

Symposium 6 - EIE2023

#235- What are next steps in implementation science?

Implementation research agenda, matching strategies and scaling up processes

Femke van Nassau¹, Christiaan Vis², Rixt Smit¹, Sebastian Potthoff³

¹Amsterdam UMC, Amsterdam, Netherlands. ²VU University, Amsterdam, Netherlands. ³Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing, Northumbria University, Northumbria, United Kingdom

Introduction to your symposium

In recent years, implementation research has gained more attention in the Netherlands. It was therefore that the national funding agency ZonMw wanted to develop a Dutch implementation research agenda. Based on a priority setting exercise in the agenda, two spin off projects were launched to address key gaps identified in the agenda: methods to match determinants to strategies, and insight into scaling up processes. Speakers will present the research agenda and results of the two follow-up projects, followed by a lively discussion. Attendees will be up to date about the research agenda and inspired by the two synthesize projects.

Symposium abstract Nr. 1

Background: Scarce funding of implementation research has resulted in mainly context specific knowledge and lacks generalizability to other contexts. Therefore, the Netherlands Implementation Collective (NIC) was asked by the national funding agency ZonMw to develop a Dutch implementation research agenda.

Methods: We held interviews with Dutch implementation researchers, conducted a 2-round e-Delphi study, and reached out to professionals to share their implementation barriers in an online survey. In the e-Delphi study, panelists were asked to provide research questions in round 1, which were then merged into 31 proposed research topics. Delphi panelist scored these topics. Consensus was reached if 67% agreed with inclusion of the topic. These topics guided the thematic analyses of the input of the survey among practice professionals.

Results: Of the 47 invited researchers, 26 (55%) participated in round 1 (222 research questions). Twenty participants (77% of 26) completed round 2, in which consensus was reached on 14 topics. The survey among 74 practice professionals provided 230 barriers. Topics were categorised into 7 themes linked to implementation, sustainability, scale-up and de-implementation, such as knowledge on how to link determinants to strategies, tailoring of strategies, using innovative research designs. But also need for capacity for implementation and implementation research was expressed, and the need for practical tools to apply evidence-based implementation in practice.

Discussion: By combining both input from implementation researchers (how does it work) as well as professionals (how to apply), the research agenda addresses topics relevant for both fields. But how to disseminate these findings?

Symposium abstract Nr. 2

Background. Without effective strategies, the majority of scientifically developed healthcare interventions fail to be implemented successfully. After identifying determinants of implementation, strategies need to be selected to address identified determinants. In order to improve the implementation outcomes, this process should be guided by methods that ensure that the most effective implementation strategy is selected. This study aimed to describe methods for matching strategies to address determinants affecting the implementation of evidence-based practices reported in scientific literature complemented this with those used in practice.

Methods. We conducted a scoping review to synthesize scientific literature and semi-structured interviews with implementation practitioners. This enabled us to triangulate methods reported in the literature with matching methods applied in implementation practice. A review protocol including definitions, inclusion criteria, data extraction format and interview topic guide was developed.

Results. In total, 4,699 unique studies were retrieved from 5 bibliometric databases. After screening titles and abstracts, 184 articles were selected for full-text screening. Interviewees ($n > 15$) were recruited through relevant networks and organizations involved in implementing evidence-based interventions in various health care settings. Analyses showed a broad variation in approaches, where some were more theory driven, whilst many more had a more pragmatic approach.

Discussion: This study provides an overview of methods for matching implementation strategies to determinants that are described in scientific literature and contrast this with how implementation strategies are selected in practice. Do we need a one size fits approach to match determinants to strategies?

Symposium abstract Nr. 3

Background: Many evidence-based health interventions are proven effective, yet scaling up appears complex and does not always occur easily. This study aimed to determine determinants, pathways and scale-up strategies leading to successful scale-up of health promotion interventions in the Netherlands.

Methods: We used mixed-methods data to learn from scale-up experiences of health interventions in the Netherlands. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with intervention owners ($N=25$) from a broad range of successfully scaled health promotion interventions in different settings (i.e. school, community, workplace, sport) and targeting different populations (i.e. children, adults, elderly). In addition, we conducted interviews with other relevant stakeholders ($N=10$) involved in scaling up processes. Additionally, a survey was distributed among all interventions ($N=306$) registered in the national

intervention database to map scale-up experiences. Survey data was analysed using SPSS and qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Scaling up usually does not occur after one decisive moment, but is often the result of different circumstances, such as persistent commitment of intervention owners and stakeholders, new funding opportunities, and certification/accreditation by recognized institutions. These 'magic push buttons' together lead to a scale-able moment. Pathways vary from a more research driven, a bottom-up practice driven, policy oriented and a more commercial approach. Several scale up strategies were identified related to funding, organisation process, monitoring and advocacy.

Discussion: These insights can help future researchers, practitioners and policy makers to bring their intervention to scale. How can we translate this knowledge into practical guidance?

Key highlights of your symposium

- the research agenda showed a need for researchers (how does it work) as well as for professionals (how to apply it)
- relative small synthesizing projects like the matching strategies and scaling up process can help to move the agenda forward

Implications for research and practice

- This symposium will provide insight into current gaps in implementation science knowledge, both from a research and practice view.
- Results of the two spin-off projects will help future researchers and practitioners to match strategies, and plan for scaling up in order to have impact on a broader level.

Overall discussion

Our overall discussion will be led by dr. Sebastian Potthoff (UK) with a focus on:

- how generalizable are the results of the research agenda to other countries?
- what practical tools should be developed in order to put the obtained knowledge with regards to matching strategies and scaling up?