

Mapping the Implementation Landscape:  
Assessing the Systemic Capacity of Statewide Community Corrections Agencies to  
Deliver Evidence-Based Practices

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## **Abstract**

Treatment quality is recognized as a critical moderator for programs to successfully reduce recidivism. Yet, the implementation of any new initiative takes place within a context—a system comprised of varying structures, norms, policies, and relationships to external stakeholders. Surprisingly little evidence exists about how to build organizational capacity to successfully achieve program fidelity and sustain innovations over time. This study provides results from a process evaluation measuring implementation capacity to deliver evidence-based practices (EBPs) in the state of Oregon. Using the ImpleMap interview procedure created by the National Implementation Research Network, findings from ten county-level community corrections agencies demonstrated how systemic, actionable implementation can be facilitated. Aggregate statewide patterns of organizational capacity emerged, as well as individual variation in the strengths and gaps of implementation among each county. By understanding county-level variation, we reveal that sustainable implementation requires purposeful attention to systemic capacities that go beyond training and coaching. To advance the science and practice of offender rehabilitation, we need to broaden our focus to rediscover the importance of process, structure, and context. Responsibility for change needs to shift from individuals to implementation systems.

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Corrections leaders say that implementation is the “bane of effective correctional programs” (Rhine, Mawhorr, & Parks, 2006). This assertion is rooted in three interrelated problems. First, managing change is difficult, particularly in complex systems. Second, it makes little difference if we know “what works” to reduce crime if we fail to use this knowledge on a scale that allows us to reach large numbers of clients with high levels of program fidelity. Third, if we fail to appropriately implement effective correctional programs, we risk a return to the “nothing works” doctrine by undermining confidence in the efficacy of treatment and corrections organizations. In short, the stakes are high and the need is great to develop better strategies and methods of building systematic implementation capacity in correctional organizations.

The urgency to successfully implement effective correctional interventions has grown in light of research findings that correctional employees trained to use evidence-based practices (EBPs) can significantly improve public safety. For example, a recent meta-analysis of 10 studies found that the recidivism rate of individuals supervised by community corrections officers trained in core correctional practices was an average of 13 percentage points lower than those supervised by officers using standard practices (Chadwick, Dewolf, & Serin, 2015). Similarly, there is growing evidence that staff competencies and fidelity to treatment are critical to realizing improved outcomes (Bourgon & Armstrong, 2005; Curtis, Ronan, & Borduin, 2004; Kennealy, Skeem, Manchak, & Eno Loudon, 2012; Landenberger & Lipsey, 2006; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005; Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Smith, 2006; Sexton & Turner, 2010) and programs delivered by staff who are not competent can lead to increases in recidivism (Barnoski & Aos, 2004; also see Wilson & Davis, 2006). These studies have particular salience for correctional

organizations because they have direct implications for how community corrections officers perform their jobs on a daily basis. We are now able to quantify the public safety consequences of practicing “correctional quackery” (Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002).

Although several quality assurance measures now exist to determine the extent to which programs adhere to the science of offender rehabilitation (e.g., the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory; CPAI) (Gendreau & Andrews, 2001), there is surprisingly little information about how to build the organizational capacity to successfully achieve program fidelity and sustain innovations. Discussing the need for more guidance on implementation, Rhine et al. (2006) argue that researchers and practitioners should collaborate on detailed process evaluations to better understand and address the system pressures that impede (or promote) the successful introduction and management of complex, multimodal interventions. To this end, our goals in this paper are threefold. First, we seek to expand the academic discourse surrounding implementation science beyond the concepts of staff competency and treatment fidelity. While fidelity is important, it is also critical to understand that treatment fidelity is the product of strong implementation. Second, we report the results of a process evaluation that assessed the implementation experiences of 10 community corrections agencies in Oregon. The findings demonstrate how systemic, actionable implementation can be facilitated by using the ImpleMap protocol developed by Blase and Fixsen (2013). Third, we argue that to advance the science and practice of offender rehabilitation, we need to broaden our focus to rediscover the importance of process, structure, and context. Responsibility for change needs to shift from individuals to implementation systems.

### **Program Implementation and Treatment Integrity**

As noted above, it is now well understood that the quality of implementation is a key moderating variable for reducing future crime (Bourgon & Armstrong, 2005; Landenberger & Lipsey, 2006; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005). Perhaps the strongest evidence of this effect comes from the Campbell Collaboration systematic review, which investigated 58 studies that evaluated cognitive-behavioral programs with adult offenders (Lipsey, Landenberger, & Wilson, 2007). Results showed that higher quality implementation translated into stronger reductions in recidivism net of several other moderating variables.

The composite implementation factor measured by Lipsey et al. (2007) included, among other indicators, the distinction between evaluations that were implemented as (1) real-world criminal justice interventions as routine practice without researcher support, (2) demonstration programs with significant influence from a researcher, and (3) programs implemented by researchers for the purposes of research (i.e., efficacy trials). Of course, it is well understood that efficacy trials and demonstration studies conducted with the close involvement of researchers are consistently related to stronger outcomes compared to evaluations conducted without researcher support (Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005; Lipsey et al., 2007). This is a primary reason why federal grant programs, such as those administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, are more likely to award funds to organizations that actively collaborate with academic researchers.

Unfortunately, this means that much of what we know about interventions is based on research that does not directly measure processes and structures that affect implementation. In addition, scholars often fail to recognize the direct influence they themselves might be having on implementation and program fidelity as they provide facilitative leadership, data support, and technical assistance in order to conduct an evaluation. As a result, the external validity of

evaluation research is likely lower than typically acknowledged, and we have paid too little attention to thinking about the transferability of innovations to practice. The reality is that the overwhelming majority of innovations taken on by correctional agencies are done so internally, far from the guidance of experts on process and program evaluation.

A number of recent evaluation studies illustrate the importance of implementation quality more specifically and provide insight into the complexity of delivering programs with fidelity under more typical circumstances. Wilson and Davis (2006) found that *Project Greenlight*, a multimodal, in-prison program designed to provide individuals returning to the community with a variety of reentry services and some cognitive-behavioral treatment, had the unintended effect of increasing offending among participants. The authors hypothesized a breakdown in implementation and problems with the program design were responsible for increased offending among participants. For example, the integrity and fidelity of the cognitive-behavioral part of the intervention broke down; the duration of the treatment was shortened; the instructors did not receive the necessary training in the intervention; the groups were more than twice the recommended size; and the intervention was terminated halfway through the evaluation period. Other programmatic and implementation problems included a failure to match participants to services based on risk and need and a failure to consider general or specific responsivity.

Additional findings have more recently been provided by Baglivio et al. (2018), which demonstrated that the treatment quality of interventions were predictive of subsequent delinquent involvement with nearly 2,400 juveniles released from 56 residential facilities in Florida. The higher the treatment quality, the less likely juvenile delinquents recidivated. The Baglivio et al. (2018) study is important because it validated the treatment quality component of the Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol™ (SPEP™), which is based on Mark Lipsey's meta-

analytic research of over 500 studies investigating interventions with juvenile offenders. However, the study did not provide insight about why some programs were successful at achieving program fidelity while others were not.

Duwe and Clark (2015) provide further evidence of the integral nature of treatment fidelity through their evaluation of the gender-specific *Moving On* (Van Dieten & McKenna, 2001) program with women prisoners. The program was implemented at the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Shakopee during two distinct time periods—one period that reflected high (80%) treatment fidelity and another that reflected low (20%) fidelity. After comparing recidivism outcomes across both conditions of fidelity, the researchers demonstrated that greater reductions in recidivism occurred when the program was implemented as intended.

Notably, the breakdown in fidelity of *Moving On* over time occurred as a result of a larger systemic scheduling problem within the prison, and not because individual staff “drifted” the intervention from quality implementation themselves.

In 2011, however, a decision was made to begin offering *Moving On* to offenders shortly after their admission to the MCF-Shakopee. In response to concerns that scheduling offenders for *Moving On* often seemed to conflict with prison work assignments or participation in other institutional programs, *Moving On* began to be offered to offenders at the time of intake, or what is referred to as R&O (reception and orientation) at the MCF-Shakopee. Modifying the point at which offenders entered *Moving On* brought about several substantive changes to the way the programming was delivered. Because R&O generally lasts 3 weeks, the length of *Moving On* was trimmed from 12 weeks to 3 weeks. Offenders participated 2 hours each day, 5 days per week, for a total of 30 hours. (p. 305)

Sustainability of the program failed because of a system-level decision that altered the program delivery at the intake stage of women’s prison sentences. There were no organizational-level supports in place to identify potential threats or obstacles to program sustainability.

As this set of high quality evaluations demonstrate, program integrity happens within a context and a system (Salisbury, 2015). Ignoring the multilevel, ecological components of

implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008) sets agencies up to spend several hundreds of thousands of dollars in training and coaching only to see innovations fail to be fully executed, or worse, backfire. When failure occurs, it is often blamed on line level staff for being resistant to change or inadequate learning transfer of the material from training and coaching. In reality, it is just as likely, if not more, that failure was the result of a lack of implementation systems in place to drive the change forward (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Duda, 2015).

### **Assessing Fidelity and Implementation Quality**

Program fidelity (also referred to as program integrity) has been recognized as one of the principles of effective correctional intervention since the 1990s. Program fidelity refers to the degree to which a planned intervention is delivered as intended and with a high level of skill (see Breitenstein et al., 2010, for a full discussion). Palmer (1995) outlined a number of “nonprogrammatic” characteristics of correctional interventions hypothesized to condition the effect of interventions including indicators of setting such as organizational climate, agency size, and physical layout. Gendreau, Goggin and Smith (1999) focused more specifically on implementation and developed a checklist of characteristics associated with successful implementation identified in the technology transfer literature and from first-hand experience working with agencies. And, Van Voorhis and Brown (1997) developed an inventory to assess “evaluability,” or whether a program was sufficiently developed and implemented to warrant an outcome evaluation.

More recently, scholars have demonstrated the predictive utility of measures of program fidelity such as the CPAI and the SPEP™ (Baglivio et al., 2018; Lowenkamp et al., 2006). These tools are highly useful for assessing correctional programs, regardless of whether they are delivered by an official community corrections agency, an institution, or a private provider, for



their adherence to the principles of effective intervention outlined in the “what works” correctional literature. Some information about implementation (e.g., training and staff qualification, age of program, and presence of a program manual) is also captured in these instruments. However, these instruments do not distinguish between fidelity to the principles of effective correctional interventions and indicators of implementation processes and structures. This is a limitation both conceptually and practically.

Conceptually, we should recognize that program fidelity is an *outcome* of implementation; these are not analogous concepts. Some organizational characteristics (such as staff turnover for example) may have direct effects on program outcomes, as well as indirect effects through their relationship to fidelity. Other organizational characteristics may be fully mediated by program fidelity (e.g., the quality of training). Still other organizational variables (e.g., a culture supportive of EBPs) may condition the relationship between various programmatic and nonprogrammatic characteristics and recidivism. Only by more carefully and fully developing the theory of program effectiveness and measuring both implementation and fidelity will we be able to make steady progress improving the science of correctional interventions and translating this science to practice.

Practically, if we fail to measure and report specific information about implementation, corrections officials will have a difficult time applying insights from evaluation studies. Information about program fidelity alone may not provide enough information about what is or is not effectively contributing to success. Decision-makers need actionable information about how to proactively support implementation and avoid common problems associated with complex organizational change (Rhine et al., 2006).

The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) has made significant progress developing the science and practice of installing evidence-based practice in education in school systems. Those of us working to disseminate evidence-based correctional practices can learn much from this work. Drawing on meta-analyses and literature reviews on implementation efforts in education, social work, medicine, and other human services, Blase and Fixsen (2013) developed a model of active implementation, which is illustrated in Figure 1. The authors identify nine drivers of successful implementation. “Drivers” are engines of change that propel the active adoption of initiatives. Blase and Fixsen (2013) organize implementation drivers around three reinforcing domains: employee competence, leadership, and organizational supports. Competence with a best practice is influenced by the selection of appropriate staff, effective training, and employee coaching. Competence with an evidence-based practice is necessary, but not sufficient to achieve widespread use of the innovation or program sustainability. Change initiatives also require leadership that is technically effective and adaptive, and organizational structures and processes that promote systems interventions, facilitative administration, and data systems to support decision-making. Finally, organizations need performance assessment to provide timely, actionable information about fidelity and program outcomes to inform ongoing efforts to maintain implementation.

--Insert Figure 1--

The “ImpleMap” (Blase & Fixsen, 2013) is an interview protocol and scoring system developed by NIRN that seeks to “map” the use of implementation drivers. Its purpose is to provide human service organizations with information about the extent to which implementation drivers are currently being used in order to facilitate planning and strategically manage change.

To our knowledge, this is the first application of ImpleMapping to understand experiences implementing EBP in correctional organizations.

ImpleMapping obtains information about how an organization implemented a specific intervention in the past to understand the implementation landscape. The implementation landscape is comprised of the organization's capacity to implement interventions, including the structures and processes in place that support the adoption and maintenance of EBPs (Blase & Fixsen, 2013). When completed for multiple agencies, programs, or localities, the ImpleMap also provides insights about system strengths and gaps in the capacity to sustain program fidelity.

To better understand the capacity of Oregon state to implement and sustain evidence-based correctional practices, we assessed the experiences of 10 community corrections agencies located in 9 counties using the ImpleMap protocol. Below we describe the methods that guided the research. Next we present the results of the ImpleMap and discuss the strengths and opportunities observed. This discussion is organized around the drivers of active implementation. Finally, we consider the broader insights revealed by the process evaluation and discuss the implications for improving the study and practice of corrections.

## **Methods**

### **Site Selection**

The Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC) Community Corrections Division provides statewide leadership and administrative support for county-level agencies. Probation and parole are combined in Oregon and community corrections is a function of state government that operates within each county. Community supervision officers are "Probation/Parole Officers" (PPOs) who oversee both probation, parole, and post-prison supervision caseloads. Ten agencies were selected to participate in the assessment purposively by the ODOC to

represent the major geographic regions of the state, agencies of different sizes, and agencies with varying levels of commitment to the use of evidence-based practices. Participation in the interviews was voluntary.

### **Participant Selection**

Agency directors were asked by the researchers to select and recruit voluntary participants who were familiar with the history of the agency, had knowledge of EBPs, and were actively involved in implementation. The researchers requested participation from staff who represented varying levels of authority and responsibility. The recruitment strategy was designed to ensure that participants collectively had knowledge of implementation at all levels of the organization. The unit of analysis in the study was the implementation driver.

Ten participants were leaders in the organization (seven directors and three assistant directors) and 10 represented middle-management (seven managers and three supervisors). Finally, 25 participants were line staff: six lead PPOs and 19 regular PPOs (11 had specialized caseloads, such as gender-specific, sexual offender, or mental health). In total, 45 ODOC Community Corrections staff members participated from 10 agencies located in nine different counties. Interview sessions were comprised of 3-6 staff members. Although the aim was to have line staff present for each session, two sessions contained only leadership and middle management. The remaining sessions had respondents at each levels of the organization.

### **Interview Procedures**

The ImpleMap sessions used a strength-based, semi-structured interview format. This allowed for open-ended responses and a conversational format. A broad script was developed with the interview steps outlined by Blase and Fixsen (2013). The sessions began by broadly asking participants to brainstorm recent innovations in the organization. Then, participants were

asked to choose one or two main innovations to guide the remainder of the sessions. Unscripted follow-up questions were asked throughout to support a conversational format. Interviewers used Blase and Fixsen's (2013) guidelines for ImpleMaps for each driver and asked follow-up questions accordingly. The full ImpleMap protocol and suggested procedures for assessing drivers can be found in the Blase and Fixsen (2013) report. Interview sessions were conducted on site at each county community corrections department between May and August of 2014 and lasted approximately 90 minutes.

As noted above, the purpose of the sessions was to understand the organizations' experiences with implementation. The interview focused on the discussion of implementation drivers. The ImpleMaps helped identify a baseline pattern to further promote each county's strengths and identify areas in need of improvement. This intent was described to respondents before beginning each session to build trust and rapport.

The ImpleMap interviews were conducted with three research team members, with the exception of one interview which was conducted by a single researcher. At least two members were well-versed in the implementation drivers (Fixsen et al., 2015). For each session, the three team members had a specific role: interviewer, observer, or note-taker. The interviewer facilitated the ImpleMap process and asked questions. The note-taker took detailed notes organized by each driver and occasionally asked follow-up questions. The observer monitored the process, with attention to reactions and behaviors among respondents. Sessions were not audio-recorded.

Immediately following an ImpleMap interview, the research team members met off-site to review interview notes, discuss observations, and reach consensus on scoring based upon the ImpleMap protocol. For each implementation driver discussed, a score was assigned to indicate

whether the organization exhibited a certain level of implementation capacity based upon the ImpleMap session (0 = “none” 1 = “some,” 2 = “basic,” 3 = “advanced”). The team’s rationale was documented for each score and shared with the agency to check for accuracy and feedback. Each county was given a specific report, including their scores and corresponding rationales as well as a discussion of their organizational strengths and opportunities for improvement. The interview notes were later coded and analyzed by multiple members of the research team to ensure inter-rater agreement. A thematic analysis was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to develop common themes for each driver across agencies.

The interview and recruiting procedures were effective at establishing a context where participants were eager to discuss their experiences with implementing EBPs and share their successes and challenges. In addition, the focus on the drivers of change subtly shifted the sense of responsibility for implementation from resting primarily with staff or one leader to the system as a whole. This resulted in discussions about implementation that avoided blaming or defensiveness. Participants were motivated to share their successful strategies with others in the state.

## **Results**

Our primary research goal was to better understand the systemic capacity of the ODOC to support the implementation of evidence-based practices. To obtain an answer, the results of individual agency interviews were mapped to the implementation drivers identified by Fixsen et al. (2015). Table 1 depicts the results for the ImpleMap sessions conducted with 10 county-level Oregon Community Corrections agencies (due to its agency size, one county was separated into two ImpleMap sessions). The results are organized by four major sections or domains: initiatives, competency development, organizational supports, and leadership. Overall, the

systemic capacity to implement evidence-based practices was basic across the 10 agencies assessed. However, notable variation was observed between the agencies with one county reporting very little to no capacity to implement EBPs and another county reporting an advanced level of capacity on numerous drivers of change.

--Insert Table 1--

Viewed holistically, Oregon's Division of Community Corrections had eight systemic strengths, which are summarized in Table 2. Major system strengths included overall operationalization of initiatives, providing sufficient training and fostering of champions for initiatives, leadership's provisions of funding for initiatives and proactive facilitation, agencies' multi-level alignment and communication, and, importantly, a system-wide organizational culture supportive of adopting and using EBPs. These system strengths are consistent with the major initiatives the ODOC undertook—namely, creating a strong culture through state-level leadership and investing in training focused on best-practices and scientifically driven interventions.

--Insert Table 2--

On the other hand, Oregon's Division of Community Corrections also had six systemic opportunities to build greater implementation capacity. While Oregon's Community Corrections had the infrastructure and culture supportive of EBPs, their statewide system lacked internal policy alignment and data systems to fully support the active implementation of such interventions. Additionally, Oregon could improve upon staff coaching, funding allocation for initiatives, processes for identifying threats and opportunities within local jurisdictions, and providing sufficient time for initiatives.

In summary, the ImpleMap suggests that Oregon has made important progress implementing EPBs by providing training and supporting cultural change. Below we explore further the agency-level differences in implementation capacity and discuss strengths and opportunities observed within each of the implementation drivers. First, however, we begin by considering the process of initiative selection.

### **Initiatives**

Implementation often begins with a decision to use a particular innovation. The agencies interviewed had significant experience trying to implement an evidence-based practice in their organizations--some of the innovations were mandated (e.g., use of the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI) and others were voluntary (e.g., use of the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) program). For the ImpleMap interview, we asked participants to identify one or two initiatives that they had recently implemented. The most common interventions chosen by agencies were classification systems (LS/CMI), Offender Management System (OMS), EPICS, cognitive behavioral programs (e.g., Thinking for a Change, Motivational Interviewing), and inter-organizational collaborations (e.g., relationships with local organizations outside of the Division of Community Corrections).

Implementation is more successful and cost-effective when organizations have clearly defined the critical parts of an initiative that must be performed and identified the level of expected performance (e.g., speed, accuracy, duration, and frequency). In addition, more positive outcomes are produced at significantly less cost when there is an exploration process in place to vet promising innovations and guide decisions about whether the agency is prepared to proceed with implementation (Romney, Israel, & Zlatevski, 2014). As noted above, operationalizing initiatives was a system strength, with all agencies reporting some process and



many organizations reporting basic or advanced practices for identifying the essential parts of initiatives. This strength was supported by the ODOC and by external purveyors of programs, which often did the work of operationalizing initiatives.

Some counties also developed internal strategies for operationalizing initiatives. For example, one large county had a formal process in place for vetting new programs. A committee consisting of members of the management team discussed proposed initiatives. When an innovation was identified for implementation, a project manager was assigned to the initiative. The project manager then formed a team that prepared written recommendations for the leadership about the managerial and administrative support needed to implement the program.

Whereas operationalizing initiatives was a strength, most counties had basic or no process in place to help vet initiatives. This may be the unintended consequence of strong state-level leadership that actively facilitated the adoption of initiatives such as the use of the LS/CMI. Some counties did develop internal processes for vetting new programs. For example, a medium-sized agency formed an Evidence-Based Practices Committee consisting of people from all levels of the organization who met for lively discussions about EBPs. This more informal group consisted of opinion leaders and internal champions of EBPs who were highly motivated to use and advocate for innovations.

### **Competency Drivers**

To develop competency with a new initiative qualified personnel need to be taught the new behavior and supported as they apply new learning on the job. Thus, competency is supported by recruitment, training, coaching, and assessment. Competency with an EBP is a necessary requirement for achieving program fidelity and desirable outcomes.

Oregon's Division of Community Corrections excelled at providing staff training. Five counties discussed EPICS as their main initiative. Each county reported that all staff had received thorough EPICS training from the Corrections Institute, University of Cincinnati. Continuous refresher trainings were also provided a year after the initial implementation and advanced staff went to ODOC for "train-the-trainer" sessions. Additionally, Oregon provided an Advanced Community Corrections Academy held on three occasions between October 2013 and March 2014. Three hundred eleven participants, who represented approximately 50% of the population of Oregon probation and parole officers, attended the training academies. Statewide training and technical assistance was also provided to agencies to support the use of the LS/CMI and case planning.

Some counties developed promising practices to encourage competency with EBPs through staff selection and coaching. For example, one medium-sized agency hired line staff based upon counseling techniques rather than authoritarianism, which aligned with this agency's movement toward evidence-based practices. Another small county arranged frequent observations of group facilitators' performance. Supervisors gathered input and reviewed results with their staff. This county also conducted annual caseload audits focused on case planning and use of the LS/CMI. In addition, several counties allowed PPOs to carry specialized caseloads (e.g., at risk-women or clients with mental illness) based upon interest or expertise.

Despite these strengths, numerous agencies struggled with staff selection, coaching, and performance assessment. Smaller county agencies discussed difficulty with staff selection due to the small pool of local candidates and lack of diversity in areas of expertise for specialized caseloads in comparison to larger counties. Union contracts also made it difficult to alter human resource policies or modify job duties. Also, smaller counties reported issues with formalizing

their coaching and assessment procedures. Conversely, larger counties were able to utilize internal trainers as coaches. There were issues in assessment of staff performance as well. Some counties reported that the persons conducting the staff evaluations were not direct supervisors or there were no formal procedures for evaluations. This weakness was present for both larger and smaller counties. Thus, there was little or no feedback or collaboration between hiring/selection, training, and coaching functions.

### **Organization Drivers**

By itself, competency with an innovation is insufficient to achieve implementation. To achieve implementation and sustain fidelity, personnel need to use the innovation accurately and consistently over an extended period of time under numerous conditions. The use of innovations takes place within an organizational context consisting of structures and cultures that can support or hinder implementation. In addition to competency, successful implementation depends on processes that promote systems interventions, facilitative administration, and decision-making informed by actionable data.

The counties that participated in the ImpleMap were particularly effective at fostering internal champions by rewarding and encouraging staff who expressed skill and interest in EBPs and supporting an organizational culture supportive of EBPs. Similarly, counties showed strengths in the areas of multi-level alignment and communication. As noted above, state-level leadership and the centralized organization of community corrections in Oregon facilitated these system supports. For example, nearly every county explained that their mission statement, goals, and vision were well aligned with those of the ODOC. Many counties also reported that they had good alignment between the goals of internal leaders and line staff. A few counties said that they also had strong alignment with the goals and values of external stakeholders. Most counties

also reported good multi-level communication. One medium-sized county paid particularly strong attention to internal communication, engaging in monthly team-building sessions conducted by a contracted licensed clinical social worker.

In smaller and more geographically isolated counties, however, participants reported more challenges with resistance among their external stakeholders and less consistent communication and alignment with state-level leaders. Some concern was also expressed about the need to strengthen bi-directional communication and allow for more “bottom-up” communication from the county to the state and from line staff and managers to county leaders. In larger organizations, participants noted more challenges with alignment between leaders and managers and line staff and less integration with external stakeholders. Similarly, larger organizations reported more challenges communicating ideas and needs between administrative, managerial, and line levels of the organizations.

Most of the counties interviewed did not have research infrastructure to determine the effectiveness of initiatives and did not regularly use data to inform ongoing decisions. Several counties readily acknowledge this area as a need. Some locations successfully used data and evaluation when they partnered with external purveyors for services, training, or evaluations. However, this capacity was temporary and was not integrated into regular decision-making processes; when the collaboration with the external partner ended, the data collection ended. Agencies that did have some internal research capacity reported that it could be difficult to obtain timely information or the information was very general (e.g., data about recidivism) and not actionable.

Similar organizational challenges were noted when funding for initiatives was discussed. For example, several counties noted that that they had successfully taken advantage of

opportunities provided by the state for one-time training or other support for innovations. However, they noted significant challenges obtaining permanent and sustainable funding to support new programs past the training and installation phase. A few of the smaller counties were successful at establishing strong local collaborative relationships with the courts, district attorneys, and nonprofit organizations that provided new sources of resources and ancillary supports. These organizations managed to adapt to funding problems by compensating for a lack of financial resources by drawing on strengths in multi-level alignment. One county that used this strategy, however, found that new collaborative relationships with external partners could also significantly stress their organization by taking on additional complex roles.

Finally, many of the counties had opportunities to improve their internal policy alignment. This opportunity is closely tied to weaknesses in systems for vetting new initiatives and state-mandated changes. Most counties did not have in place a process for determining how well initiatives matched the mission, vision, and goals of the agency. Similarly, new policies and directives were not drafted to clarify how new programs or practices should be integrated into existing policies and practices. We observed numerous examples of this problem with regard to the use of evidence-based practices governing rewards and sanctions. The policies were not changed to easily allow for the flexible use of rewards and sanctions under the professional judgement of line personnel. Similarly, as discussed more below, policies were not aligned to allow for the redistribution of effort and funding to support initiatives. Despite these systemic problems, some counties showed strength in this area. A medium-sized county updated their official policies annually at an agency-wide retreat. The administrative staff at this county also met to discuss how initiatives could be aligned with their mission and goals.

### **Leadership Drivers**

Finally, implementation requires effective leadership to install new practices and to maintain them over the long term. Fixsen and Blase (2013) identify two domains of leadership with particular relevance to change management and implementation--adaptive leadership and technical leadership. Adaptive leadership refers to the ability to negotiate uncertainty and complexity, build consensus, and manage resistance to change. When systems need to be changed, adaptive leadership helps the organization move from the status quo and work through the disruption that accompanies change. Technical leadership refers to the ability to identify and respond effectively to problems (e.g., managing caseloads and work assignments) and achieve outcomes.

Although leadership drivers averaged to a basic score at the systems level, a notable amount of variation existed among agencies on their use of leadership drivers, with about half reporting basic or advanced capacity in these areas and the other half reporting none or little leadership capacity to drive implementation. In addition, agencies that had higher leadership capacity also tended to have higher overall implementation capacity.

In sum, the counties interviewed had greater adaptive leadership capacity as indicated by their ability to reward motivated staff, engage disinterested and inactive staff, and remove obstacles to change. For example, leaders of a small county proactively sought ways to ensure new initiatives were successful by recognizing barriers to achievement and making modifications when and where needed. Other counties expressed frustration with “initiative fatigue” and stressors caused by cuts to state and local budgets. The push for “smart supervision,” justice realignment, and the lingering effects of the “great recession” appeared to strain the adaptive leadership ability of several counties interviewed. We noticed medium-sized counties tended to

be more adaptive than either smaller or larger counties, perhaps owing to differences in complexity, resources, and access to supports.

Strengths in technical leadership capacity were observed in several agencies as indicated by their ability to reallocate funding for initiatives. As discussed above, some agencies took advantage of grants and other external funding sources to install innovations. The ability to reallocate funding appeared to be more difficult for smaller and more geographically isolated agencies. Whereas the system showed good capacity in the area of managing funding for initiatives, there was an opportunity for leaders to better allocate time for implementation. The lack of time for initiatives may be tied to a failure to align internal policies.

### **Discussion**

The implementation of any new initiative takes place within a system comprised of structures, norms, policies, and relationships to external stakeholders. Without tailoring implementation to the context in which the innovation is taking place and establishing an actionable, systematic plan for implementation, solutions are unlikely to be fully implemented or sustained. The analysis of the implementation experiences of 10 community corrections agencies in Oregon revealed rich, grounded insights into the successes and challenges personnel from all organizational levels encountered while attempting to implement EBPs. Viewed together, the findings uncovered patterns that are helpful for understanding systemic opportunities and gaps in Oregon's organizational capacity to sustain EBPs. In addition, several broader conclusions can be drawn from our observations.

First, Oregon has made significant progress over the last 10 years of establishing a strong culture supportive of evidence-based practices and investing in training. This is likely the result of state-level leadership. In 2003, Oregon passed legislation (Oregon Revised Statute (ORS)

182.525) requiring that 75% of state funding to correctional agencies for programs must be directed toward evidence-based programs. The results of the ImpleMap confirm that the state was effective at promoting the value of EBPs and that corrections leaders were responsive to the legislation by improving training and undertaking several large scale initiatives. More specifically, the strongest drivers of implementation in Oregon's community corrections agencies were tied to large training initiatives (i.e., staff training, operationalization of initiatives, and funding for initiatives), cultural change (i.e., fostering champions and organizational culture), and leadership from the Oregon Department of Corrections and the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors (i.e., multi-level alignment, multi-level communication, and proactive facilitation). These are important drivers of implementation and represent significant progress.

Second, even in a system that is integrated more than many states and has been working to implement EBPs for over a decade in a context where legislation strongly supports EPBs, several systemic gaps in implementation capacity were identified. The overall capacity of the 10 agencies we observed is at a "basic" level. This likely overstates the total systemic capacity of Oregon community corrections because we were not able to observe many of the smaller and more geographically isolated agencies, particularly those within frontier counties (i.e., agencies among sparsely populated, but geographically large, rural areas). This result reflects the complexity, difficulty, and scale of systems change.

The ImpleMap suggests several promising systemic interventions for Oregon community corrections agencies. Ultimately, more attention should be devoted to building data systems and leadership capacity (factors that most directly influence accountability for change) and to the hard work of changing policies and practices that make time for and prioritize EBPs rather than



the more traditional tasks of probation and parole such as documentation, investigation, and law enforcement. There are also opportunities to better scrutinize new initiatives, strategically assign training (rather than mandating across the board training), and increase incentives for line staff to adhere to program models.

We suspect that a lack of systematic implementation planning is not only the result of the complexity and difficulty of systems change but is also due to an incomplete understanding of how to achieve program fidelity. A narrow focus on fidelity leads us to overemphasize training and place too much responsibility for implementation on the individual personnel attempting to use the intervention. The assumption is that if we can just “fix the staff,” we can fix the system. Broadening our lens to include implementation drivers shifts our perspective to the organization and places responsibility for change on the system. To “fix the staff” (i.e., attract and sustain a highly skilled professional workforce), we need to fix the system.

This idea appears to be gaining ground in applied criminal justice research (e.g., Taxman & Belenko, 2012), and is highlighted in the latest techniques for training staff on using motivational interviewing with offenders. Stinson and Clark (2017), for example, devote a full, concluding chapter of their textbook to the implementation and sustainability of motivational interviewing practices. One of their first reminders to readers is that “implementation comes in many sizes” (p. 212). Although EBPs can be established in multiple agencies of varying size, implementation itself will never look exactly the same from one agency to another. Nevertheless, it is likely that similarly-sized agencies encounter analogous strengths and gaps in implementation. Rural community corrections agencies with smaller numbers of staff may face challenges with consistent funding streams, internal coaching capacities, and time allocation to learn new skills. On the other hand, they may also be strengthened by strong internal multi-level

alignment and communication because, in reality, there are fewer staffing levels to align and communicate between. These similarities are largely consistent with our results from the more rural counties we interviewed in Oregon,<sup>1</sup> and indicate a need for researchers to measure organizational size and complexity to more comprehensively understand how best to approach implementation.

Scholars also have a central role to play in helping us understand systems change and the effect of implementation on program fidelity and program outcomes. In the last decade, we have made significant progress advancing research on the effectiveness of correctional rehabilitation. The field has moved from identifying the principles of effective interventions to demonstrating the efficacy and effectiveness of various strategies for reducing offending organized around core correctional practices. The research has also born out the significance of program quality and has shown that fidelity to core correctional practices appears to be more important than the specific program used (Lipsey et al., 2007).

To continue to advance the science of correctional interventions, more research is needed that directly measures processes and structures that influence implementation. We need to study the causes of fidelity and the interrelationship between contextual and organizational variables that may condition the effects of interventions. Palmer's (1995) suggestions also bear repeating: we need more process evaluations that identify the barriers to change and the characteristics that drive implementation and contribute to effective interventions. Blase and Fixsen's (2013) model of active implementation (Figure 1) provides a promising organizing framework for a robust research agenda on "what works" to sustain effective correctional interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> However, as noted in the Results, there were challenges for these counties to effectively communicate and align with Oregon DOC.

There are certain limitations in the current study to keep in mind. First, the results are context specific to Oregon. In addition, the counties that participated in the ImpleMap interviews may not be representative of the community corrections departments in the state as a whole. The intent of the assessment was not to make generalizations about the level or quality of implementation but to understand barriers and opportunities for change and to share successful strategies for implementing programs. Our results nevertheless highlight the potential usefulness of the ImpleMap protocol for planning and evaluation. Second, the results help us understand processes but should not be considered outcomes or summative. Future research should compare initial ImpleMap results to community corrections outcomes (e.g., recidivism rates) and explore the extent to which the ImpleMap protocol and related scores can be analyzed quantitatively. Finally, the results should be viewed as exploratory and descriptive not explanatory.

### **Conclusion**

From a technology transfer perspective, it is a “win” that more state legislatures are incentivizing correctional agencies to shift their culture from being surveillance and punishment-oriented toward being evidence-based and rehabilitative. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance “Smart Supervision” initiative and the National Institute of Corrections have also played a critical role in disseminating information about EBPs and encouraging their use. Yet, many correctional agencies struggle to know how and where to begin their evidence-based implementation process. There is too much reliance on a model of change that focuses on obtaining funding for training without carefully vetting the initiatives for organizational fit and determining how to support the implementation of the innovation past the initial training phase.

The experience of Nevada is illustrative. In 2017, the Nevada Division of Parole and Probation embarked on a massive culture shift toward evidence-based practices. The legislature

approved funding for multiple initiatives including the Nevada Risk Assessment System (modeled after the Ohio Risk Assessment System; Latessa, Lemke, Makarios, Smith, & Lowenkamp, 2010), Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), and Core Correctional Practices training. Approval was also granted for the construction and operation of two day reporting centers. These are major achievements for a state that has been slow to embrace the evidence-based practices movement.

However, during the legislative session, no one asked whether the Division had an implementation plan for determining *how* all the new initiatives would be achieved and sustained or whether they even had the capacity to deliver on the many goals it proposed. This is an especially important oversight. Statewide mandated training without a larger systematic plan runs the significant risk of failing. If failure occurs, it will not be because the initiatives are inappropriate or the external purveyors did not provide quality training and technical assistance. It will fail because there was no actionable implementation plan to support change. For implementation of this scope to work and be sustained, it takes more than a few captains in the Northern (Reno) and Southern (Las Vegas) Command being delegated to take on what equates to turning an aircraft carrier around using a few paddles. To drive change, far more purposeful attention to implementation is required of the organization. Fortunately, it is promising that executive leadership at Nevada Parole and Probation now understand this and are creating an implementation plan encompassing far more than just treatment fidelity.

Corrections leaders need to assess the readiness of their organizations to implement a new program before making significant investments in training. External purveyors of training also have a responsibility to help leaders understand how to sustain their investment and realize long-term success and improved outcomes. External funders should also request evidence that

an organization is ready to implement new programs before funding initiatives. Further, funders should provide more support for technical assistance and leadership training to build implementation capacity and help prepare organizations to implement innovations successfully.

Correctional leaders frequently are promoted internally through the ranks of an organization and as a result may have limited knowledge about organizational change, leadership, and other important aspects of public management that facilitate or impede implementation. The ImpleMap process provides guidance for leaders to improve their understanding of how their system operates, and a roadmap for determining how to begin building an implementation process. Universities and professional associations share responsibility in educating students and members on these important skills.

There are over 5,000 jails and prisons in the United States--now more than the number of degree-granting colleges and universities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008; 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). In addition, an estimated 3,000 community corrections departments exist in the U.S. based on the number of counties (United States Geological Survey, 2018). It would be foolish to assume that all correctional agencies can collaborate closely with researchers to implement each major initiative. Although a third-party may provide the training designed to teach new evidence-based skills, the trainers are often not contracted to assist in building an implementation system, nor would many know where to begin. Until systemic implementation planning becomes woven into the fabric of evidence-based corrections, we will continue to see agencies simply “train and hope” (Stokes & Bauer, 1977).

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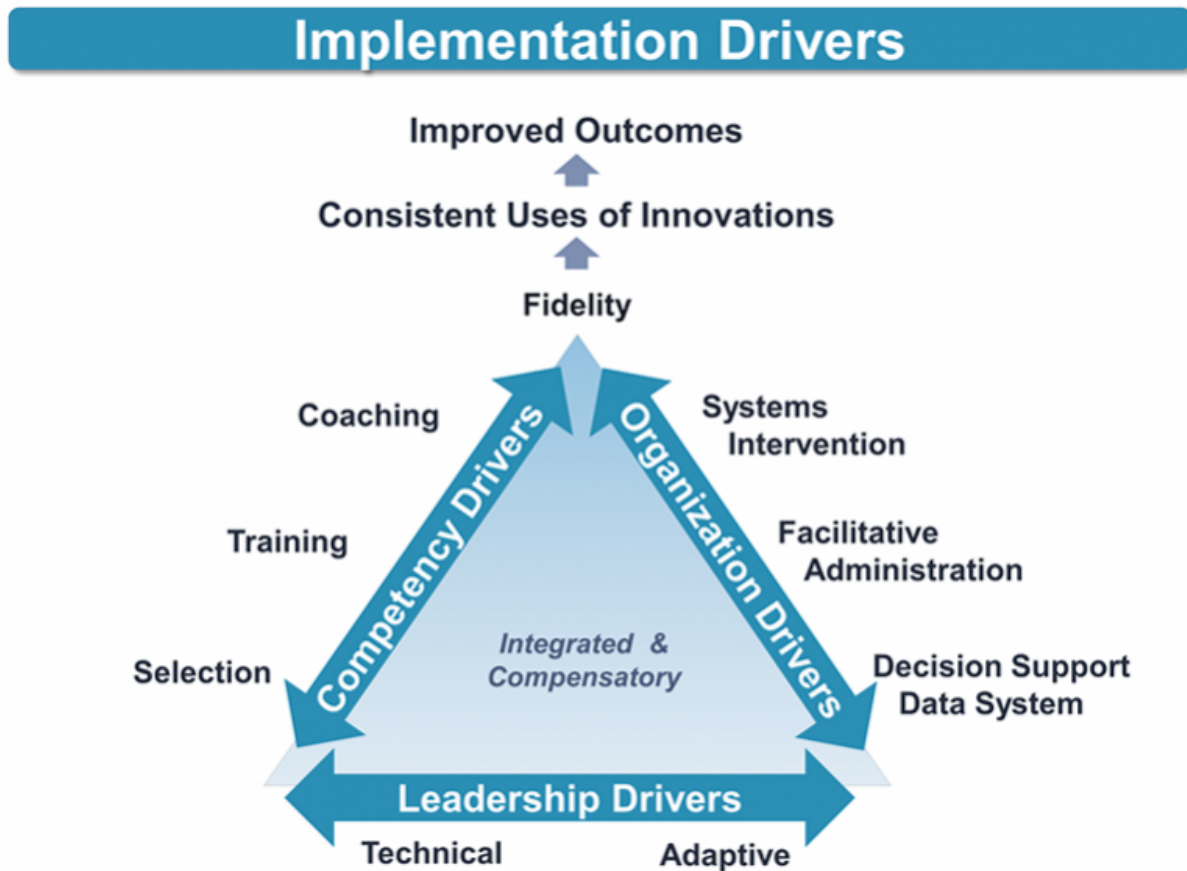


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Figure 1. *Fixsen et al.'s (2015) Implementation Drivers*



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Table 1. *ImpleMap Results for Ten County Agencies*

<b>Scoring</b> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; gap: 5px;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: white; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">0</div> <span>= None</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: #f0f0f0; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">1</div> <span>= Some</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: #d0d0d0; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">2</div> <span>= Basic</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 15px; background-color: #a0a0a0; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">3</div> <span>= Advanced</span> </div> </div>	<b>Agencies</b>										
	County #1	County #2	County #3	County #4	County #5	County #6	County #7	County #8	County #9	County #10	System Average
<b>Initiatives</b>											
System for Vetting Initiatives	0	2	3	1	2	2	2	1	3	2	<b>1.8</b>
Initiatives Operationalized	1	3	2	1	3	2	3	3	2	3	<b>2.3</b>
<b>Competency Development</b>											
Staff Selection	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	<b>1.9</b>
Staff Training	1	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	<b>2.5</b>
Staff Coaching	0	2	3	1	1	2	2	1	2	3	<b>1.7</b>
Staff Performance Assessment	1	2	2	2	0	2	3	1	3	3	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Organizational Supports</b>											
Data Systems	0	3	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	2	<b>1.6</b>
Multi-level Alignment	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	<b>2.2</b>
Fostering Champions	2	1	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	<b>2.3</b>
Multi-level Communication	1	1	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	<b>2.1</b>
Identify Opportunities and Threats	1	2	1	0	2	2	2	2	3	2	<b>1.7</b>
Internal Policy Alignment	0	1	1	1	2	3	3	1	2	1	<b>1.5</b>
Funding Allocation	1	3	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	2	<b>1.7</b>
Organizational Culture	1	1	1	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Leadership</b>											
Time for Initiative	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	2	3	<b>1.7</b>
Funding for Initiative	1	2	2	2	1	2	3	3	1	3	<b>2.0</b>
Staff Motivation	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	3	3	2	<b>1.9</b>
Proactive Facilitation of Initiative	0	1	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	<b>2.1</b>
<b>County Average</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1.94</b>

Note: For averages, standard rounding rules were applied to visually represent county and system levels of implementation capacity.

Table 2. *System-Wide Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement*

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
Staff Training (2.5)	Internal Policy Alignment (1.5)
Initiatives Operationalized (2.3)	Data Systems (1.6)
Fostering Champions (2.3)	Staff Coaching (1.7)
Organizational Culture (2.2)	Funding Allocation (1.7)
Multilevel Alignment (2.2)	Identifying Threats and Opportunities (1.7)
Multilevel Communication (2.1)	Time for Initiatives (1.7)
Proactive Facilitation (2.1)	
Funding for Initiative (2.0)	