



Implementation Specialist Practice Profile Skills and Competencies for Implementation Practitioners

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Allison Metz
Laura Louison
Caryn Ward
Katie Burke

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Implementation Specialist Practice Profile

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of the Implementation Specialist Practice Profile is to identify the skills and competencies needed by implementation specialists and communities to support effective implementation and scaling of evidence-informed practices and policies to improve outcomes for people and communities. Implementation researchers have identified constructs, variables, and strategies that support the sustainable use of evidence to improve outcomes. These constructs and strategies have been synthesized into frameworks and conceptual models that provide a basis for the science of implementation and are used by implementation specialists to support communities to implement, scale, and sustain evidence-informed practices for impact. However, building the capacity of systems to build and use evidence takes a different set of skills and competencies than needed for professionals conducting implementation research.

The Implementation Specialist Practice Profile outlines the skills and competencies needed to build the capacity of practitioners and communities to effectively use evidence to improve outcomes. These skills and competencies are informed by philosophical principles that guide the work of implementation specialists and defined by core components that describe a range of activities implementation specialists conduct as they provide implementation support. Skills and competencies were identified through a literature review, document review, interviews, and vetting and consensus building (Metz, 2016). Content validation is planned for the last quarter of 2018 to refine the skills and competencies and ensure they are relevant, understandable, helpful, and measurable. Usability testing will be conducted with implementation specialists working in a range of contexts.

Philosophical Principles

Implementation specialists are guided by specific values and principles in their day to day work, including:

- Empathy – approach the change facilitation process with regard for others as legitimate, respected, and valuable contributors to the development and growth of the model and associated processes and outcomes (Jordan, 2016)
- Curiosity – ask questions, engage with evidence and ways of knowing across content areas and disciplines, tolerate uncertainty
- Commitment – bring patience, resilience, and willingness to challenge the status quo to the process; create readiness, and invest in building effective teams (Fam, Smith, & Cordell, 2016)
- Methodical – access and integrate scientific findings to make informed decisions for stakeholders and service beneficiaries (Shapiro, 2002)
- Transdisciplinary – embrace and use different ways of knowing, different ways of being, and diversity of discipline (content) expertise to bring about mutual and transformative learning

Constructs and Core Components

Implementation specialists conduct a range of activities to provide implementation support. The Implementation Specialist Practice Profile is comprised of three constructs; each construct is made up of a number of core components with related activities. The Constructs include the three conceptual areas that organize the work of a Implementation Specialist including co-creation, ongoing Improvement and sustaining change. Each Construct is defined by a set of a Core Components that describe the functions performed within each of these areas, and a set of activities that represent what Implementation Specialists might “say and do” in their day-to-day work

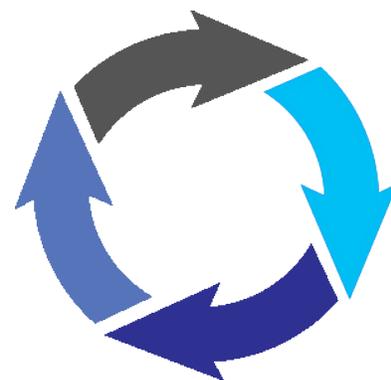
- **Co-Creation:** Implementation specialists support the active involvement of stakeholders in all stages of the production and implementation process resulting in service models, approaches, and practices that are contextualized and tailored to settings (Metz & Bartley, 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The goal of contextualization is to ensure there is a match between programs and practices and the values, needs, skills, and resources of those delivering interventions/approaches, systems stakeholders, and service beneficiaries (Horner, Blitz, & Ross, 2014). *Core components that support co-creation include co-learning, brokering, addressing power differentials, co-design, and tailored support.*



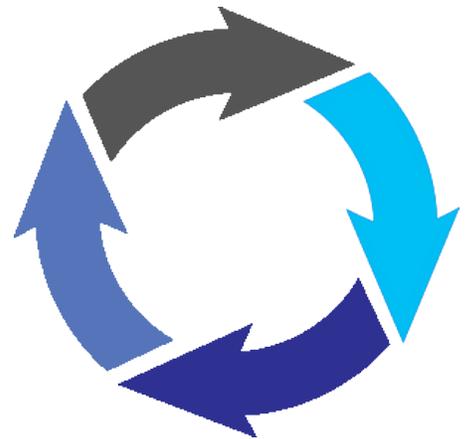
- **Ongoing Improvement:** Implementation specialists support the use of quantitative and qualitative feedback at each stage of implementation, through regular individual, team, and stakeholder debriefings to support improvement (Damschroder et al., 2009). Ongoing improvement includes dedicating time for reflecting or debriefing to promote shared learning and improvements along the way. Ongoing feedback on interventions and approaches should use practical, relevant measures of progress, and organizational learning should be a core value of the implementation setting. *Core components that support ongoing improvement include assessing need and context, applying and integrating implementation science approaches, and conducting improvement cycles.*



- **Sustaining Change:** Implementation specialists support the sustainability of interventions and approaches by developing a shared vision and mutual accountability, building on existing relationships, problem solving and resource sharing, and maintaining collaboration over time (Green et al., 2016). Implementation specialists seek to understand and address the dynamic changes that occur over time in the use of interventions/approaches, the characteristics of the practice settings, and the broader system that establishes how services are delivered (Chambers, Glasgow, & Stange, 2014). Sustainability has evolved from being considered as the endgame of a translational process to a suggested ‘adaptation phase’ that integrates and institutionalizes interventions within local organizational and cultural contexts. Interventions and approaches are classified as sustained when the core elements are maintained or delivered with integrity after initial implementation support has been withdrawn, and adequate capacity exists to continue maintaining these core elements (Wiltsey Stirman et al., 2012). *Core components that support sustaining change include growing and sustaining relationships, building capacity, cultivating leadership, and facilitation.*



Implementation Specialist Practice Profile: Constructs, Core Components and Core Activities



Co-Creation	Ongoing Improvement	Sustaining Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-learning • Brokering • Address Power Differentials • Co-Design • Tailored Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess Need & Context • Apply and Integrate Implementation Science Approaches • Conduct Improvement Cycles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow and Sustain Relationships • Build Capacity • Cultivate Leadership • Facilitation





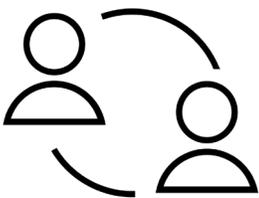
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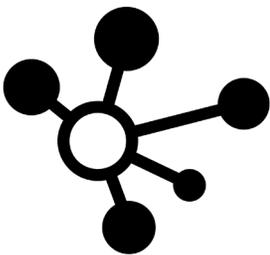
The goal of contextualization is to ensure there is a match between the program or practice and the values, needs, skills, and resources of those delivering interventions, systems stakeholders, and service beneficiaries (Horner, Blitz, & Ross, 2014).

Core components that support co-creation include co-learning, brokering, addressing power differentials, co-design, and tailored support.

Core Components	Core Activities
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- Co-learning:** Work collaboratively with systems stakeholders to learn how applied knowledge on implementation science can be effectively used in the local context. Implementation specialists are open to learning about the history and current priorities in the local context in order to assess the most feasible and relevant uses of implementation science.
 - Understand the system and organizational context and culture.
 - Create spaces for new ideas to emerge (space can be created through asking questions and structured facilitation processes; and physically created through meeting places and room set up).
 - Negotiate and build trust and respect for all perspectives.
 - Communicate and listen for the purpose of mutual understanding and for collaborative integration of different knowledge perspectives.
 - Seek ways to introduce and get buy-in for an implementation science approach that fits with existing programs, practices and processes.
 - Synthesize diverse perspectives of thought, and check for understanding.
 - Seek opportunities to reflect on the problem, the implementation specialist’s personal experience, and the intention and interaction with others.
 - Support collaborative implementation planning.



- Brokering:** Enable knowledge exchange and sharing among stakeholders to increase understanding of diverse perspectives and increase the application of implementation science to improve outcomes.
 - Connect otherwise disconnected individuals or groups in the system by providing advice and serving as a relational resource.
 - Position themselves “in between” people or groups in a system network who are disconnected but whose connections are vital for the success of the change effort.
 - Share evidence and data and promote opportunities for stakeholders and team members to engage with others in the use of data.



Core Components	Core Activities
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- **Address power differentials:** Address power imbalances between community members, stakeholders in the wider system, technical assistance providers and researchers by building trust, supporting two-way communication, cultivating opportunities for mutual consultation and identifying many accountabilities.

- Include diverse expertise in team discussions.
- Position the range of service beneficiary experiences at the center of decision-making and implementation activities.
- Recognize and acknowledge loss of status and authority that can impede buy-in and engagement.
- Develop an evolving 'collective view' or 'shared understanding,' rather than pushing for consensus which is often artificial and perpetuates power structures.



- **Co-design:** Co-design tools, resources, and models through iterative processes and consensus building.

- Co-design tools, products, processes, governance structures, service models, and policy.
- Facilitate design-centered activities that use collective sense-making and negotiation.
- Conduct cyclical tests of change to iteratively improve prototypes of tools, products and processes to support implementation efforts. Ongoing testing and improvement of tools, products, processes, governance structures, service models, and policy to support implementation efforts.



- **Tailored support:** Determine frequency, duration and intensity of implementation supports based on the needs, goals and context of the implementation team and systems stakeholders. Implementation specialists refrain from assumptions that a certain level and type of support is always needed.

- Assess and agree to the implementation support to be made available to each individual site and/or collectively to a number of sites.
- Schedule virtual and onsite meetings based on the goals of the team and stakeholders.
- Tailor support based on "just in time" needs of the team and systems stakeholders.
- Assess the effectiveness of the level of support in meeting needs, goals, and context of the implementation effort

Ongoing Improvement:



Implementation specialists support the use of quantitative and qualitative feedback at each stage of implementation accompanied with regular personal, team, and stakeholder debriefings to support improvement (Damschroder, et al., 2009). Ongoing improvement includes dedicating time for reflecting or debriefing to promote shared learning and improvements along the way. Ongoing feedback on interventions and approaches should use practical, relevant measures of progress, and organizational learning should be a core value of the implementation setting.

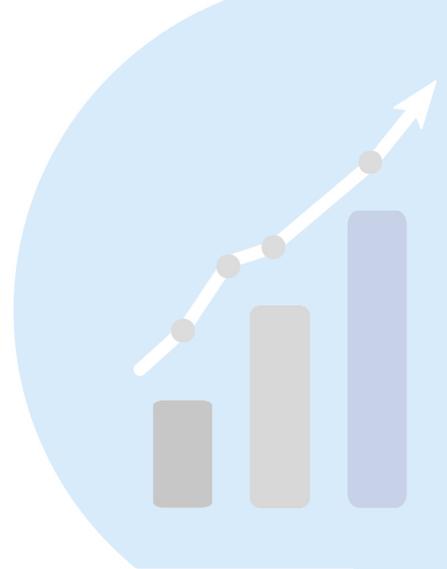
Core components that support ongoing improvement include assessing need and context, applying and integrating implementation science approaches, and conducting improvement cycles.

Core Component

Core Activities

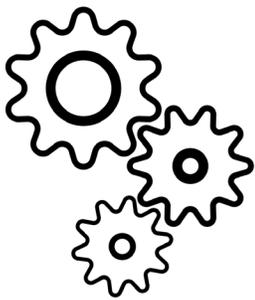


- **Assess need and context:** Work with stakeholders to understand population and community needs and the extent to which potential interventions meet identified needs for particular target populations. Support assessments of contextual fit between proposed interventions/approaches and the local service settings before moving forward with implementation. Value the perspectives of multiple stakeholders when identifying the problem space and considering alternatives for addressing problems and improving outcomes.
- Clarify stakeholder needs and expectations to help stakeholders understand each other's perspectives regarding the problem to be addressed.
- Use data-driven inquiry methods to support 'discovery' processes (e.g., needs assessment data, stakeholder analysis, mapping of existing services, initiative inventory).
- Use and/or conduct evidence reviews to determine relevance and fit of identified interventions and approaches with identified needs
- Assess the contextual fit of proposed intervention(s)/ approach(es) with the values, needs, skills, and resources available in the service setting.
- Assess the contextual fit of the proposed intervention(s)/ approach(es) with the current political, funding and systems and organizational landscape.
- Identify and respond to other changes in the system which could affect implementation.
- Identify and support mitigating actions to manage risks and assumptions for the change effort (e.g., assumptions regarding resources, commitments or buy-in; risks or loss for different stakeholders).
- Involve stakeholders in identifying and understanding the implications and consequences of change efforts.
- Work with stakeholders to build strong contextual fit before moving forward with implementation efforts.



Core Component

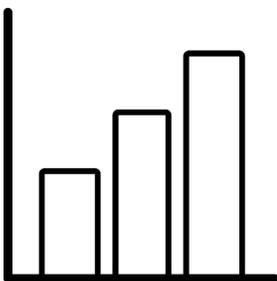
Core Activities



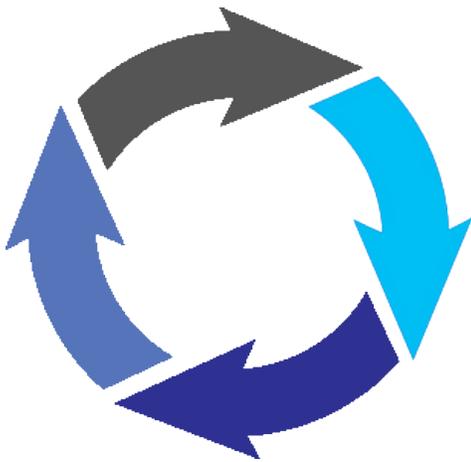
- Apply and integrate implementation science approaches:** Apply and integrate appropriate approaches by using systems thinking, participatory methods, and knowledge management and exchange (Bammer, 2005). Systems thinking involves examining how implementation efforts fit within a whole system and choosing appropriate implementation approaches that will address these whole systems issues. Participatory methods recognize that key stakeholders should contribute to choosing implementation approaches. Knowledge management and exchange includes summarizing and synthesizing how a range of implementation approaches address critical issues in order to make informed choices about the approach that will be most suitable for a particular context or setting.

- Remain up to date on implementation science concepts, frameworks and research
- Assess and make judgements about appropriate implementation frameworks and approaches for different contexts and settings
- Include stakeholders in decision-making regarding the selection of implementation approach or framework
- Apply and integrate a range of implementation frameworks, approaches, tools and resources in different service and policy settings

- Gather and use quantitative and qualitative feedback about the progress and quality of implementation accompanied with regular personal and team debriefing to support improvement (Damschroder et al., 2009).
- Embed processes for data to be collected, analyzed, and reported frequently as a way to monitor progress and to make decisions about the ongoing planning, implementation, and outcomes of an intervention/approach (Chinman, Imm, & Wandersman, 2004).
- Ensure that implementation teams have access to valid and reliable data on how the intervention/approach and implementation infrastructure supports are functioning to guide decision-making along the way.
- Develop capacity to assess and use data for decision-making through modelling, instruction and coaching.
- Dedicate time for reflecting or debriefing throughout implementation as a strategy to promote shared learning and improvements along the way.
- Use feedback loops that connect policy and practice, identify and address implementation barriers, and ensure that improvements made during implementation are communicated to all stakeholders.
- Support implementation teams to prioritize needs, challenges, or problems to be addressed through the use of data.



- Conduct improvement cycles:** Use data throughout implementation to purposefully reexamine implementation processes and continuously improve practice, organization and systems changes. Through the ongoing use of data, implementation specialists conduct cyclical tests of change to ensure iterative improvements in implementation processes.



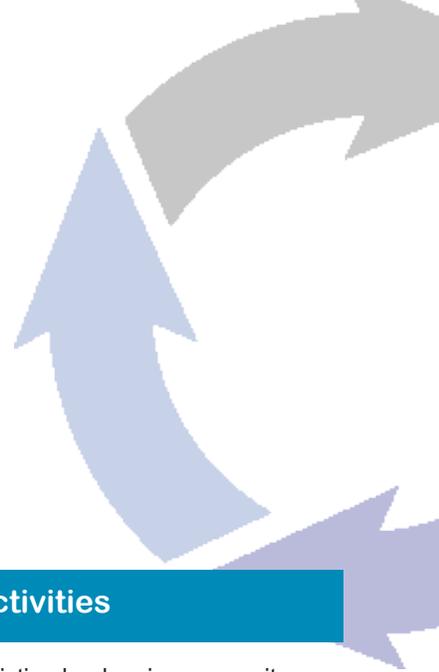
Sustaining Change:

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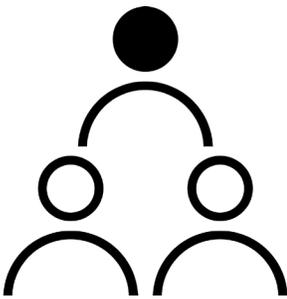
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Core components that support sustaining change include growing and sustaining relationships, building capacity, cultivating leadership, and facilitation.

Core Component	Core Activities
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grow and sustain relationships: Grow and sustain diverse, authentic, respectful and trusting relationships with stakeholders to guide and support implementation and systems change efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build trust with others by modeling transparent action and accountability. Engage in ongoing self-assessment and diagnostic assessment of relationship strengths and weaknesses. Encourage and make use of feedback to strengthen relationships. Regulate distress in relationships by creating space for stakeholders to discuss challenges and dispute assumptions when conflict emerges.
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build capacity: Increase the knowledge, skills, motivation, and attitudes to achieve their goals. Successful capacity building includes attention to all types of capacity (psychological, behavioral and structural) at all levels of the system (individual, organization, network, and system). This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intervention/approach-specific capacity: The knowledge, skills, motivation and attitudes about a specific intervention or challenge, such as an understanding of successful evidence-based programs (Flaspohler et al., 2008) General capacity: The knowledge, skills, motivation and attitudes required for overall functioning and achievement, such as bookkeeping (Flaspohler et al., 2008) Analytic capacity: The knowledge, skills, motivation and attitudes to gather information about a problem, analyze patterns and dynamics, and reflect critically on root causes and potential solutions (Sorgenfrei & Wrigley, 2005) Adaptive capacity: The knowledge, skills, motivation and attitudes to adjust actions and strategy in response to analysis (Sorgenfrei & Wrigley, 2005) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with stakeholders to assess capacity strengths and needs related to mission and goals. Provide or secure training needed for partners to gain capacity, and connect with others who can provide training, modeling and coaching. Model the use of knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, and practices for stakeholders to demonstrate application in a real-world setting. Coach stakeholders' use of knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, and practices in their daily work so that partners can gain confidence and competency. Build individual, organizational and network capacity to respond to future external and internal changes. Identify and implement organizational processes and structures to develop implementation capacity (e.g., human resources, technology) Identify and exploit opportunities to build system wide capacity which will support implementation.



Core Component	Core Activities
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- **Cultivate leadership:** Identify and strengthen leaders to be systems leaders who work across organization and system boundaries and silos. Successful leadership cultivation intentionally fosters space for new and emerging leaders, particularly those without historic or current access to power.

- Identify emerging and existing leaders in community and/or system through the use of power analysis or systems mapping tools for this purpose.
- Use appreciative inquiry and reflection techniques to help leaders assess their roles and capacity within the system.
- Support emerging or growing leaders to share responsibilities, such as co-facilitating meetings, so that leaders can gain confidence and competency.
- When leadership transitions occur, implementation specialists work with stakeholders to provide planning, continuity, analysis and support as needed to ease the transition.

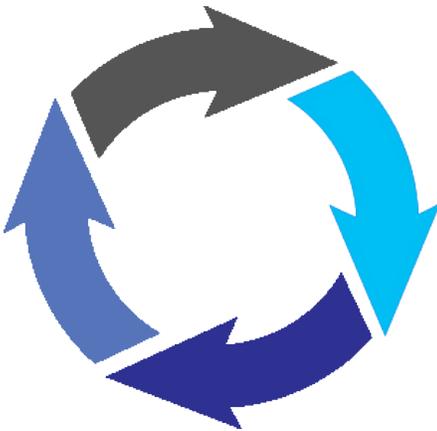


- **Facilitation:** Enable a process of participatory problem solving and support that occurs in a context of a recognized need for improvement and supportive interpersonal relationships. Successful facilitation promotes cycles of “mutual consultations” among stakeholders to ensure that different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing are integrated into planning and solutions (Powell et al., 2015). Implementation

- Serve as formal and informal facilitators as determined by analysis of context and strategy.
- Support a balance of divergent and convergent thinking among team members, depending on the type of challenge faced.
- For easily named and easily solved challenges (technical challenges), support stakeholders to evaluate alternatives, summarize key points, sort ideas into categories, and exercise judgement.
- For complex challenges with no easy solution (adaptive challenges), support stakeholders to generate alternatives, free flow open discussion, gather diverse points of view, and suspend judgement.
- Create welcoming spaces for all participants in meetings.
- Select and use structured facilitation method ahead of group discussion, depending on the type of challenge, to ensure that appropriate strategies are used to address different types of problems.
- Support a communication protocol and process that facilitates interactions among stakeholders.

specialists are guided by four core values for participant engagement (Kaner, 2014):

- full participation where all stakeholders are encouraged to share their perspectives
- mutual understanding where stakeholders accept the legitimacy of one another’s needs and goals inclusive solutions that emerge from the integration of everybody’s perspectives and needs
- shared responsibility of stakeholders to implement proposals they endorse and to give and receive input before final decisions are made.



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