

# A Qualitative Study of how Practitioner Perceive Success with Drug Policy and Programs: and Applying to Drug Programming and Policy

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## ABSTRACT

This paper draws from the findings of a research study that was conducted during the spring of 2015 with the purpose of discovering the perceived effectiveness of drug treatment and prevention within an administration perspective. The study is primarily focusing on how successful the outcomes of the agencies are at providing services for a target population. The perspective of the experts was overwhelmingly positive, which begs the question: what aided in the success? In order to answer this question, success needs to be defined in this setting and then an explanation of what allowed for the successes needs to be provided. This analysis was collected by administering a total of 5 semi-structured interviews lasting one hour a piece. The findings of the interviews and data collection help to fill previous gaps in interagency cooperation and continue to develop the theoretical framework with regards to this subject. Collectively, this study defines how success can be formulated with the use of interagency cooperation, and I conclude this study with some recommended strategies for continued success.

## INTRODUCTION

How does one describe a program or policy as successful? Sometimes there are numbers that quantify the progress on how effective they are. Then there are times where there are a plethora of success stories from the beneficiaries of said programs and policies. Most commonly, though, is an underlying understanding that the program and policy provides a service to a silent population, one that cannot speak on their own behalf, which proliferates the creation of new programs and policies. If this silent population is benefiting from the programs and policies, how does everyone else know if these programs are truly successful at providing a service? How is the success proven when the population that the service is effecting is unable to speak for themselves? This paper attempts to fill these voids by answering two questions: What is success in policy and program creation and how does one achieve this success when multiple agencies are involved?

Originally the purpose of the quasi-standard interviews was to discover the perception and perspectives of practitioners on how successful drug programming and policies were in La Crosse. The goal was to get an understanding of the environment surrounding the treatment of the drug dependent individuals. While previous research tends to focus on passing policy changes as success, passing policies may not be the only form of success. According to Weible et al. (2012) "the policy process may entail a variety of goals," and "perhaps, goals is [*sic*] to ensure successful policy implementation or raise public awareness of a social issue. In other instances the goal might be to facilitate cooperation among political advisories in hopes to mitigate conflict and reaching a negotiation agreement." This short clip shows that success can be multifaceted and may be completely subjective to what the final goal is. The issue with this focus is the assumption that success will happen. Success is not always a natural occurrence. How do agencies have the opportunity to reach success? In order to achieve success in anything, there needs to be a starting point in which conflict exists and success is the desired outcome to the conflict. This is one thing this paper tries to answer, and one solution the data shows is that to reach success, cooperation must exist.

Cooperation has many different applications and definitions when applied to different social settings. Cooperation can mean the end of one conflict between two individuals as well as conflict between two agencies. Individuals need to resolve conflict or no other issues can be resolved. Also, if the conflict is not resolved the relationship between the individuals can degrade and, after a period of time, no longer exist. This lack of conflict resolution can and does exist in personal relationships without much damage to society, but this is generally unacceptable with government agencies.

Agencies need to be able to cooperate with each other in order to help the communities in which they exist. Unlike individuals, agencies have many more dynamics and higher expectations when dealing with cooperation. Some of these dynamics may include power, resource distribution, lack of resources, and what each agency considers a success. All of these different dynamics make interagency resolution and cooperation much more complex than the traditional interpersonal conflict. Furthermore, the need for interagency cooperation is much more important for the community in which they exist. The interview answers have a great deal of focus on interagency conflict, interagency resolution, and how agencies cooperate to achieve success. Consequently, the interviewee's answers demonstrate a definition of success and how it can be presented to the community.

Once the definition of success has been reached, as well as an understanding of its functions within this case study, strategies for success will be provided. These strategies are created out of thin air, but derived from the analysis of the expert's responses. The four strategies, when used at once, will allow to highest level of success, not only for this specific case study, but for all similar situations. For the strategies to be unveiled, the definition of success first has to be created.

## REVIEW OF THE LITURATURE

What is success? This question has an infinite number of answers and each answer fits in with the setting of the question and what the final achievement goal is. This paper is specifically looking at success with policy and programing directed at substance abuse treatment. The setting is now created—a political setting. However, the question is still too broad. By narrowing it down to the perspective and perception of the practitioners that run the programs or create the policy for helping and providing to the drug dependent population, success can be defined in this setting. Now the question is specific to the perceptions of practitioners on the effectiveness of these policies and programs with helping the substance abusing population. Since success is not something that can be answered in any literature due to its complexities, a simple definition offers a start to how success can be created during data exploration. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, success is defined as: “the correct or desired result of an attempt.”

It's one thing to be successful, but how does one achieve success? It is not spontaneous—there are steps to reach success. The underlying form of all success stories starts with communication, but communication is only the very beginning. Solely using communication does not result in success or anything else for that matter. Cooperation must be achieved before reaching agreement through communication. Tsai (2002) defines cooperation as “simultaneous cooperative and complete behavior.” This behavior will allow two conflicting groups to find a resolution and reach an agreement. There are many different ways agencies cooperate and there are many factors that influence the amount of cooperation between agencies. “While many organizations have made use of traditional merger or interagency” cooperation, this “model” is “not frequently seen in the nonprofit realm” (Goldkind and Pardasani 2012). As mentioned above, many times agencies have to prove they are successful, which can be difficult. “Over the past 40 years [...] agencies have increasingly been pressured to operate more like the private/corporate sector” (Goldkind and Pardasani 2012). The reason for this thought is to show success through financial results. Even if this barrier is overcome, there are many doubts about the effectiveness of cooperation of agencies. According to Weber and Khademian (1997) “conventional wisdom presents the American political system as unable to utilize alternative, consensus based policy mechanism.” This barrier can only be overcome with increased data collection, which this paper intends to do.

In order for any form of cooperation to exist, a conflict or dispute must be in existence. The resolution of this dispute allows the agency to retain its identity and to continue to serve the community. Like success and cooperation, there are many different ways a dispute comes about. “These conflicts range from relatively simple and localized disputes to highly complex” (Clarke and Peterson 2015:1) disputes. If they are not attempting to be resolved in some manner, then the function and identity of the agency is in question. Once the agencies have accepted a dispute through cooperation, success has been achieved.

Dispute can either be productive or destructive, depending on the ending result of each dispute. There are ways to resolve disputes and conflicts. Dispute resolution, or conflict theory as sociology regards, through the work of Georg Simmel is: “a reflection of more than just conflict of interest, but also, of conflicts arising from hostile ‘instincts’. Such instincts can be exacerbated by conflicts of interest, or mitigation by harmonious social relations” (Turner 1975). According to Simmel, humans are the reason for conflict, but a group of humans can also be the mitigation to conflict. This applies directly to agencies and their ability to mitigate conflicts through censuses. This can be described as working censuses.

Working consensus is described as “with certain parameters, interactants are expected to honor each other's self-definitional claims” (Spencer 1992). This means to understand and accept differences in self-identified claims.

Although this theory may not be directly relatable to agencies, it does shed light on the idea of acceptance and understanding when working with others. This “honor” that Goffman focuses on is a good underlying message to all agencies to be accepting and open-minded during interaction. This working consensus, which strengthens a resolution, allows for interagency cooperation to give the most opportunities success when creating policy and programs for the community.

This working consensus and dispute resolution is not the only way cooperation can be achieved with interagency. Power can become an essential way for one agency’s agenda to prevail over another agency’s agenda. Although this may not be the best form of cooperation, if the conflict is resolved using this style of communication, then it too is cooperation. In the same Turner (1975) article, he describes Marx’s view of conflict; “Conflicts of interest are the result of the inequality distribution in all social systems of scarce resources, particularly power.” The other resources of scarcity, such as funding, experts, education, or manpower, are generally more concrete. Power, along with these other resources, can cause conflict among agencies and disrupt interagency cooperation.

With all the dynamics involved with communication with agencies, how can cooperation overcome other inequalities of power, funding, education, and experts in the field? The findings portion of this paper will have a direct answer to how communication and specifically cooperation with interagency allows for success, even with the inequalities throughout agencies.

## SETTINGS AND METHODS

To study this group and the idea of communication, I administered 5 quasi-standard interviews to five different practitioners that work with the target population. The individuals worked within an administering or enforcement environment within La Crosse, Wisconsin. All of the interviews asked relatively the same questions with slight variations depending on where the interview went throughout talking. Each interview lasted about an hour and the focus was on perspective of the current drug scene and how the programming and treatment, as well as education, in this area is working.

Each person that was interviewed was considered an expert and could either talk directly about the programs that the La Crosse community has to offer or they were able to speak about the policies that are enacted in this community and how they affect the people living under the policies.

Once all the interviews were transcribed, each transcription was entered into a software program, Dedoose, which allowed coding of the transcriptions. The entire transcription was coded by common occurrences such as funding, treatment, community, communication, policies, and funding. After going through all five of the transcriptions and coding each one, a total of 120 different codes were discovered. After the data collection was complete, analysis of the codes and finding common trends between each data set was discovered. Finally after the trends were discovered, an in-depth sociological review uncovered the reason behind these trends and their significance. A deeper latent meaning of trends needed to be examined to truly understand what the findings are showing. The manifest meaning that caught my attention the most was communication. Of the three major themes that presented themselves, communication is the hardest concept to qualitatively analyze. This means that there is a greater chance for variation and qualitative meaning in the findings.

## FINDINGS

What is success? That question has so many dynamics that it is never easy to answer. After doing the interviews and collecting all the data from all my participants, a few specific examples were presented as “successes.” The research showed that success in a political setting tended to be without much surprise, political. The findings from the interviews were not as political as the research made it seem. In fact, the data from the interviews showed a much more personal approach to success. This personal approach stems from each individual having direct contact with the population these policies and programs are affecting. This unique and close connection allowed for personal and specific insight that reading a book or article would not provide. Quantitative work is extremely important, but at times this data can be distant, famously associated with an “Armchair theorist.” These interviews give a great view point of programs and policies alike, showing that they are not only helping, but also describing how the people creating them take a personal responsibility and excitement from the process.

### **Policy: success**

This is the section where questions asked of the experts were focused on success with regards to policy. They were also asked why they felt these policies were successful. The following are examples that the experts felt were good policies currently in place in La Crosse:

“mandatory treatment, increased evidence based research, being open to change, introducing the PDMP (which stands Prescription Drug Monitoring Program) for to reduce over prescribing, promoting the education on how to administer Narcon, close interaction of judges and drug court participants, proper ID legislation, good Samaritan law, having a close working relationship with specific senators in Wisconsin, drug and diversion courts, GREAT (which stands for Gang Resistance Education and Training), and the heroin task force.”

The reason that the participants felt these policies were successful was that the policies were focused with evidence behind them. The conversation below focuses on the idea of evidence how it can be beneficial when applied to policy creation.

“well I think that you are looking at now like a public health model you’re looking at a lot of environmental strategies make that change the local policy system-level and I think is important that the programs that are being used are research-based. So they’re found in a you know in a peer review journal you know American journal Wisconsin Journal of medicine all the different journals or other and recognized and published you know so as we researched, it’s been published, it’s been valid, up think that’s the way to go but I also believe that a lot of the change can occur for policy is at the local level.”

In this specific situation, policies such as using the PDMP and having proper identification to get opiates have evidence behind their introduction. Another example is when an interviewee was asked what the positive policy changes were to the needle exchange program. She answered that a lot of positive changes, especially with the number of individuals who will to use this new resource. She states that:

“well when I started, the needle exchange program started here in 2005. Just a good example. When I started of October of 2008 we had maybe 8 to 9 exchanger every month. And last month we had 237. So that has been a big change that has progressively getting more and more and more. That has been a huge change, especially with that program. Obviously, there us more than just that, they I do. Its noticeable and notable, you can basically graph that out.”

In both of these examples from the data collected, they felt that these new policies are not only supported by data, but they also perceive them as very effective in helping the substance abusing population function better in the community. Sometimes the success of policies and programs did overlap, but this was not the case every time. These successes were slightly different than how programs were viewed as successful.

### **Program: success**

The same questions that were asked of polices, were also asked with programming. The expert was asked to explain why they felt the way they did when examining the program. The programs that the experts felt were working well and should be used in the future are:

“increasing number of people moving into medicated treatment, reducing recidivism rates among intervenes drug users, understanding the lifestyle of a substance addicted individual, only allow people to take medicine while in medicated assistant in the clinic, having diversion courts, and having halfway houses for low to no risk offenders.”

As with the policies, programing success was felt in many different ways and each participant showed a different way in how success can be found. The reason that the experts felt these programs were successful is due to the increased levels of help the programs gave to participants in the programs. While talking to one of the experts about taking courses to reduce risky behavior and how effective they truly are. This following conversation sheds light on why a specific program, BASICS, and evidence-based education is viewed as having a positive effect on the community.

“I can tell you that there’s a course at the University called BASICS (which stands for Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students) and is actually evidence-based but is often something that is more short-term. I think is going to sit well somebody maybe for four to six weeks at most. So it’s effective for a short duration.”

This expert believes that although there is room for improvement, the effectiveness of the program is shown and has benefits for the individuals using educational treatment. This second conversation focused again on evidence based practices, but has a focus on treatment instead of education.

“Alice: or we don’t have the treatment that we really want or that’s most effective with this population so umm you know and I think we have treatment available here I think that it’s, there’s a big shift in treatment and there has been over the past several years in terms of that old school way umm which to me is more of like will break you down to build you back up umm to trying to make it more individualized and umm accepting a person where they are and you know using things like motivational interviewing and things like that to get them to make those changes so

Me: what is motivational interviewing?

Alice: motivational interviewing is a is umm it's an evidence based practice used in it started in the AODA (which means Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse) field

Me: ok

Alice: so basically its miller and rolneck and they umm basically, I'm trying to think the best, it's a way of communicating with people that's non-threatening

Me: ok

Alice: and so and also in a way trying to get them there on their own so it's really not effective for me to be like 'you know what, you suck, you're a liar' da right? You're not gonna respond to that so

Me: right

Alice: it's more of umm communicating a way that gets them to talk about that their problems maybe they're contemplating them but they don't know and there's some ambivalence there which is total human nature, by the way. So it seems very simple. In many ways it is. But it's a practice umm you know it takes practice and it takes work to do it effectively so..."

In this excerpt, the expert talks about a program that is new and innovative and has shown to help drug addicted individuals in past programs. This change of programming allows for improvements that over time become successes that can be used to continue to help this population. Although the experts felt a great deal of current programs and policies were and are successful, they demonstrated through some of their answers the needs of improvement.

### **Program and Policy: yet to be successful**

With this great amount of success within the drug policy and program environment, some issues became present as well. Unlike the breakdown of successful programming and policy, the "yet to be successful" are combined into one listing. This lists consists of either programs or policies that have yet to be successful, or are viewed as harmful and need to be eradicated from the current system. Again, like the above, questions were asked to find out not only which were unsuccessful, but why they were perceived as unsuccessful. This understanding is fundamental in reversing the issues of each program or policy and shifting them from unsuccessful to successful. The following list is a combination of what the experts perceive as issues that need to be resolved to make a more sustainable system for the individuals involved within the substance abusing population.

"how syringes, empty or not can be considered paraphernalia in certain conditions, getting dirty syringes back, over enforcement with red boxes, little to no drug treatment while locally incarcerated, lack of evidence based studies in regards to treatment, more innovative options in corrections, not enough drug disposal days, training and having more people in the community able to administer Miloxon and Narcon, more medicated assistance, more inpatient treatment, more outpatient treatment, more treatment options, heroin detox while incarcerated, prevention, drug paraphernalia law, basic training on substance abuse for all working persons in the criminal justice system, electronic, not handwriting prescriptions, and DARE (which stands for Drug Abuse Resistance Education).

The experts felt that these programs and policies were either inefficient or outright bad. The conversation below demonstrates why the practitioners thought the issue was with a specific policy currently enforced in Wisconsin. This policy targets the individuals that use the needle exchange and this policy causes more harm than good, according to this one expert.

"Me: Do we have polices, even it not enforced, are still there. Where you are thinking why do we still have this, what is the purpose?

Lindsey: I honestly don't know much about the policies that we have here, because I don't need to know much about them. I know more about general Wisconsin laws.

Me: you can talk about those as well.

Lindsey: I think one of the most important or ridicules one is the drug paraphernalia law.

Me: which is

Lindsey: the state, (she geos and gets it from another room) so that is part of the problem. In also getting dirty syringes back. It that's people, once, so what I have right now is ten packs of syringes. So it's a ten packed sealed in plastic. So once that seals broken, it's considered paraphernalia. So the minute you open that packed, its paraphernalia. Technically, some police officer enforce things differently because they law is so vague that you know, even technically dirty syringes are paraphilia, even in a read box. So you are return red box, so you say and I try to tell me people and all my users, it's also. They ask, how, they came back up and they had two syringes back up and put them in and put them in the sharps, because they didn't want to get caught, but you tell them to bring these syringes back, well what if I get pulled over can they search my red box? Well technically, yes, I don't know many that are going to want to. It's also depends on how you interact with the police officer.

If they have had interactions with you, what you were doing when you did get pulled over or you know whatever. There is a lot that goes into it than just that. But also even if you have the pack, so just the 10pack is not paraphernalia, but if add a ten pack and say a cooker or a spoon, then that's paraphernalia. That automatically become paraphernalia. So, it's just kind of a vague, somebody came to me and I gave him a ten pack and he ask is this the legal amount in Wisconsin? I was like I don't think there is a legal amount but he goes the legal amount is 2 in Minnesota. Well I'm like that's interesting and I have never heard that before. So you can have syringe and be totally ok. So I don't know. That's been an issue, the drug paraphernalia law been and also which they are working on and did a really good job is the Good Samaritan law. At least having that in effect is real nice. It's still again trying to remind them that it limited immunity for the person calling and not for anybody else in the house, at least that is something and obviously you can say nothing. You going to get away scott free with whatever you are doing there. I understand the limited immunity, I completely do. So that's been uh a nice one with uhh that's at least been something that we can give them because there's so many umm I've had so many exchangers that have been like o I tell everybody just put me out the if I'm OD-ing just push me out of a moving car and leave me on the side of the road you know and it's like or you know they drop them off at the emergency room they don't do anything they just run and they you know so that's I mean that's somebody's life like you're"

Although her answer is quite long, it illustrates with great detail about the damages that a policy or program can have on an already harmed population. Another example of a bad policy and program was when DARE came up in conversation. The conversation focused on the issues of education of drugs:

"Alice: I'm trying to think of my own experience and I think a lot of it starts at home and umm it's your environment and all of that so you know I think and schools but I think that you know education is important umm I just don't know what it is

Me: ok

Alice: what is that because DARE is proven ineffective and you would think well you know make them aware of it make them you know what's there, show them the drugs."

Although the second excerpt is quite lengthy, it demonstrates great detail as to why this expert perceives this policy as not only ineffective, but also harmful to the population she directly works with. In both of these examples, the issue of bad policy is that it is not only still used, but using the policy and programs are causing a negative effect to its target population. Evidence-based practices are viewed in an extremely effective way to create policy and program, and this conversation shows what happens when this step is not used or is ignored. The continued use of these harmful programs and policies, in the view of the experts, can do more harm in the long run. In order to continue to focus on fixing these issue spots, cooperation among agencies has to increase.

### **Cooperation**

With the negative that either haven't been resolved by the agencies, or that the issues have been rejected, ignored, or reinforced with policy and programming, future cooperation and collaboration is essential to fix all the negatives. Cooperation within agencies is essential to fix the problems that exist among both interagency and the communities that these agencies represent. Agencies and "organizations rely on [...] effective work groups in external knowledge sharing" (Cummings, 2004) to function and serve a community. With the issues that still exist, interagency cooperation needs to be the essential part of the conversation. In the past, issues and conflict were confronted and resolved through the use of cooperation. Cooperation begins with the ability to communicate desires. In this example one interviewee described her ability to communicate issues to others during a meeting. "[I] was just at one of our heroin task force and I gave her [a senator] a report that I had found." This same individual is also able to communicate her knowledge to the community through many avenues. "I mean I've worked here for years. I do know a lot of people, I do go to rotary, and I've been a Rotarian for eighteen years." This demonstration of connection to the community allows her to not only be visible, but to show support for the community as she says it is to "be a good leader and give that information back to the community."

Another interviewee I spoke with demonstrated the communication he has with others in the agency: "if I felt, I could always call" and "say hey, we need to talk about something, not specific to a person and they would always be open to talking and listening and sharing what they could." This shows cooperation among interagencies and individuals. In order for the agencies to function properly, communication and "a lot of networking" and "a lot of communication back and forth" go into achieving success. Also, using cooperation will build and strengthen the relationship and communication stream for these agencies. Resolution from conflict through cooperation creates opportunities for growth of cooperation itself.

### **Power, resource shortage, and other barriers**

So what is keeping every exchange of interagency communication from being resolved through cooperation? Many factors such as a change in power among the groups, a shift in resources, or a change of personnel within the agencies can create new barriers that didn't exist before. These barriers must be overcome to continue on a path of cooperation and agreement. Power can be seen by one individual or agency enforcing their will onto others. This power within and throughout the agencies can affect each and every conversation and conflict. The sway can be in a positive manner like getting a tough policy passed. Power can also be damaging to conflict resolution because the communication stream can begin to shrink, which can greatly reduce the cooperation among agencies. If power is used incorrectly, it can greatly damage any progress towards resolution. Although power can be an issue within politics, due to a limited amount of questions this barrier was not focused on through the use of questions. A continuation of research on power and how it affects interagency, with regards to cooperation, needs to be studied in more depth.

The other barriers to conflict resolution include a change in resources. Resources include funding, experts, education, manpower, and buy-in from all groups included in the program and policy. These barriers, which can be described as tangible barriers, will always exist and will never disappear. Since these barriers never cease to exist, conflict created from them should be relatively easy to avoid. If cooperation has been reached before a tangible barrier change, then all future interagency conversation following the tangible change should follow a similar cooperation process to reach a new resolution. The barrier, power that, as explain above, is not tangible and must be overcome. Overcoming the barrier of power will allow the highest amount of success of drug policy and programs. Cooperation among interagencies in La Crosse is a must, which is what my findings have shown. La Crosse has done a very well with overcoming any interagency conflict and finds resolution through cooperation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

In general, it is very easy to see what works well and what does not and then to just say, "fix it". This is easier said than done. Many times the difference between the problem and the solution is not lack of knowledge or lack of expertise, but rather the inability to communicate. The main focus of the first paper was to use communication within agencies to create success in the form of policy and programming. That paper only focused on theoretical framework, creating a platform for change to occur. This paper takes that next step to shift focus from theoretical framework to live application of the ideas and concepts.

With communication being the fundamental need for any changes to occur, it can be implied that all future solutions utilize communication. Also, the goal of the communication, regardless of the topic of conversation, is to achieve success. The issue with this assumption is that the path to the goal may be blurred by differences of opinions, evidence barriers, monetary barriers, and the lack of buy-in from all parties involved with change. These barriers are the general reason for a policy or program being unsuccessful. Luckily, utilizing a few tactics will neutralize these barriers and shift yet-to-be-successful too successful with the least amount of friction.

### **Evidence-Based Practices**

The biggest and most used term to describe successful programming and policy is "evidence." This concept is not only consistently used to describe a successful policy and program, but it is also mentioned to be a missing key when trying to resolve the unsuccessful. The issue with using this as the only solution to solve all issues is the inability to receive accurate information. This lies with the counterpart of evidence—opinion. Many times people, even the experts that I interviewed, use their own opinion as a fact. In order for future positive changes to occur, opinion and fact need to be separated by all involved. Although this can be an issue and was seen slightly during the interviews, most of the conversation demonstrated that the experts were able to tell the difference. They demonstrated this by either saying that "In my own opinion..." or "I think that..." This ability to separate opinion and fact, especially when working with programming and policy, will allow for the most constructive conversations between experts. The use of evidence allows everyone to agree on one optimal solution not based off what they would do, but what is known to be the most effective. Also, using evidence-based solutions shifts the focus from a personal viewpoint, which can be clouded judgement, to a much more objective viewpoint. As a side note, it is also important that the evidence being used to solve or change issues be creditable and reproducible. If the evidence is on conjecture, this can have harmful and negative side effects that were not expected (see DARE.) This trend was the most commonly cited by the experts as the reason for a success or failure. The next most commonly cited concept is to create an advantageous communication atmosphere.

### **Task Forces**

As with using evidence, strong bonds between agencies and the individuals working within the agencies is a must if solutions are to be found. The experts describe a personal relationship with each other, which promoted not only communication, but conflict resolution. The most commonly used form of a creation of communication between parties is the creation of task forces. A task force is a collective group of individuals that have a common goal. Of the five individuals that were interviewed, 3 of them are currently an active member of a task force. The other two either used to be in a task force or is a common guest to speak during the task force's meetings. The biggest advantage for these task forces is the collaboration of multiple experts, their opinion and solutions, and presenting them in a structured manner. This can also be described as bringing evidence to the table and using the evidence to help the substance abusing population. Not only does the collaboration of ideas among experts help the target population, but it can greatly affect the population that could become a substance abusing population.

### **Education and Prevention**

This is also known as education. This education can greatly reduce the amount of people that fall into the drug abusing lifestyle. All the experts agreed that education and prevention is not only under-utilized, but also that a few of the educational programs being used may be completely ineffective. The main example of this is DARE and prevention programs for "high-risk" youths. Both of these examples not only are fairly ineffective, but DARE has been shown through the use of evidence as counterproductive. This is a problem that needs to be resolved; it is unacceptable to use any programing that produces an opposite effect than what is intended. The issue with prevention programs is that they have only been shown to be effective for a very short term. This knowledge of higher needs for prevention and education is well known, but changes have been slow and while changes are happening, some of the ineffective programming is still being used. The reason for the slow shift from traditional education and prevention approaches could be related back to two separate reasons.

### **Harm Reduction**

The first is mentioned above—the lack of evidence on the education and prevention front. This barrier is slowly disappearing over time. Sometimes money is also mingled in with the lack of evidence as a barrier. The other and more pressing barrier is the shift from an abstinence approach to a harm reduction approach. This barrier is becoming more prevalent with the creation of programs such as the needle exchange and diversion courts. Harm reduction is a newer thought that promotes the idea of reducing the damage of specific, unavoidable behaviors. Since the behavior will never cease to exist, what approaches and advances can be made to reduce the amount of damage the behavior can cause to the individual participant in said behavior? This is the final trend that is present in the data once analyzed. Harm reduction, although becoming more utilized, has received a lot of criticism from communities and governments alike. The reason for this is the engrained theory that being "tough on drugs" is the only way to stop drug use. The problem with the mindset is what one expert said: "you can't arrest drugs out of society." With this understanding, the only other viable option to reduce the harms that drugs can cause to individuals and a community is to provide a system that constructs the safest environment for the ones participating in the use of drugs. This may mean being lenient on mistakes made by this population, but the past evidence shows this works better than harsh and draconian drug policy.

### **Conclusion and Limitations**

In this paper I have drawn from theoretical works containing success in policy and programs, as well as conflict, and cooperation with regards to interagency communication. I have interviewed five different individuals that are practitioners in the field of substance dependency. Within the culture of substance abuse, the population has very little say and are generally unable to help themselves when policy and programs are being created. Resolutions are created when agencies come together to promote help and positive change for this target population.

While interviewing and doing all of the research, I had a very limited amount of time to complete everything, which leaves opportunities to focus on for future research. The lack of time was one limitation expressed during the creation of this paper. Another issue that I experienced in this research was the unavailability of more practitioners that have enough experience with the substance abuse population. This means that this data can only be applied directly at La Crosse area. If the findings from this paper are to be used outside of this area, more research, which includes more interviews, with a larger population of participants needs to be conducted. Finally, due to this experience being new to me, the strength of coding data may need some work. Even with all of these limitations, the data collected, analyzed, and presented here in this paper have a direct application to how agencies and other groups can resolve conflict with the use of cooperation.



These direct applications have been broken down into four separate categories. Harm reduction, education and prevention, communication in the form of task forces, and using evidence to create policy and programs are the four keys to success. These four different, but not mutually exclusive concepts, if utilized together, can create success. Using all four keys will make policy success in all three phases: creation, implementation, and enforcement. With programming, using the keys will create success in three phases as well: education and prevention for individuals not yet abusing any substances and treatment for those who are currently abusing. With the understanding that the communication is essential for the success, the communication of the four ideas will breed success faster and more effectively than if only one or two are used.

This paper focuses on the idea of success and how it can be described in drug policy and programming. After interviewing the 5 experts, transcribing, coding the transcriptions, analyzing the information they provided, and finding trends throughout the data; more than just success can be defined. With all the practitioners perspectives collected, predictors and useful tools and strategies can be applied to the setting. These predictors create a wide avenue of opportunity to continue to improve the La Crosse area and all the individuals living in the area as well.

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