

## Implementer Portrait: Barbara van der Linden



Barbara van der Linden is staff member [Implementation and Innovation](#) at ZonMw, The Netherlands. Her work centres in the fields of health care, public health, and the social domain. Since October 2020, Barbara is an elected board member of the [European Implementation Collaborative \(EIC\)](#) and she actively contributes to plan and shape the [European Implementation Event 2021](#).

Barbara lives and works in The Hague, The Netherlands. In Dutch she says *implementatie* (= implementation) and *kennistransfer* (= knowledge translation).

*What is one of your favourite articles on implementation?*

My favourite read on implementation is *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition by Everett M. Rogers (ISBN: 8601300412962). This book first helped me while I was writing my PhD on Integrated care (2001) to begin to understand the importance of active implementation and the factors that influence successful implementation. It remains a standard that everyone working in implementation science and practice should read. Current theory still builds on the basic concepts that Rogers introduced and the case studies from different fields can still inspire us to this day.

*What are you currently working on that relates to implementation?*

I am working on the continuous improvement of ZonMw's (the Dutch National funder for health care research and Innovation) implementation policy, on collaborating with international funders on Dissemination and Implementation, and on the professionalization of the field of implementation in the Netherlands.

As a funder we are in a unique position to promote implementation and the infrastructure that we need to include implementation expertise in bringing research into practice and carrying out quality improvement projects in the healthcare field. We do this by setting criteria in grant applications, investing in targeted implementation and implementation research funding opportunities, organising partnering between research and practice and investing in the [Netherlands Implementation Collaborative](#). We also invest in the education of implementation specialists and care professionals, help set up an implementation resource platform, and the articulation of an implementation research agenda. I'm working on connecting what we are doing in the Netherlands to international developments by leading a Dissemination and Implementation Group within the Ensuring Value in Research Funders Forum and through the EIC board where we will collaborate with national



networks. I really believe we are riding a positive wave that will result in recognition of our rapidly emerging implementation profession.

*If you were to have lunch with another 'implementer', whom would you pick?*

I'd like to meet Don Berwick for lunch. He was leading in the quality improvement movement that started in the US in the 90's. An inspiring person who combines narrative examples (see the Escape Fire story on YouTube!) with translation to models and policy. I met him the first time about 20 years ago and would love to talk with him about his vision on how quality improvement and implementation has developed since then.

*If you had the resources for it, what within implementation science or practice would you want to work with next?*

With implementation practitioners - and hear from them what they experience in daily practice. Mirror implementation theory with their practice experience to get a feeling of what 'multidisciplinary collaboration', 'planned implementation,' 'adaptation' for example really mean in daily implementation work: make explicit their 'tacit knowledge' and experiences. Capture these experiences as essential elements of training programmes for implementation professionals. Sometime it seems that the growing base of evidence on successful implementation is not capturing the reality that implementation practitioners face. There are many models and frameworks that can serve as a backbone for implementation work, but the challenge is to use them without getting lost in their complexity and putting too much focus on 'fidelity'. For me a good implementation worker combines evidence and experience in a thoughtful, evidence-informed but practical way. We need to address both these elements when constructing basic and continued education training programmes for early career and established implementation professionals. In the near future I would be happy to see the formal recognition of the profession of implementation with adequate training programmes in place. My primary focus for this is the Netherlands but possibly the EIC can help to create a European movement in this direction.

*Please feel free to get in touch with Barbara via her email [linden@zonmw.nl](mailto:linden@zonmw.nl) or her Twitter handle [@blinde01](https://twitter.com/blinde01).*

---