

Lessons Learned: Initial implementation of a Skills-based Coaching Program in Child Welfare

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Background

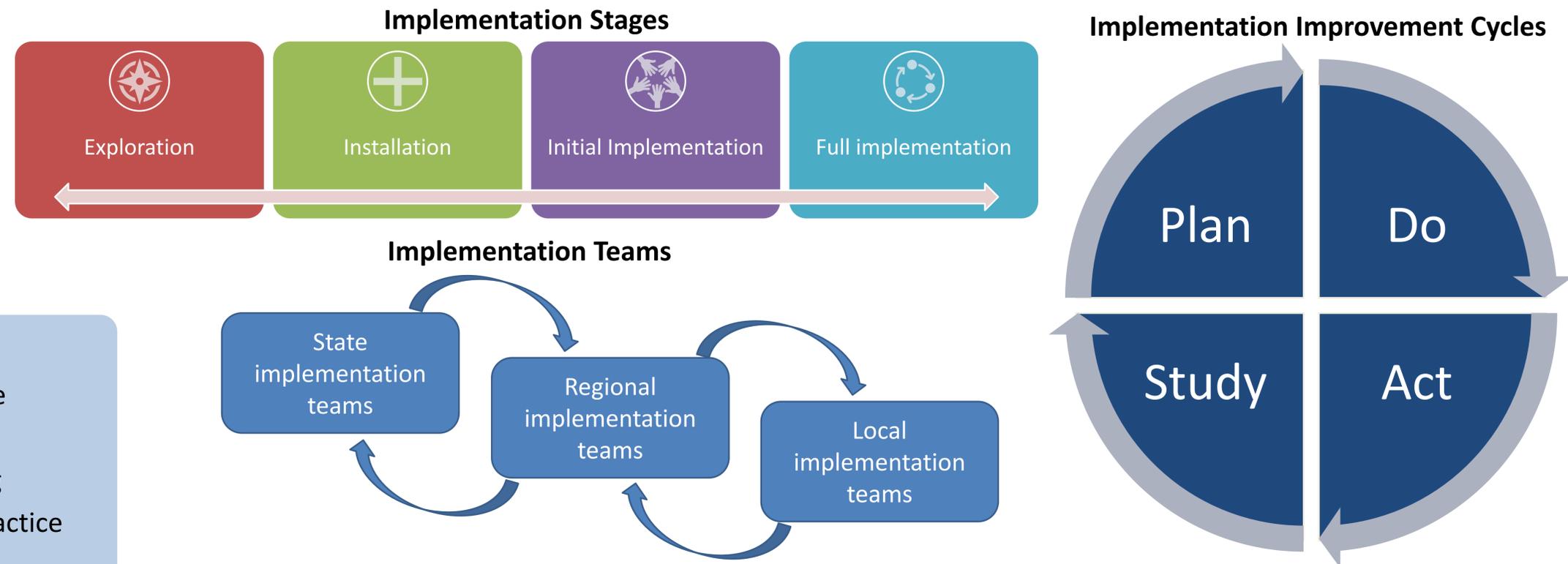
- Child welfare is a fast-paced and high stakes environment, where practices can become entrenched and challenging to modify. Yet, research continues to grow in identifying effective strategies for creating change in this complex setting.
- Coaching has become an increasingly common practice to strengthen knowledge and skills for child welfare professionals (Das et al., 2021).
- Learning from the teams tasked with implementing a coaching program in a real-world child welfare environment can provide critical insight for those seeking to implement new programs in this context.

Coaching Program Overview

- KanCoach is a skills-based coaching program adapted from the Atlantic Coast Child Welfare Implementation Center (ACCWIC) coaching model that focuses on developing and strengthening supervisory capacity and skills to promote quality frontline practice and improve outcomes for families.
- Priority topics for knowledge and skill development are safety and risk assessment, family-based assessments and case planning, strength-based engagement, relative/kin connections, secondary traumatic stress and anti-racist practices.

Methods

An implementation science framework guided the initial implementation of the KanCoach skills-based coaching program for child welfare supervisors. Specifically, three Active Implementation Frameworks (AIF) were used in implementation: (1) implementation stages, (2) implementation teams, and (3) improvement cycles were used to engage agency leaders, managers, and supervisors in initial implementation activities (Fixsen et al., 2019). The skills-based coaching program was implemented statewide across six regions and including six child welfare agencies, including the public state agency and five private, non-profit providers. The agencies provide services across the child welfare spectrum, including family assessment and investigations of child maltreatment, family preservation, foster care, and adoption services.



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Results

Implementation Teams

- Steering Committee
 - 50 members across the child welfare community in a midwestern state (state agency, private non-profit agencies, judicial administration, parent partner organizations)
- Strategy-specific Subcommittee
 - 15 members across child welfare agencies and parent partners
- Regional Implementation Teams
 - Membership specific to agency
- Local Implementation Teams
 - Membership specific to agency and region of the state

Implementation Stages

- **Exploration** – Researched skills-based coaching programs, developed coaching program, planned for staged implementation.
- **Installation** – Continued developing coaching program, assessed readiness for initial implementation utilizing implementation drivers (organizational, leadership, and competency drivers; Fixsen et al., 2009).

- **Initial Implementation** – Identified pilot sites (1 urban, 1 rural) with 30 participants. Successfully staged implementation in 6 regions across the state, with 260 supervisors trained in the coaching model. Utilized state, regional, and local implementation teams, strategy-specific subcommittee, and participant surveys for feedback in improvement cycles toward full implementation.
- **Full Implementation** – Sustainability planning is ongoing. Continuous feedback loops from state, regional, and local implementation teams, strategy-specific subcommittee, and participant surveys inform improvement cycles.

Improvement Cycles

- Facilitate ongoing monitoring – Established six implementation metrics to track supervisor progress (training, practice collaboratives, 1:1 coaching, self-assessments, caseworker assessments, and observation-based fidelity assessments).
- Utilize state, regional, and local implementation teams, strategy-specific subcommittee, and participant surveys for feedback in improvement cycles
- Incorporate priority topics with shared principles into coaching program – utilize feedback from parents with lived experience in child welfare system

Lessons Learned

- Developing a strategy-specific subcommittee with members who (a) *actively* engage with regional and local implementation teams and (b) have decision-making capacities within their organizations are critical to successful implementation.
- Establishing (a) key metrics to track implementation and (b) clear feedback loops through which data are shared with implementation teams and input from teams are communicated to coaching program leadership are essential strategies for enhancing improvement cycles.
- Positive experiences in the coaching program laid the foundation for sustainability by developing champions who “spread the word” about the coaching program to peers.
- Engaging individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system provides a unique and vital perspective in developing and strengthening a skills-based program in child welfare.

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