Implementation Stages
Overview
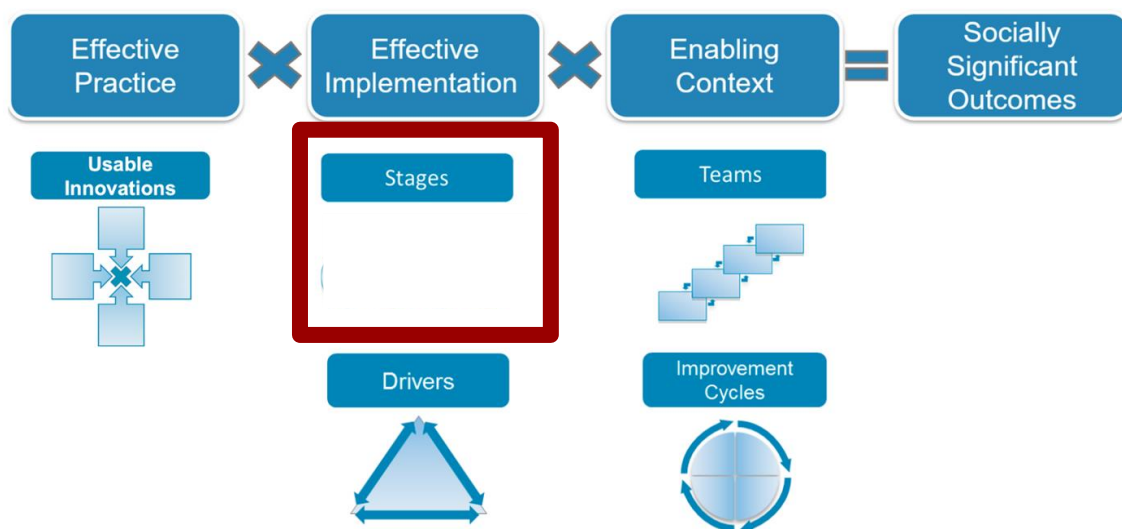

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Introduction: Implementation Stages

This overview of Implementation Stages is designed to help practitioners (in sites, communities and state organizations) build Active Implementation capacity to ensure continually improving academic and behavioral outcomes.

Key Takeaways:

- Identify rationales for attending to Implementation Stages
- Define the implementation practices for each of the 4 Stages
- Identify tools and resources to support stage-based planning
- Assess the use of stage-based activities to support successful implementation efforts

Let's examine how Implementation Stages support the Active Implementation Formula (see above). It is important to start with the end in mind, Improved Outcomes for students. Improved Outcomes represent the "why" in the equation. We want to improve instructional practices and behavioral supports to improve student outcomes. The "what" in the equation is Effective Practices. We need to know "what" it is we're going to be implementing so that we can ensure Effective Implementation, the "how" in the equation. With Effective Implementation, we create the infrastructure to ensure the program or practice is in place, being used as intended, and producing outcomes.

Implementation Stages address the key component of "how" the work unfolds and serve as a guide for the steps Implementation Teams need to take over time. Implementation

Stages is one of the five Active Implementation Frameworks necessary for building sustainability. Leadership Teams, the "who" in the equation, are part of the Enabling Context who are linked across the system, responsible for developing capacity using data to support implementation within and across Implementation Stages to support Socially Significant Outcomes for students.

Topic 1: Implementation Stages Overview

Implementation is not an event. It is a mission-oriented process involving multiple decisions, actions, and corrections designed to make full and effective use of evidence-based programs or practices (EBPs) in education settings. Change at the site, local, community or state level does not occur all at once. Research suggests it can take from **two to four years** to fully and successfully operationalize an EBP (Bierman et al., 2002; Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf, 2001; Panzano & Roth, 2006; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982; Saldana et al., 2012). The timer starts when an organization begins to consider change and ends when the change is fully in place and produces intended outcomes in all programs or sites in the community or state. The process includes four stages that can lead to the long-term survival (**sustainability**) and continued effectiveness of any program or practice in the context of a changing world.

Stages (Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, Full Implementation) are not linear and each one does not have a crisp beginning or end. For example, there are times when an organization will move among stages due to changes in staff, funding, leadership, or unsuccessful attempts at employing the program or practice with high fidelity. There also may be instances in which an organization is in more than one stage at the same time. For example, a program may begin delivering new services due to time frame limitations and mandates by a funder, while they are still securing resources and putting infrastructure elements in place.

There are key components and processes to pay attention to during each of the stages. These can guide a systematic and intentional approach for managing system change and building sustainability for the new program or practice.

Lastly, full implementation is achieved when the new practice or approach has stabilized, and we are seeing the consistent use of the new EBP is resulting in improved student outcomes. We also see that strategies to gather feedback for improvement by using Improvement Cycles are highly functioning and provide routine information on how the new practice is going and how the supports are functioning.

What are Implementation Stages
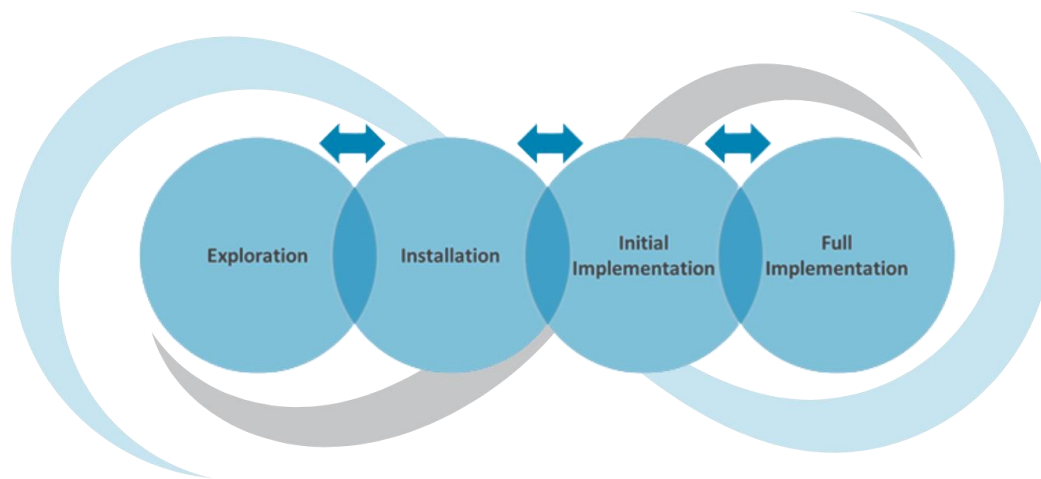
Exploration – identifying the need for change, learning about possible evidence-based programs and practices (EBPs) that may provide solutions, learning about what it takes to implement the program or practice effectively, developing an Implementation Team to support the work as it progresses through the Stages, growing collaborators and champions, assessing and creating readiness for change, developing communication processes to support the work, and deciding to proceed (or not)

Installation – securing and developing the support needed to put a new program or practice into place as intended, developing feedback loops between the practice and leadership level in order to streamline communication, and gathering feedback on how new practices are being implemented

Initial Implementation – the first use of an EBP by practitioners and others who have just learned how to use the program or practice.

Initial implementation is about trying out those new skills and practices, and getting better in implementation. In this stage, we are gathering data to check in on how

implementation is going, and developing improvement strategies based on the data. Implementation supports are refined based on data. For example, we might find that a new skill educators are using as part of social and emotional development could be further strengthened by additional coaching from an expert; so we would think about how to embed these strategies into ongoing coaching opportunities, and how we would gather data on if the coaching is leading to the improved use of these skills.

Full Implementation – the skillful use of an EBP that is well-integrated into the repertoire of practitioners and routinely and effectively supported by successive program and local administrations

Topic 2: Rationale for Implementation Stages

Why are Implementation Stages Important?

There are three methods of support programs use of in real-world settings in order to achieve positive outcomes for recipients: Letting it happen, Helping it happen, and Making it happen (Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Fixsen, Blase, Duda, Naoom, & Van Dyke, 2010). The role of an Implementation Team is to "Make it happen!"

In order to "Make it happen," the Implementation Team must navigate the complexity involved in new ways of doing things. Change is a process (not an event). Implementation occurs in stages and someone must plan and negotiate the journey through these stages to engage and support practitioners and administrators and effectively launch the work. Implementation Team members ensure that those doing the work have the skills and support structures to feel competent and confident in using the evidence-based program or practice (EBP) as intended. Stage-based work helps to successfully navigate the journey.

Starting with an awareness that implementation occurs in stages allows for intentional planning for the change process. When we pay attention to the stages of implementation we can:

- Match our activities to that stage and increase the likelihood of moving successfully through the stage and on to the next stage
- Prepare for the activities and challenges that we will face in the next stage
- Reduce wasted time and resources
- Increase the likelihood of sustained and improved use of educational practices

We are more likely to have people willingly join in the change journey if we match our activities to the stage of implementation we are in and if we take into account the stage of engagement of key individuals as well. When we behave as though we are in one stage (e.g., Full Implementation) and are really in another (e.g., Initial Implementation) we can create tension, feelings of incompetence, fear and frustration. Signs of so-called "resistance" may actually be a signal that we need to reassess our activities to see if they truly match the current stage of implementation for a given organization (e.g. site, local, community, or state entities).

Topic 3: Exploration Stage

The Exploration Stage is a critical starting place when states, communities, local organizations, and others are considering change. Taking the time to explore what to do, how to do it, and who will do it saves time and money (Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf, 2001; Romney, Israel, & Zlatevski, 2014) and improves the chances for success (Saldana et al., 2012; Slavin et al., 2010). During Exploration, readiness is assessed by an Implementation Team. To the extent an organization is not ready, the Implementation Team is accountable for helping to create readiness. Data indicates that about 20% of people and organizations are ready for change at any given time (Prochaska, Prochaska, & Levesque, 2001). Thus, creating readiness is an important function when the goal is to reach all individuals being served.

The Exploration stage takes place well before a new evidence-based program or practice (EBP) is put in place. The overall goal of this stage is to consider the extent to which a potential EBP meets the needs of the community, and whether implementation is feasible. During Exploration, an Implementation Team assesses the potential match between community needs, the new EBP requirements, and community resources. This involves engaging Critical Perspectives which include practitioners, administrators, and other staff members, families and the community, purveyors and "experts" and with other implementing sites and local entities. Only after this exploration process does the Team make a decision or recommendation to proceed or not to proceed.

This stage also is the time to assess potential barriers to implementation related to funding, staffing, referrals, and system changes. **The result of the Exploration Stage is a clear Implementation Plan with tasks and timelines to facilitate the Installation and Initial Implementation of the program.** The plan creates the "readiness" for the change as the Team performs this stage's related functions.

Implementation Teams

An Implementation Team is an organized and active group that supports the implementation, sustainability, and scale-up of Usable Innovations by integrating the use of Implementation Stages, Drivers and Improvement Cycles. Usable Innovations provide the reasons for changing roles, functions, and structures to more efficiently, effectively, and persistently produce intended outcomes, providing the content that is the focus of Selection, Training, Coaching, and assessment of Fidelity. When a single individual is assigned the whole task of bringing new ways of working to an organization, what happens when that person leaves? Creating a team to lead the

implementation process is a critical early part of the sustainability process. If an Implementation Team is not available, the Exploration Stage is the time to form a team and have it begin to function. The Implementation Team needs to be comprised of individuals who, collectively, have the expertise necessary to implement the new EBP, and to develop and maintain the system and infrastructures to support effective implementation.

Usable Innovation

In the Exploration Stage, the overall goal of the [Implementation Team](#) is to investigate and select a [Usable Innovation](#) to meet the needs of the community served. Before implementing a new evidence-based program or practice (EBP), it's vital to have a clear understanding of the EPB and its suitability for your state, community or organization. It's necessary to have sufficient detail about the program or practice so that you can train staff and administrators to implement it with [fidelity](#), that the EBP can be replicated across all of your sites, programs, and communities, and that there is an assessment that allows you to measure the use of the program or practice. In other words, the EBP needs to be teachable, learnable, doable, and readily assessed in practice. The following criteria need to be in place to ensure that your EBP is usable:

- Clear description of the program
- Clear essential functions that define the program
- Operational definitions of essential functions
- Practical Fidelity Assessment

Implementation Drivers

It is during the Exploration Stage that general capacity to support the EBP begins. [Implementation Drivers](#) are activities and supports needed for staff include creating readiness, providing staff training, developing [Coaching Service Delivery Plans](#), and identifying performance or Fidelity Assessments. Organization capacity supports for the EBP include such things as revising or developing administrative policies and procedures to ensure system alignment, identifying technology and data needs to support implementation, and obtaining necessary resources and community connections to move forward.

Create Readiness

Readiness for change is an essential condition for successful change. Creating "**readiness for change**" is an active component of the Exploration Stage. During the Exploration Stage, individuals typically need more information and time to process what the needs are, and what the EBP or change might mean for them. Encouragement, incentives, or demands to "just do it" typically do not lead to the "action" hoped for by the leaders or management team. Data show about 5-15% of these efforts lead to intended outcomes (Vernez et a., 2006). What is needed is relevant and detailed information so individuals and organizations that are being asked to change go into the process well informed and "ready" for change.

Readiness is an under-emphasized part of the implementation process. Proceeding with implementation prematurely can lead to both ineffective and expensive implementation efforts. In some cases, leadership or management teams within an organization or system have fully explored a "change initiative" and have decided on a course of action. The same leaders and managers then are surprised when collaborators, staff, or colleagues (hearing about the intended change for the first time) display what some call "resistance to change." **Resistance** occurs when people are asked prematurely to move to action. They are resistant to change because they are not "ready for change." It is the responsibility of managers and Implementation Teams to minimize resistance that is the result of poor planning and lack of useful communication.

Creating readiness for implementing evidence-based practices in human services is not a simple matter. Given the breadth, depth, intensity, and duration of the efforts involved in implementing EBPs to reach individuals in communities statewide, states and local organizations need to engage in Exploration Stage activities at each level of system functioning.

Improvement Cycles

Data driven decision making plays an instrumental role in selecting a Usable Innovation during the Exploration Stage. Data are collected through needs assessments, program and practice assessments, and staff and organizational readiness assessments. The information gathered is used to reach a decision about the best EBP to adopt to meet the needs of the community being served.

Dissemination Plan

During the Exploration Stage, the Implementation Team will need to identify who their Critical Perspectives are and develop a Dissemination Plan to include them in meaningful ways in their work. While the actual implementation work may be vested in the few individuals who comprise the Implementation Team, to promote sustainability it is critical to involve the wider range of interested perspectives in the process. A carefully crafted plan allows for sharing of information with staff, families, and relevant community entities as well as seeking their input and using their expertise. Other system participants such as advisory boards, regional and state agencies should be engaged as well so they can become an active part of the Improvement Cycles that will be used to remove potential roadblocks and establish procedures and protocols to facilitate the work.

Topic 4: Installation Stage

New evidence-based programs or practices (EBPs) are not yet being delivered during the Installation Stage. Rather, this is when needed organizational and personal competencies are established to ensure the successful implementation of the selected EBP. After making a decision to begin implementing a new EBP, there are tasks that need to be accomplished before the change in practice actually begins. These activities reflect the Installation Stage of implementation. Activities during the Installation Stage create the infrastructure and make the instrumental changes necessary.

Implementation Teams

During the Installation Stage, Implementation Teams actively build their own capacity to support the implementation of the selected EBP. They partner with program developers, external consultants, and intermediary organizations to ensure they have the competencies needed to support and sustain implementation at the staff level as well as at the organization level. At this stage, Implementation Teams work together to assure the availability of resources necessary to initiate the project, including the development of the implementation infrastructure.

Organization managers often think of a new program or practice as "plug and play" and are surprised by the need for preparation and resources. Many attempts to use a new EBP end at the Installation Stage when the lack of resources becomes evident. Implementation Teams help organizations anticipate these needs and help them prepare for the next Stage.

Implementation Teams actively develop the supports needed to initiate the new EBP and use it as intended. Teams put necessary organizational supports into place (e.g., funding, human resource strategies, new policies and procedures, materials). They create referral mechanisms, reporting frameworks, and outcome expectations. And importantly, Implementation Teams create and install the supports needed to improve the confidence and confidence of staff (e.g. Training, Coaching, Data Systems). This is all part of establishing a new site, community and organizational climate and culture.

Usable Innovations

Before implementing a selected EBP, it's important to have a clear definition of the program or practice. Defining an EBP in sufficient detail allows the organization to train

staff and administrators to implement it with fidelity, replicate it across all sites, and observe and measure the use of the program or practice. See Usable Innovation.

Implementation Drivers

Selection of staff, identifying sources and providing initial Training for staff, identifying resources for Coaching, finding or establishing Fidelity Assessment tools, locating office space, assuring access to materials and equipment, and so on are among the resources that need to be in place before the work can be done effectively (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Saldana et al., 2012). During the Installation Stage, Implementation Teams work together to secure the availability of these resources, including the development of their organization's implementation infrastructure. These activities and their associated "**start-up costs**" (which may add to first year costs) are necessary first steps to begin any implementation of a new program or practice.

"All organizations [and systems] are designed, intentionally or unwittingly, to achieve precisely the results they get." (Darling, 2005).

From an implementation perspective, we know that successful and sustainable implementation of EBPs always requires organization and systems change. Implementation Drivers promote work needed for this change including selecting and/or repurposing of staff, scheduling team meetings, aligning policies and procedures, purchasing equipment, finding space and developing the competence of those bringing the changes to staff members. Any of this work that can be done before the Initial Implementation Stage will reduce the number of potential problems later.

Select the first practitioners

Who is qualified to carry out the new program or practices? The Installation Stage includes identifying specific behavioral characteristics needed to carry out the work, then developing methods for recruiting and selecting practitioners with those characteristics and with the necessary prerequisite knowledge and/or skills. At any level of the organization, this decision of "who goes first" must be made: Which sites, which organization staff members, which Regional Implementation Team, which content experts and practitioners have the most potential or at least can be developed quickly? Careful consideration and mutual selection at this point will reduce potential "push-back" as the harder work begins. Just remember, the person who is first to volunteer may not be the optimal choice!

Develop Selection protocols

Selection of the leaders and early practitioners for your current (and future) improvement initiatives will be crucial to successful use of the EBP. To expedite this Selection process, the development of selection and/or interviewing protocols to use as screening devices will be helpful. Prior to actually selecting staff, the process will develop consensus in the group regarding the skills and characteristics that are necessary. A protocol will keep the focus on specific criteria, keep the process consistent, and make it more likely for choices to be acceptable to the whole group. If necessary, it may also make it easier to later explain why someone was (or was not) selected. Once created, the protocol can continue to support Implementation Teams in selection activities for future work.

Develop Coaching Plan

From the research of Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (2002), we have learned how important coaching is to promote actual use of a new program or practice in the service setting by practitioners so that consumers can actually benefit from these strategies. Review the table below. Note the difference coaching makes in terms of actual use of a program or practice.

Table 4.1 Percent of Participants Who Demonstrate Knowledge, Demonstrate New Skills in a Training Setting, and Use New Skills in the Classroom Outcomes

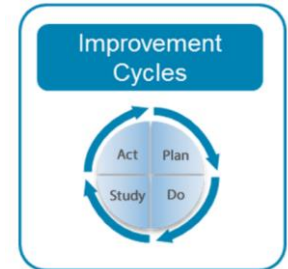|	Outcomes		
Training Components	Knowledge	Skill Demonstration	Use in Classroom
Theory and Discussion	10%	5%	0%
+ Demonstration in Training	30%	20%	0%
+ Practice & Feedback in Training	60%	60%	5%
+ Coaching in Classroom	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**

(Joyce and Showers, 2002)

Since strategies practitioners use on site involve skills of varying complexity, it is not enough to know a strategy. They must be able to use it with fluency in order to get

positive student outcomes. [Coaching](#) provides "craft" information along with advice, encouragement, and opportunities to practice and use skills specific to the EBP.

Improvement Cycles

Implementation Teams use [Improvement Cycles](#) to gather data during the Installation Stage to ensure that general and practice-specific capacities are sufficient to begin implementation confidently, and that communication is happening as intended both within and between levels of the organization, team members and key individuals and groups.

Evaluate readiness of data systems

To evaluate success of an EBP, an organization must examine both how it affects recipient outcomes and determine the fidelity of the use of the EBP by the practitioners. If there is only marginal (or no) improvement, does this mean the EBP itself is the problem? Or is the problem that the implementation of the EBP was not effective? A [Decision Support Data System](#) designed to quickly and effectively capture both fidelity and outcome data can provide an answer to that question. Once established, the system provides data that are reliable (consistently measure), valid (accurately measure), accessible for decision-making, and support frequent use of data during the implementation process.

Establish communication links and protocols

Regularly scheduled, frequent, formal, transparent, and accurate communication between and among the practice level (e.g., program/site) and the policy level (e.g., organization/community/state) creates an opportunity to continuously examine and improve the process of implementation. Through these communication links, teams can use [Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycles](#) to quickly troubleshoot issues as they arise at the local level and remove roadblocks that slow or derail use of new strategies. Implementation Teams use Improvement Cycles to rapidly solve problems and help keep the focus on using the EBP to improve individual outcomes.

More systemic issues and challenges involving multiple organizational levels also benefit from a [linked communication](#) process. This process of creating and then using communication feedback loops for Policy Enhanced Practices and Practice Informed Policies helps create a more aligned system that supports new ways of work.

Topic 5: Initial Implementation Stage

During the Initial Implementation Stage, the new evidence-based practice or program (EBP) is first put into place and made available to consumers. The key focus of this stage is on continuous improvement. In Initial Implementation, staff are attempting to use newly learned skills (e.g., the program or practice) in the context of an organization, that is itself just learning how to change to accommodate and support the new ways of work. This is the most fragile Stage where the awkwardness associated with trying new things and the difficulties associated with changing old ways of work are strong motivations for giving up and going back to comfortable routines (business as usual).

Implementation Teams

Implementation Teams work together within and across levels of the organization to support the implementation infrastructure and ensure high fidelity implementation of the EBP. Implementation Teams place a heavy emphasis on the systematic review of data during this stage to ensure that any changes to the model or approach are purposeful and planned, rather than reactionary or opportunistic.

The Initial Implementation Stage is a real challenge. Massive investments in encouraging local sites and communities to use the EBPs lead to about 10% use of these as intended (Vernez et al., 2006). The failure is not in the program or practice – they are supported by research indicating they are quite effective when used as intended. The problems occur in the lack of support for implementation best practices to support the full and effective use of the EBP. Establishing and sustaining changes to the point of integration into daily work is not likely unless there is external support for change at the practice level (support from coaches; Joyce & Showers, 2002), organization level (support from Implementation Teams; Aladjem & Borman, 2006; Nord & Tucker, 1987), and system level (support from Implementation Teams; Schofield, 2004).

During the Initial Implementation Stage all the components of the EBP are in place: initial practitioners begin using the new program and practices, the implementation supports begin to function, and the site, local and state systems begin to change to facilitate the use of the EBP and realize intended benefits. The Implementation Team is alert to see if the efforts in the Exploration and Installation Stages have secured the resources necessary for a successful launch.

Implementation Drivers

The Initial Implementation Stage is the time to see whether the practitioners involved in the new work are mentally prepared for change and have been provided with sufficient knowledge and skill to use the EBP well. This is a fragile stage since people feel awkward when trying new things. While struggling to make this new way of work their own, some will be tempted to seek comfort by reverting to their prior practices. Implementation Team members ensure that the Coaching and Data Systems are functioning to offer support and encouragement to staff as they help manage these new expectations. Celebrations of progress motivate continuing use of the new program or practice.

Site data, observations of staff, and practitioner reports further inform what, if any, changes are needed in future trainings and coaching routines. This allows for adjustment before moving into the Full Implementation Stage.

In earlier stages, the Implementation Team and leadership determined how sites and organizations (e.g. scheduling, staffing) might need to change to create a Hospitable Environment for staff using the new EBP. During the Initial Implementation Stage, the plan is put into action. Since no plan is complete, unanticipated changes will add to the "awkward" moments as adjustments to the plan occur. (Note: Leadership and addressing adaptive challenges can help move through this awkward stage.)

The motto for Initial Implementation is "Get started, then get better!" To play an instrument, learn to drive, or initiate anything requiring new skills, we know it will take time to become good at it. However, until you actually begin, you will not know your strengths or what needs additional attention. Get started, then get better!

Improvement Cycles

PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) Cycles

As the new work is launched, practitioners may experience similar, consistent barriers to using an EBP as intended. The key activities of the Initial Implementation Stage focus on strategies to promote continuous improvement. Improvement Cycles make the connection between what we have built (form) and how well it serves (function). PDSA

Cycles are one strategy Implementation Teams often use during the Initial Implementation stage to make meaningful changes, alleviate barriers, embed solutions, and improve intended outcomes. The activities of PDSA Cycles include:

- Plan — Identify barriers or challenges, using data whenever possible, and specify the plan to move programs or practices forward as well as the outcomes that will be monitored
- Do — carry out the strategies or plan as specified to address the challenges
- Study — use the measures identified during the planning phase and collected during the 'do' phase to assess and track progress, and
- Act — Make changes to the next iteration of the plan to improve implementation

Make use of Practice-Policy Feedback Loops to resolve systems issues

Policies that govern our work must be facilitators to any new practices (Policy Enabled Practices). An examination of the use of the practices at their intended level can be used to influence the development and modification of those policies and procedures (Practice Informed Policy).

For example:

- After restructuring roles for some staff members, the evaluation process is still based on their former position descriptions. The position descriptions and evaluation tools and process need to be updated and aligned to support the use of the practice
- Peer coaching is a component of a district's selected EBP; however, a district policy exists that a teacher may be out of the classroom only one day per semester for professional development. The policy needs to be rewritten to align with the need for multiple classroom visits and the necessary debriefing after each visit.

For these kinds of issues, solutions may require support from leadership, policy makers or other key partners of the larger system. Implementation Teams engage leadership in bi-directional Practice-Policy Feedback Loops to identify and resolve potential roadblocks at multiple levels of the system. Through this early "diagnosis" and resolution, negative impacts on effective use of EBPs can be minimized and student benefits can be realized.

Communication links and protocols

As this new process unfolds, all interested individuals need to stay in communication to maintain the flow of information. During the Initial Implementation Stage, Teams are tapping resources, staff members are spending time and energy on the new way of business, and frustrations can run high. To maintain "buy-in" it is crucial to have transparency at all levels of the organization. Using agreed-upon Communication Protocols keeps everyone "in the loop" by providing updates on progress, a venue for questions, and opportunities for clarifications and problem-solving.

Topic 6: Full Implementation Stage

Full implementation of an evidence-based program or practice (EBP) occurs once the new learning becomes integrated into practitioner, organizational, and community practices, policies, and procedures. Over time, the EBP becomes "standard practice" and a new operationalization of "business as usual" takes its place in the setting (Faggin, 1985). During Full Implementation vigilance over site practices and data reviews continue as more staff members participate, turnover occurs, and Improvement Cycles continue.

Full Implementation is reached when 50% or more of the intended practitioners, staff, or team members are using an EBP with fidelity and good outcomes. For example, if there are 10 teachers who are attempting to use a program for math instruction, 5 of the teachers would need to be using the program as intended as measured by a practical Fidelity Assessment. Full Implementation is difficult to achieve and sustain without the necessary implementation supports described herein (Fixsen, Blase, Timbers, & Wolf, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Implementation Teams

In the Full Implementation Stage the new ways of providing services are now the standard ways of work where practitioners and staff routinely provide high quality services and the implementation supports are part of the way districts and schools carry out their work. Implementation Teams are built into organization structures and are essential contributors to the ongoing success of using the EBP. Staff, administrators, and leaders come and go and each new person needs to develop the competencies to effectively carry out the EBP and its implementation supports. Managers and administrators come and go and need to continually adjust organizational supports to facilitate the work of practitioners. Systems continue to change and impact organizations and practitioners. Implementation of the EBP continues to be developed and programs already in place continue to be improved. The work of Implementation Teams is to ensure that the gains in the use of effective practices are maintained and improved over time and through transitions of leaders and staff.

Implementation Drivers

The Implementation Team will continue to look at each of the Implementation Drivers during this Stage to monitor their effectiveness in "full throttle" mode. Continuous quality

improvement of the Implementation Drivers is a hallmark of Full Implementation. Has there been turnover in staff on the Implementation Team? Are new staff members on board who need orientation and training? Are new staff members getting increased Coaching compared to staff who are meeting fidelity? Is Coaching being provided to all staff? Is Coaching contributing to staff satisfaction and improvements in fidelity? Are the Data Systems providing timely, actionable, reliable, and valid data? Are data regularly used for decision-making? How are the stakeholders reacting to the widespread use of these practices?

Policy changes/development for sustainability

When Full Implementation has been achieved and is being sustained, people sometimes forget that changes in policy and procedures can adversely impact use of the EBP as intended. Throughout the life of the EBP the Implementation Team together with leadership pays attention to the degree to which policies and procedures help or hinder implementation and outcomes. Have you paid attention to the changes needed in policy and procedures with ongoing active use of the i\Improvement Cycles? It can take some time to change policies even after the Implementation Team recognizes the need to do so. There may be future EBPs which will require the same type of changes in policy as the current one. Now is the time to get comfortable with 'institutionalizing' the use of Improvement Cycles to strengthen the infrastructure so you are ready to go next time!

Improvement Cycles

Fidelity scores signal Full Implementation. Fidelity measures are identified and/or developed during Exploration and Installation. Fidelity measures are used during Initial Implementation to improve the competency of new Implementation Team members as they support teacher and staff learning and use of EBPs. When 50% of the practitioners meet fidelity criteria, it is likely that organizations and sites have changed and are providing routine support for the full use of the program or practice. Does the criterion of 50% seem low to you? That mark is actually challenging to meet and sustain given staff and leadership turnover. To obtain Full Implementation, Implementation Teams are essential to assuring the supports are in place to reach this stage of implementation and to sustain that level of excellence for successive cohorts of students and staff.

Evaluation for expected outcomes

When 50% of the staff are using the EBP fully and effectively, it is legitimate to anticipate robust recipient outcomes. At this point, there is no doubt that the EBP is in place and is being used as intended across a site. Full Implementation creates the opportunity to see if the programs/practices/systems are producing the anticipated outcomes. During Full Implementation, it is appropriate to analyze the results from the selected or created assessments for individual outcomes coupled with implementation fidelity checks. Based on the results of this evaluation process, action plans are created or updated (e.g., reporting to interested individuals, celebrations, re-examination of drivers). Sustainability requires tenacity. First, you got started, then you got better. Now may be your biggest challenge – maintaining the quality over time and across staff through purposeful use of the Implementation Drivers and Improvement Cycles. The goal is to have the use of these frameworks become second nature.

Topic 7: Stage-Based Planning

Stage-based planning can help Implementation Teams and other interested individuals plan effectively for the activities, infrastructures and supportive contexts that need to be addressed at each stage. When activities are matched to Implementation Stages, it can increase the likelihood of moving successfully through each stage and better prepare for the challenges of the next stage.

A 2015 Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation (OPRE) Brief, An Integrated Stage-Based Framework for Implementation of Early Childhood Programs and Systems (Metz, Naoom, Halle, & Bartley, 2015) provides a definition, and examples, along with an available Implementation Stages Planning Tool.

For more information, download OPRE Brief.

Topic 8: Stages of Implementation Analysis: Where are We? Planning Tool

Purpose of Tool

The Implementation Stages Planning Tool will help the Implementation Team plan for and/or assess the use of stage-based activities to improve the success of implementation efforts for evidence-based programs or practices (EBPs).

The tool can be used to self-assess current stage related activities (e.g., "We are in the midst of Exploration") or past efforts related to a stage (e.g., "We just completed most of Installation? "How did we do?" "What did we miss?").

For effective use of this tool follow these steps:

- Define the desired function of the tool in advance (e.g., Assess current status? Action planning?).
- For self-assessment, Implementation Team or Implementation Lead (individual tasked with monitoring implementation activities) completes the entire assessment to achieve "strength of stage" score for each stage of implementation.
- For Items marked "Initiated or Partially in Place" and "Not Yet Initiated," Team develops Implementation Stages Action Plans to outline next steps or determine what needs to be revisited.
- The tool has items relevant to each stage and can be used throughout all stages to check back or when implementation dips occur (e.g., change in leadership, staff turnover, etc.). The Implementation Team also should feel comfortable adding stage-related items that are specific to the EBP and process in their program, site, community or state.

Summary

Implementation Stages serve as a guide in facilitating the steps Implementation Teams need to take over time to build capacity and infrastructure to implement an evidence-based practice to fidelity.

Key Takeaways

- The 4 Implementation Stages are Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, and Full Implementation and each have functions specific to the Stage.
- The Rationale for Stage-Based Implementation:
  - Starting with an awareness that implementation occurs in stages allows for intentional planning for the change process.
- When we pay attention to Implementation Stages we can:
  - Match our activities to that stage and increase the likelihood of moving successfully through the stage and on to the next stage
  - Prepare for the activities and challenges that we will face in the next stage
  - Increase the likelihood of sustained implementation of evidence-based practices.

Resources

Read

- [Handout: Implementation Stages Overview](#)
  Implementation Stages outline the integrated, non-linear process of deciding to use an effective innovation and having it fully in place to realize outcomes. Active implementation stages are Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation and Full Implementation.

- [District Readiness – Examples from Practice](#)
  Two district examples, one using data to assess readiness and the other using Practice-Policy Feedback Loops to scale and sustain implementation.

Watch

- [Lesson: Implementation Stages Planning Tool](#)

This interactive lesson describes the key functions of the Stages of Implementation Analysis planning tool and high level activities related to the stages of implementation\

- Implementation Quick Start
  This 5-minute presentation provides a quick overview of Implementation Science and the National Implementation Research Network's Active Implementation Frameworks.

Listen

- Implementation Science for Educators Podcast (Implementation Reflections)
  Implementation Science for Educators Podcast: Implementation Reflections

Reflect

- Activity: Getting started with Implementation Stages
  How do you start engaging in stage-based implementation activities? Review the Active Implementation Overview material on Implementation Stages, then consider these questions. We encourage you to discuss these with your team and/or to write down your responses.

- Activity: Which Stage is this effort in?
  Review a set of 5 scenarios. For each scenario mark one of the following:
  A) Exploration B) Installation C) Initial Implementation D) Full Implementation E) None of these

Apply

- Tool: Implementation Stages Planning
  The Implementation Stages Planning tool supports the identification of the current stage of implementation, as well as supports planning and improvement

- Implementation Stages: Action Plan
  An action plan is simply a way of guiding the implementation team's discussion and identification of the next right steps in implementing your program, then holding ourselves accountable for accomplishing those activities within a specified timeline.

For additional resources, visit: https://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/resources/

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