leaders can support the development of others' ability to perform, and contribute to the development of learning organizations by providing ongoing feedback and opportunities to grow through informal and formal methods. Within teams/departments consider what can be done in order to promote learning for all staff. For example, does your team or department:

- Recognize and allow for different learning styles?
- Allow staff to bring mistakes to your attention and use them as learning opportunities?
- Mentor new staff in needed aspects of their work?
- Bring forward new resources and articles for discussion and learning at meetings?
- Offer a "book club" or "article swap" or otherwise encourage ongoing learning?