

Leveraging Practice Profiles to Strengthen Workforce Development

Great training and curricula on EBPs won't solve it all; there's more to what makes a great employee. Great employees have qualities, mindsets, and skills that set them up for success. Often, we intuitively know these things – as supervisors, **we recognize “it” when we see it, but don't often operationalize “it” in written documents.**

When things go unsaid, it can lead to **unclear expectations, confusion, frustration, and eventually turnover.**

We need to be clear about:

- Exact skills, knowledge, behavior, and attitudes staff need to have (e.g., humility, growth mindset, empathy)
- What exactly it looks like to apply those skills/knowledge/attitudes in practice (e.g., how to leverage empathy to meet clients where they're at)
- What it looks like to have mastered key skills/knowledge/behaviors (or for skills to be in development, or at an unacceptable level)

Practice profiles make the implicit explicit, helping supervisors recognize where their staff are, so it's not just a gut feeling.

SAMPLE PRACTICE PROFILE EXCERPT

EMPATHY in communication and problem-solving		
OPTIMAL	DEVELOPMENTAL	UNACCEPTABLE
Accepts responsibility, tries to meet clients where they're at, seeks to understand why • “We've tried a couple of different strategies to meet with the family, but it's not working for them. What have other people tried to resolve similar barriers? How can I improve to meet their needs?”	May recognize current strategies aren't working but be unsure of next steps. May use a mix of accepting and blaming language • “The family isn't making these appointments, but I just don't know what to do about it.”	Uses blaming language, doesn't accept responsibility • “This family is noncompliant.” • “I've tried all these strategies with this mom, and she just isn't getting it.”

KEY ELEMENTS OF A PRACTICE PROFILE:

- ✓ Creates a common vocabulary: for discussing jobs and skills & expectations
- ✓ Shows 3 levels: *optimal* (top of practice, mastered skill); *developmental* (competency is growing, working on applying skills consistently/independently/in varied contexts); *unacceptable*
- ✓ Specifies: core values that should guide decision-making and action (e.g., trauma-informed), core processes/approaches (e.g., assessment-driven care), and core skills (e.g., problem-solving)
- ✓ Is specific: includes real-life scenarios of what you see in practice
- ✓ Different versions exist for all staff levels: frontline staff, supervisors/coaches, executive leaders

BEST PRACTICES

1. Co-create practice profiles with frontline staff and clients

What do staff think makes a good co-worker or supervisor? How do clients want staff to engage with them to help them improve? Co-creation leads to increased buy-in and support.

2. Use it as a tool to start conversations and create a clear but supportive environment, not just as a tool for compliance and accountability

Have conversations with staff about what it will mean to use a practice profile, what they're nervous about, and what they need to feel truly *supported* (not judged or evaluated). Follow through when staff tell you what they need.

3. Roll it out gradually

Start with a skill of the month (or quarter) and introduce the skill in a safe, group setting. Model that supervisors and leaders are open to feedback as well. Continually ask staff for feedback and what else they need to get to "optimal."

4. Don't let it sit on a desk

Integrate the practice profile into the DNA of your hiring, training, and ongoing coaching processes.

Use practice profile content to:

HIRING

- Create and tailor job descriptions
 - Create behavior or scenario-based interview questions to assess existing skills/attitudes
- Benefits: increases likelihood you hire on the right characteristics and skills, instead of gut feelings*

TRAINING (initial and ongoing)

- Develop and updated tailored training content
 - Create role plays, scenarios, and case studies to learn and practice new skills
- Benefits: sets expectations early on, helps staff build skills in a safe space (role plays), builds confidence/competence, and sets the tone for a learning environment early-on*

COACHING, CLINICAL SUPERVISION

- Create an assessment/self-assessment of staff skills
 - Set individualized goals with each staff member and prioritize which skills to work on
 - Measure growth in skills and give constructive, consistent feedback
- Benefits: promotes shared expectations, consistency, accountability & an overall nurturing space for staff to self-reflect, get feedback, and grow their skills*

References and further reading: check out this [white paper](#) from the National Implementation Research Network

HOW PRACTICE PROFILES WORK TO DRIVE POSITIVE OUTCOMES:

