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## The Massachusetts Family Networks Implementation Study

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# The Massachusetts Family Networks Implementation Study

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## MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

MA/DSS, under the direction of Commissioner Angelo McClain, has 29 Area Offices organized in 6 regions; 78,054 consumers (41,302 are children < 18 years of age); 9,352 children and youth in placement; and approximately 3400 employees (FY2007; 3rd quarter).

## FAMILY NETWORKS

Family Networks is a comprehensive systems transformation initiative to redesign and integrate traditional categorical services across the Commonwealth into local systems of care for children, youth, and families served by the child welfare system. The Family Networks Implementation Study, a partnership between MA/DSS and UMMS, is a two-year study of the process of implementing local systems of care that began in January 2007, and will continue through December 2008.

### STUDY OVERVIEW

The partnership between MA/DSS and UMMS is the foundation of the Family Networks Implementation Study. The benefits of active stakeholder involvement are numerous, including increased buy-in to the study process, assistance in identifying key outcomes, and the proliferation of study results (Kaufman et al., 2006).

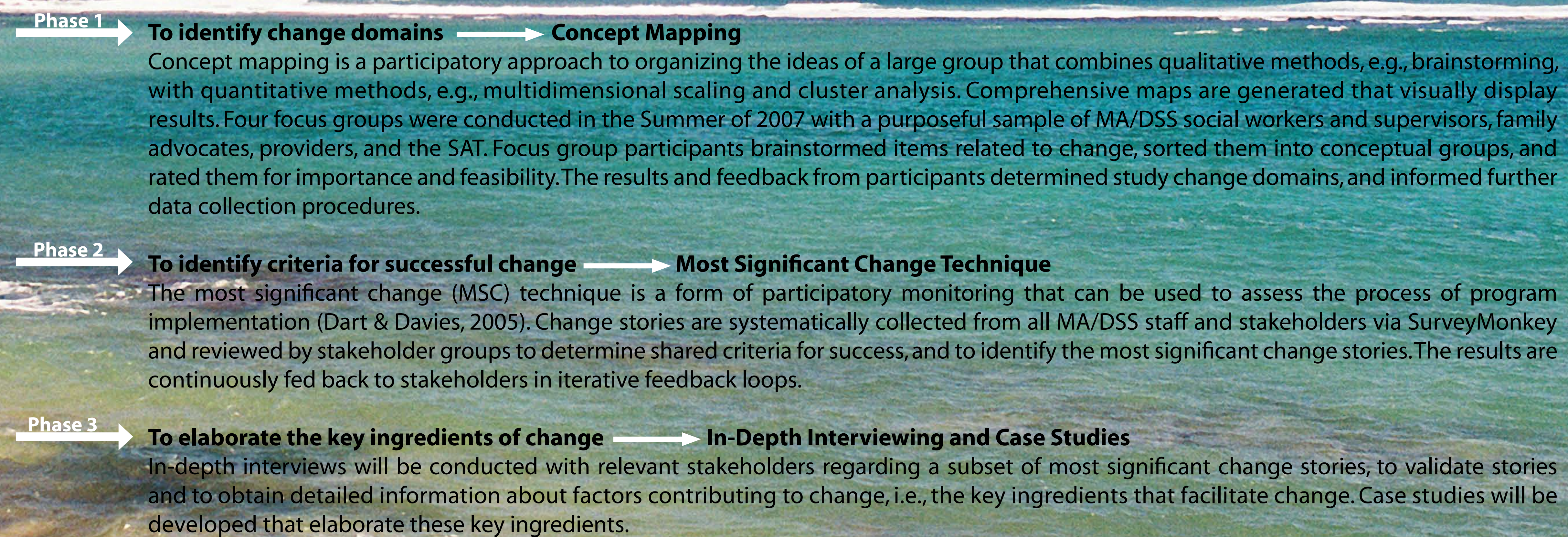
- ◆ **SHARED PROJECT MANAGEMENT** – The study is co-managed by MA/DSS and UMMS project leads;
- ◆ **CREATION OF A STUDY DESIGN TEAM (SDT)** – The SDT includes representatives from MA/DSS and UMMS working together to determine the study framework, sampling, research methods, measures, and analyses;
- ◆ **CREATION OF A STUDY ADVISORY TEAM (SAT)** – The SAT includes representatives from MA/DSS, family advocates, providers, and UMMS who assist in framing research questions, providing input into data collection strategies, interpreting findings, designing feedback loops, and reviewing products; and
- ◆ **DESIGN OF FEEDBACK LOOPS** – The SAT is creating strategies for feeding back study findings and products to relevant stakeholders.

### THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**What structures, processes, and conditions influence the implementation of Family Networks?**

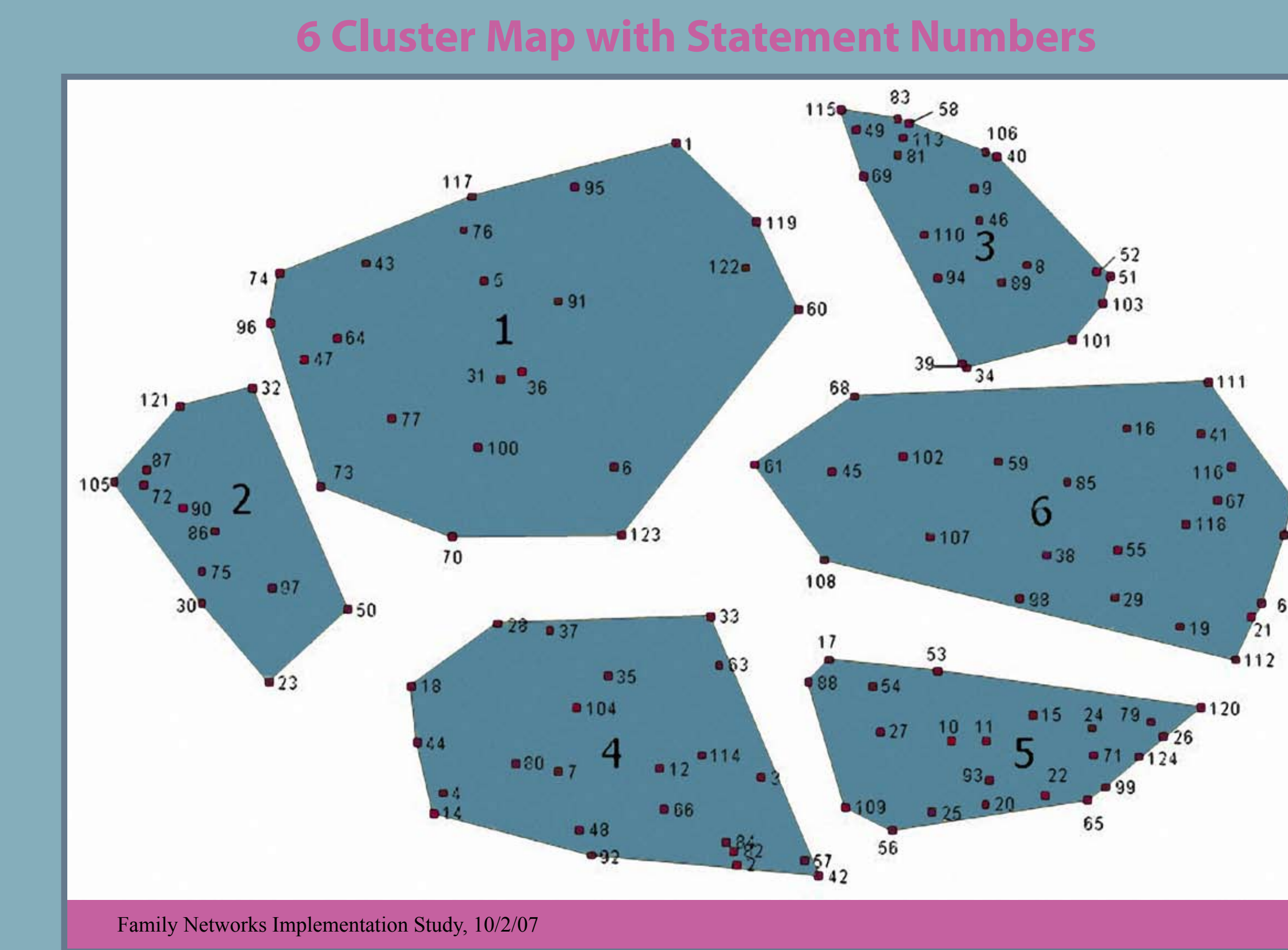
- ▶ What needs to happen over the next 6 to 12 months?
- ▶ What has worked so far, i.e. in the past 6 to 12 months?
- ▶ How do we keep our eye on what's happening?

### RESEARCH METHODS



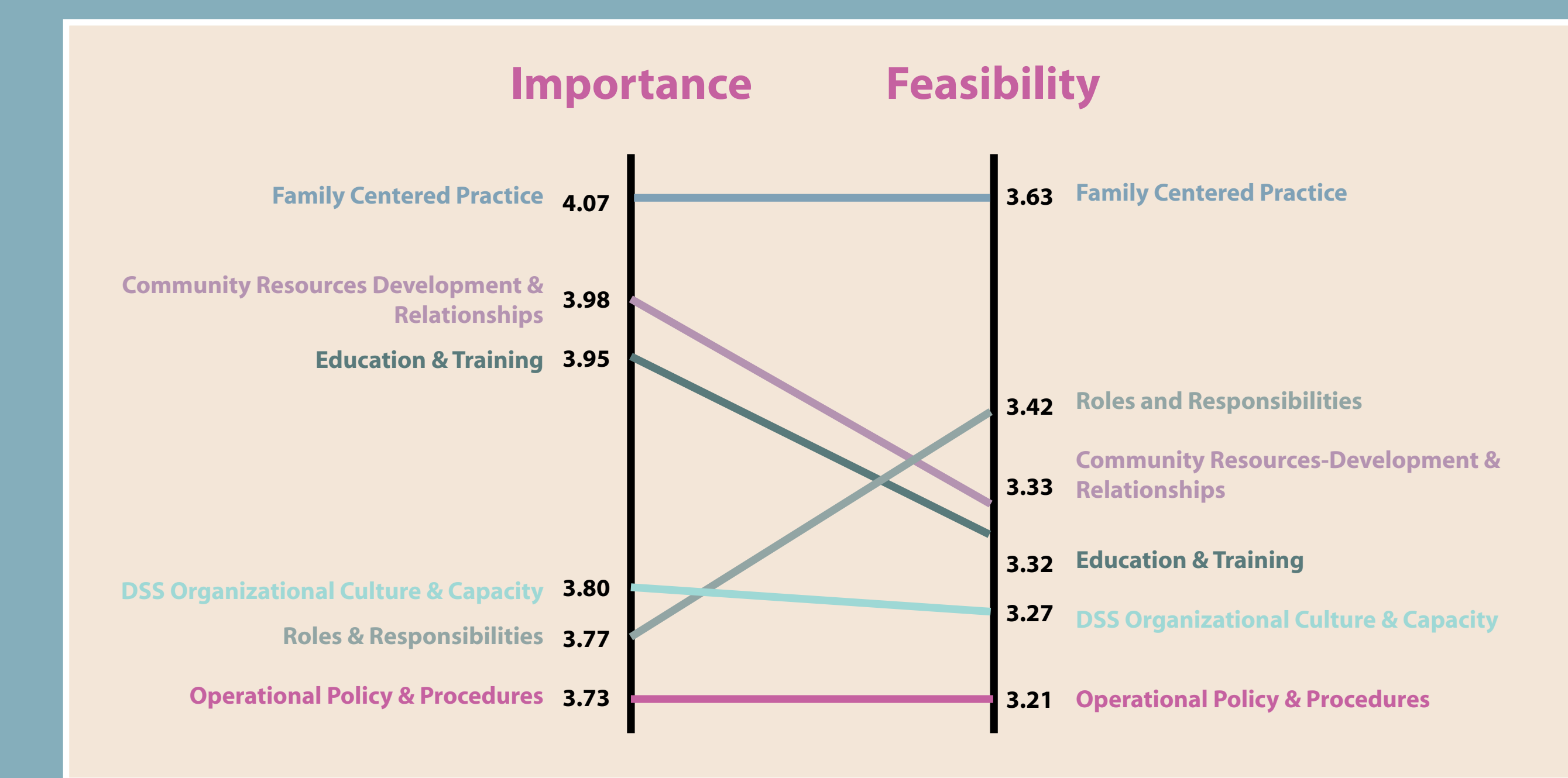
## Phase 1 IDENTIFYING CHANGE DOMAINS

Four focus groups (n = 37) generated statements in response to the prompt: "Generate a list of actions that need to happen in the next 6 to 12 months to continue to develop and sustain Family Networks." Focus group participants included MA/DSS and Lead Agency managers, MA/DSS Supervisors and Social Workers; Family Advocates; and Providers. Participants (n = 33) sorted 124 statements into conceptual clusters. Maps were generated to display results of cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling.



## RATING IMPORTANCE AND FEASIBILITY

Participants rated statements on importance and feasibility from 1 = "not very..." to 5 = "extremely..." Ladder graphs were generated to show the relationship between average ratings of importance and feasibility for specific clusters.



## STUDY IMPLICATIONS

Findings from the Family Networks Implementation Study will inform MA/DSS strategic planning, system refinements, and the Family Networks outcomes evaluation. Continuous quality improvement strategies, drawn from study findings, will be relevant and useful to other Massachusetts EOHS agencies with similar service delivery systems and agendas. Project activities and products will promote the Commonwealth's participation in the national dialogue regarding systems transformation in child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice.

## BALANCING RIGOR AND RELEVANCE:

### Study Advisory Team Review

Study Advisory Team members met to interpret the concept mapping and statement rating data. They distilled findings from the six cluster solution generated in the concept mapping exercise into five relevant change domains, or categories of activity for the next 6 to 12 months. Some activities are already underway. Others will benefit from increased attention.

- ◆ **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT** includes activities to enhance family involvement in all aspects of Family Networks and MA/DSS service planning and delivery.
- ◆ **COMMUNITY RESOURCE ACCESS AND CAPACITY** involves partnering with communities across the Commonwealth to support children and families who are, or are at risk of becoming involved with MA/DSS.
- ◆ **ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, RELATIONSHIPS AND RULES** suggests that clear guidance is required regarding the activities and responsibilities of MA/DSS staff, Lead Agency and provider staff, and families.
- ◆ **EDUCATION AND TRAINING** is required to support people in their new roles.
- ◆ **CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT** will insure the continued refinement of Family Networks in response to lessons learned, new opportunities, insights, etc.

## Phase 2 IDENTIFYING SUCCESS CRITERIA

The UMMS research team, in partnership with the Study Advisory Team, created a template for framing stories, and met with staff to pilot the data collection strategy in two Area Offices. The team began collecting stories from a wider pool of MA/DSS staff and stakeholders through the online survey tool, SurveyMonkey. Next steps include the review of stories via active discussion in which significance is explored and success criteria are carefully documented.

## EXAMPLES OF MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

**INSTRUCTIONS:** From your point of view, describe a story that epitomizes the most significant change that has resulted from Family Networks in the past year.

◆ **A PROVIDER'S PERSPECTIVE:**  
"The most significant change that I have experienced is being able to work with the entire family....provides the opportunity to develop family plans that incorporate all members including those who may be placed outside of the home...I have been more successful with reunifying children with more appropriate services and a better understanding of family dynamics."

◆ **A MA/DSS SOCIAL WORKER'S PERSPECTIVE:**  
"My most significant story would be to watch...a successful transition of a child that was in residential placement for years be successfully reunified with his mother...The team worked... to assess the child's needs, come off all the medications, and do the work that was necessary to transfer this child home to his community."