

Considering the context

AH TRIP stands for Allied health translating research into practice. So let's continue talking about the planning phase of implementation.

If you are implementing a complex intervention, understanding the context will assist with planning for implementation. That's because every setting is unique in its own way – this might be due to the people involved, the local leadership style, the culture or resources available. Assessing the context will help you understand the key barriers and enablers within your local environment to identify implementation strategies that are just right for your unique situation

So how do you think about context?

There are 4 overarching key factors to consider:

1. Your evidence-base for the practice change or intervention – Is there strong evidence? Is this evidence likely to be accepted? For example, if you are implementing an extended scope of practice role in an MDT outpatient clinic. It is important to consider if the different discipline groups agree with the evidence to change? How likely is the change to be accepted by the people who have to implement it?
2. The people involved (sometimes referred to as recipients and can include staff and consumers) – It is important to understand how motivated staff are to implement the change? Do you understand how motivated your recipients are to adopt /accept the change? In this case of your MDT outpatient clinic – It could be important to consider what consumers will think? Will the consumers be happy to receive care from an allied health professional instead of a doctor or nurse who traditionally provide this service? Consumers are the receivers of healthcare so their buy-in is important when considering the people involved in the context.
3. The organisation – There are 2 parts to this. Firstly, the local level in our MDT outpatient example this would be the clinic where you are implementing the change. Are there enough resources, what's the leadership like, what's the culture like? How is staff morale? Have changes been successfully implemented in the past or have most projects failed? The second is the broader level ie: at an organisational level, it might be important to understand what the organisational leadership is like and how the intervention or practice change fits in with organisational priorities and the strategic direction.
4. The outer setting is level of context goes beyond your organisation to the broader levels – Think about this might help or hinder your intervention. In this example, it might be important to align with the state-wide expanded scope of practice strategy. Or you could consider are there other state or federal government policies, priorities or funding that might impact positively or negatively on your intervention? Another example in the outer setting could be regarding accreditation standards, can your practice change align to a national standard?

Understanding the context is important and there are 4 key factors to consider

So how do you measure context?

There is no right or wrong way to measure context, what is important is that you consider the context in a comprehensive way before jumping into implementation. Understanding context can assist you to plan implementation, including the selection of implementation strategies. It can also assist with monitoring implementation progress and understanding what works where and why as part of your evaluation. Depending on your project resources and timeline, you may choose to undertake structured interviews with key stakeholders to assess your context, or you may use context assessment tools and prompts to guide your thinking, observations and reflections in a more subjective way.

What you use is likely to depend on your intervention and the implementation theory, model or framework you use. For example: If you have chosen i-PARIHS or CFIR as your theoretical approach, you will find a list of questions or prompts to assist you to assess the context within their resources
TDF also assesses some aspects of context particularly related to behavior change
There are a range of other tools available to assess context in a structured way within each theoretical approaches and you will learn more about them as you move through the theories, models and framework webinars.

It is important to take the time to understand the context. Having a mentor to help you reflect on your context can be very helpful.

Reference:

Chaudoir SR, Dugan AG, Barr CH. Measuring factors affecting implementation of health innovations: a systematic review of structural, organizational, provider, patient, and innovation level measures. Implementation science : IS. 2013;8:22.