

### INTRODUCTION

There is tremendous pressure on justice and human service agencies to adopt research-driven approaches that demonstrate better results. While some improvements have been made, we are discovering that there remains a gap between what policies, programs, and practices are intended to do and the outcomes they produce. Implementation Science is the body of research that addresses methods to close the gap between our intentions and what is happening in practice. The implications for the justice field are immense as the cost of poor implementation is high. People cannot benefit from approaches that are not implemented as intended and failed implementation efforts leave behind a disengaged and disconnected workforce, an inflexible organizational culture, and poor outcomes.

The ***Five Dynamics of Effective Implementation™*** is a model that translates the science of implementation into practical strategies for justice and human service organizations. The tools and methods in each dynamic area are designed for organizations and leaders to be more influential and intentional with their implementation outcomes. As community and justice innovators apply the science behind effective implementation, a new era of more effective human service can emerge.



### WHAT WE KNOW

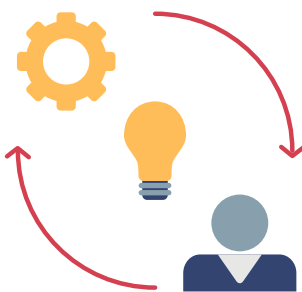
The justice system has been committed to implementation of evidence-based and research-informed practices for more than two decades, with only modest impacts on overall outcomes. Great advances have been made in the development of interventions to reduce recidivism risk, to address criminogenic needs, and to change behavior. Research has also emerged that provides guidance about treatment responsiveness, intensity, and dosage, adding volumes to the “what works” literature.

Unfortunately, knowing what works has not been enough to move the needle. New and advanced interventions have not been enough on their own to create positive and sustainable outcomes that can be repeated without losing their effect .

1 Fixsen, D. L., Blase, K. A., & Van Dyke, M. K (2019). Implementation Practice & Science. Chapel Hill, NC: Active Implementation Research Network

Understanding what works is only part of the formula that leads to reductions in recidivism and behavior change. The often-neglected aspects of creating real system change are in **how** policies, programs and practices are implemented. This means being purposeful and intentional about choosing change efforts that are addressing the right problem(s), implementing in a way that addresses the **Five Dynamics of Effective Implementation™** (people, data, culture, leadership, and feedback), and creating a context that supports the change over time. Without focusing on implementation, most change efforts and initiatives are destined to fizzle, fade, and never achieve their intended results.

The data is clear: **traditional change initiatives have high rates of failure.** Without guided and directed implementation support, only 14% of implementation efforts make it into day-to-day practice,<sup>2</sup> and those that do not include skilled and active implementation supports can take upwards of 17 years to reach fidelity.<sup>3</sup> Scientific and strategic implementation work requires formal tools and structured interventions to guide staff and leadership about how to do what we are asking them to do. Without tools,



people are relegated to their best guess and their own agendas which can work against guided and active implementation.

These tools and implementation activities are, in and of themselves, interventions for implementation. They are designed to prime leadership, to signal priorities to staff, and to develop language to inform and create applied implementation habits at work.

## IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS



**Implement:**

*to use*



**Innovation:**

*a new or different way of doing work*



**Implementation:**

*the act of creating an organizational context that allows for the innovation to be implemented consistently and with high quality*

<sup>2</sup> Balas EA, Boren SA. Managing clinical knowledge for health care improvement. Yearbook of Medical Informatics 2005: Patient-centered Systems. Stuttgart, Germany: Schattauer, 2000: 65-70

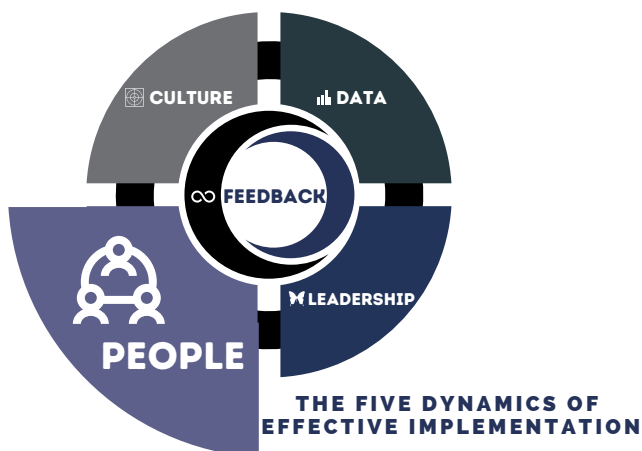
<sup>3</sup> Fixsen, D. L., Blase, K. A., & Van Dyke, M. K (2019). Implementation Practice & Science. Chapel Hill, NC: Active Implementation Research Network.

## PEOPLE

Most change efforts in the justice and human services space are considered 'people dependent'. This means that they require people to do something new or different, and do it well, in order to create better outcomes. Unfortunately, people dependent innovations have the highest failure rates, upwards of 80-90% in some studies. Just like at home, sometimes we develop habits and mindsets at work that don't always support the implementation efforts we are trying to accomplish.

Who we hire, how we hire, and how we train and coach our people are critical components for continued implementation success. This is because things like staff attitudes and beliefs about the work, their commitment to the organization's mission, and their knowledge and experience play a role in how an organization's services are experienced by people.

Consistent ongoing coaching and feedback is the key to keeping staff skills sharp and on track. Without a coaching process which is part of the daily work flow, and supports staff to integrate new skills into the delivery of services, an organization may not know whether poor outcomes are a result of the program itself or how it is being delivered.



The *People Dynamic* is also about building your bench. It can take time for new supervisors and leaders to understand and feel comfortable in their role. In many cases, we are promoted because we were highly effective at our previous role, which doesn't necessarily translate into being good at building up people. Preparing people to take on leadership roles is an important, intentional and purposeful piece of implementation work.

## START BY ASKING THE RIGHT

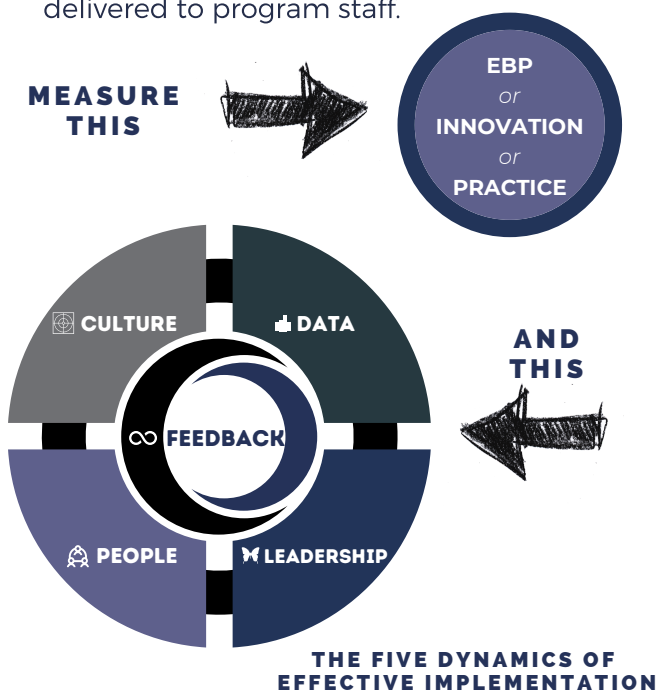


- What competencies are necessary to do this work well that are hard to teach? How can you screen for those competencies in your hiring process?
- How does onboarding set up the vision you have for the future of your organization?
- What do you give feedback on currently? How does that align with what you are trying to accomplish?
- What is required of existing staff and managers who are charged with implementing the strategy?
- What actions do they need to carry out?
- What decisions do they need to make?
- What sorts of relationships do they need to build?
- What mindset do they need to bring to the work?

## DATA

The implementation of any innovation requires the use of objective data to drive decisions about progress and quality. To be successful, programs must have the capacity to measure and track performance and guide decisions. This process of using data to track the implementation process itself, supports organizational engagement in the continuous quality improvement cycles necessary to successfully implement innovations that work.

Implementation data seeks to answer the question, "Are things happening in practice the way we have intended in our plan?" This data can be used to course correct, to guide staff in their work, and to share progress with stakeholders and funders. Thus, it is critical that a data support system exists that captures meaningful and relevant data, provides the ability for that data to be analyzed in a meaningful way, and can act as a support in guiding decisions about practices and programs as well as provide meaningful feedback to be delivered to program staff.



The *Data Dynamic* compels organizations to build their own capacity to become a data driven organization at all levels in order to maximize impact. This work requires purposeful attention to process evaluation, quality, and fidelity measurement to ensure that great ideas translate into effective practice. This process makes using data as feedback accessible and easy to set goals, measure progress, and improve processes for the greatest return on investment. This can only be accomplished with intentional implementation and leadership support.

## START BY ASKING THE RIGHT



- What data do you currently have that could serve as a baseline?
- What does success look like?
- How is quality defined?
- How will we measure frequency/dosage?
- How will we know if our efforts are working?
- What will we do to 'pulse' measure our efforts?
- How long will we collect data before we make changes to the process?
- Who will be responsible for tracking the data, and how?
- How will we share data in a meaningful way?

## CULTURE

Organizational culture directly impacts the choices that an organization is willing to make to bring people, processes, and policies in line with implementation strategy. Organizational culture is often invisible to the people on the inside and can be a powerful driver in progress or lack thereof. While there are many definitions of organizational culture, the simplest is captured by the following equation:



The equation highlights how individual and collective mindsets, habits, and organizational boundaries reinforce patterns of interaction and dialogue that create culture. Organizational culture can help good implementation, or it can impede desired implementation results. Many habits and mindsets that support an implementation effort and are likely exhibited by the champions of the initiative or innovation. Unfortunately fear, uncertainty, and resistance are powerful emotions that are contagious and that can work against the best efforts. These types of mindsets are easily able to permeate a culture and can often transmit deeper and faster across an organization.

Organizational habits can go a long way to support or inhibit the mindsets that people have. If a person is used to doing work in a

particular way, proposed changes might trigger feelings of loss and questions of competency, causing them to hold more strongly to status quo. Implementation requires change. And fear of the unknown can elicit feelings of irrelevance, the number one shame trigger in the workplace that can quickly transform into disengagement.<sup>4</sup>

Organizational culture attributes that drive implementation success include flexibility, innovation, professional development, risk taking and trust. These characteristics are in direct conflict with many justice and governmental agency preferences for process, bureaucracy, chain of command and control. By purposefully embracing characteristics that align with successful implementation, organizations can shift their culture to support their vision for the future.

## START BY ASKING THE RIGHT



- How aligned is our culture currently?
- How will we know if the culture starts shifting?
- How can we set the tone for this work?  
What will we all do and say, specifically?
- What are our expectations (beliefs, attitudes, habits, dialogue and interaction) for ourselves and each other?
- How will staff be recognized/incentivized for engaging in this work?

<sup>4</sup> Shame Resilience Theory, Brene Brown

## LEADERSHIP

Leadership skillset and mindset is important in the adoption and implementation of innovations. Leadership attitudes and strategies are often what make the difference in program performance, as formal leaders are responsible for the important decisions, resources, relationships, and vision for implementation. Their focus can create a supportive environment for staff, remove barriers to implementing innovations, and create a culture of feedback and process improvement which is important in creating a learning culture that supports intentional, systematic change.

The leadership mindset is contagious. Leaders are often taught to manage change, as if it were something that can be controlled and governed with management practices. This leads to technical, linear, and check-the-box approaches to the change process that at best, are limited in their ability to facilitate organizational change and, at worst, create more adaptive challenges in the future. Implementation leadership requires a personal and collective commitment to perpetual growth and learning throughout the implementation process. This can be challenging, as many justice agencies have a predisposition to solve problems with rules and policies. Unfortunately, it is rare that a new policy, procedure, or set of rules creates meaningful and sustainable change within an organization.

**PERPETUAL  
GROWTH  
&  
LEARNING**



The leadership attitudes and strategies best aligned with implementing programming and innovations can be found in the **10 Essential Principles of Implementation Leadership™**. These principles were derived from practical experience and academic research related directly to the implementation and sustainment of justice innovations.



**JOIN THE NEXT IMPLEMENTATION LEADERSHIP ACADEMY TO LEARN MORE.**

<https://acji.org/leadership-academy/>

**START BY ASKING THE RIGHT**



- What is our vision for the future of our agency? How does this implementation work fit with that vision?
- What existing policies, processes, and practices are misaligned with this work? How can we stop or deprioritize them?
- What existing policies, processes, and practices are aligned with this work? How can we emphasize or prioritize them?
- What policies, processes, and practices do we need to support this work? How can we create a foundation for this work without being overly prescriptive until we know more about the change?
- What will I do, as a leader of change, to build my bench to support this work beyond my tenure?



## FEEDBACK

Implementation is a process that requires experimentation and adaptation. Failing forward and learning from trial and error is a foundational concept of quality improvement. It is not enough to simply put things in place, you must look for opportunities to get good information on how things are working in practice and what adjustments could augment the impact. To do this requires ***Dynamic Feedback***.

Feedback helps leaders and teams determine what is ***actually*** being implemented. Feedback is about talking to those doing the work, impacted by the changes, and receiving the innovation to better understand impact and challenges. Feedback from multiple levels, perspectives, and stakeholders helps us to check our assumptions about what is or isn't working, what our data means and what it's telling us, and how people are experiencing the change.

It is not uncommon for leadership to overestimate the amount of meaningful feedback they are receiving. Without consistent and intentional effort, leaders can become insulated from the type of feedback that leads to learning and improvement cycles.



Because implementation science presumes that strategies will change, focused feedback loops ensure that progress is measured and strategies are improved upon. Dedicating time and energy on “improvement cycles” as a means of refining strategies based on feedback is a critical component to measuring the effectiveness of your implementation effort. Using an implementation team to assist with this work can promote effective, efficient, and sustainable implementation and organization change.



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**IMPLEMENTATION  
TEAMS**

**INFINITE  
IMPROVEMENT  
CYCLES**

## START BY ASKING THE RIGHT



- How are the people receiving the innovation being impacted as a result of this implementation effort?
- What feedback would help us to know if how we are showing up at work is helping or hurting? Are we making the difference we intended?
- What would be helpful to know from new staff, taking advantage of their fresh perspective? Whose perspective might be missing?
- Are staff receiving the support and feedback they need to understand their impact?
- Who is on our implementation team, seeking out intentional feedback that drives process improvement cycles?

## CONCLUSION

There is a multilayered phenomenon in justice organizations focused on strategy, and there's a lot of it – whether it be EBPs, new policies or procedures, or subject matter experts. However, simply having a strategy does not necessarily lead to achieving implementation goals. Strategy doesn't necessarily translate into skills to implement effectively, and then those skills can't translate to habit, and the habits can't translate to new ways of doing work. Ultimately...



**WE CAN'T JUST WORK IN OUR ORGANIZATIONS; WE MUST WORK ON OUR ORGANIZATIONS.**

The ***Five Dynamics of Effective Implementation™*** provides a lens into understanding how to operationalize and measure an organization's implementation infrastructure. Using science driven strategies and tools that accelerate the adoption of new ways of doing work builds organizational capacity for implementing future initiatives. The time has come for organizations to integrate purposeful implementation into their work, so that no matter what new innovation comes their way, the organization is prepared to tackle the challenges ahead.



## HOW TO GET STARTED

### ACJI WANTS TO HELP

#### THE IMPLEMENTATION LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



The 8-Week virtual **Implementation Leadership Academy** is a provocative, introspective, and interactive academy designed for executives, managers and change agents leading organizations through the challenging work of change. Based upon the ***10 Essential Principles of Implementation Leadership™***, the academy applies the science of implementation to support leaders in developing practical tools to overcome the challenges of people, culture, data, leadership and feedback.

#### THE IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP SERIES

PEOPLE



DATA



CULTURE



The **Implementation Workshop Series** lineup helps identify gaps and strengths in an organization's infrastructure around People, Data, Organizational Culture, and Leadership practices. These workshops are geared toward leaders, emerging leaders, and those doing the work to improve the long-term impact of their implementation efforts and actualize better results. Each workshop includes an organizational assessment, instructive content and customizable tools that apply the science of implementation to practice.