Evidence Briefing #27

What supports team managers to translate policy into practice?

The Issue
Team managers, sometimes called 'middle managers', are pivotal to the implementation of new ways of working in social care, but this can be challenging.

What we wanted to find out
What supports team managers to translate policy into practice within their teams?

What we did
We searched for relevant systematic reviews published since 2015 that examined the role of team managers in implementing policy. We also searched for published studies not included in reviews. We searched four databases covering social care and business.

What we found
We found a systematic review of the role of team managers in implementing evidence-based practices in health care,[1] a review of the literature of middle managers in translating new ideas,[2] and a mixed methods study of the role of leadership styles and strategy in implementation effectiveness.[3]

What the evidence suggests
The role played by team managers in translating policy to practice is pivotal, given their connection to peers in similar roles and their links to senior managers. They are more likely to support a new policy when it aligns with their values and interests, when they are involved in early decision-making and when their role in implementation is clear.[2] Those who view a new policy positively may act as "champions" of the change while others may be "radical cynics".

They can use team and individual meetings to communicate the reasons for the new policy and support emotive responses to change.[2]

Team managers undertake four key roles is supporting the implementation of a new policy or intervention with their staff[1]:
- *Mediating* between policy and practice. This involves supporting staff through coaching, addressing concerns, and promoting accountability.
- *Diffusing information:* creating practical resources for staff and providing feedback to senior leaders
- *Selling implementation;* sharing the vision and being positive about the change.
- *Synthesising information* making policy language accessible and meaningful for practitioners.

Team managers use their knowledge of their team and the resources available to decide how best to support the implementation of new policies.[2]

Leadership Styles

Research identifies two distinct managerial styles and their influence on change: *transformational* leadership that inspires and motivates teams, and *instrumental* leadership that focuses on practical tasks. Both leadership styles can be effective in implementing change, particularly when a manager is involved in shaping how a policy is introduced.[3] Team managers who are proactive, innovative with greater reflexivity are more likely to be successful

in implementing new policies.[2] Team managers should be supported to develop their leadership skills based on their individual strengths.[3]

Support from others

Team managers are more likely to support and own a new policy or intervention if they have the resources required for implementation e.g. adequate staffing, time and incentives.[1,3] Staff responsible for implementing a new policy need adequate training and coaching.

Team managers benefit from a relationship with senior managers that involves emotional support, mutual respect, trust and responsiveness.[2] Team managers who do not have support from senior managers may use their relationship with peers in similar roles for support with interpreting and implementing new policy in their teams.[2]

Lessons from Implementation Science

Implementation science is concerned with how best organisations can promote the uptake and integration of evidence-based practices, policies, and interventions into routine settings. Drawing on evidence from research and practice, implementation scientists have concluded that successful implementation involves effective innovations, effective implementation and enabling contexts, irrespective of the setting [4]These have been brought together in what are referred to as Active Implementation Frameworks (AIF),[5] the six components of which provide a useful guide to the effective introduction of new ways of working.

1. **Usable innovations** – this is about being clear about what is expected from staff and why each part of the policy or intervention is important to achieving the desired outcome. Policies should make clear what, if any, aspects of a new way of working cannot be changed, what can be adapted (and in what circumstances).

2. **Implementation drivers** – these are the methods used to implement change. These may vary considerably, but examples include effective communication, adjustments by managers that are not 'usual practice' such as changes in record keeping, provision of training, coaching and technical support, and additional staff where necessary. It also includes the sharing of goals and sharing how changes will be measured

3. **Implementation teams** – These are teams who are experienced in using the AIF, who understand the policy or intervention and what is required to implement it faithfully, and who can provide support to staff, address barriers and provide feedback (which might result in adjustments needed to facilitate implementation).

4. **Implementation stages** – The AIF describes four stages that lead to effective implementation: exploration (of the existing organisation), installation (planning and training arranged), initial implementation (when program quality is monitored and problems rectified) and finally – full implementation (embedding the intervention and assuring quality and outcomes)

5. **Improvement Cycles** – The AIF suggests using Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles to support continual improvement.

6. **Systemic Change** – Changes in structure and processes to support intended outcomes.

What this means for practice

Because they are close to practice and have links with peers *and* with senior managers, team managers are in a unique position to facilitate change. They have an important role in the first five AIF components described above, and they can inform senior managers what structural changes may be required to implement major changes in policy and practice (AIF 6). Team managers carry out a number of responsibilities in communicating the reasons for, practical implications of, and emotional responses to the implementation of a new policy for their staff. Their role, expectations and boundaries should be clear, and team managers

should be supported to develop their leadership skills. Resources such as adequate staffing, time and training and coaching for staff can enable team managers to support their teams to translate policy into practice.

Quality of evidence

We are moderately confident that we have included the best available evidence about how team managers can support the implementation of new policies or interventions. We included research that appeared transferable to an adult social care setting, but found no research that focused solely on team managers in adult social care and the setting was not always well described.

References

1.   Birken S, Clary A, Tabriz AA, et al. Middle managers' role in implementing evidence-based practices in healthcare: a systematic review. *Implementation Science.* 2018;13(1):149.
2.   Radaelli G, Sitton-Kent L. Middle Managers and the Translation of New Ideas in Organizations: A Review of Micro-practices and Contingencies. *International Journal of Management Reviews.* 2016;18(3):311-332.
3.   Tawse A, Atwater L, Vera D, Werner S. Strategy implementation: the role of middle manager leadership and coordination. *Journal of Strategy and Management.* 2024;17(1):59-77.
4.   Fixsen DL, Blase, K. A., Metz, A., & Van Dyke, M. Implementation science. In: Wright JD, ed. *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences.* Second edition ed. Amsterdam: Elsevier; 2015.
5.   Fixsen AAM, Aijaz, M., Fixsen, D., Burks, E. and Schultes, M-T. *Implementation Frameworks: An Analysis.* Chapel Hill, NC: Active Implementation Research Network; 2021.