Reviewer’s report

Title: Beyond "implementation strategies": Classifying the full range of strategies used in implementation science and practice

Version: 0 Date: 27 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Bianca Albers

Reviewer's report:

Dear Jennifer Leeman and colleagues,

Thank you for your work on the article 'Beyond implementation strategies', which I read with great interest. My understanding of the article's essence is the following:

You suggest a framework for the classification of implementation strategies based on

1. The factor they target to promote the uptake of an EBI (e.g. awareness, perceptions, motivation, capacity etc.), and
2. The system level at which they are used (be it the synthesis/translation, the support or the delivery system)

Based on this understanding, I have four key comments, which are the main reason for me to recommend a thorough revision of the article:

1. Firstly, it remains unclear to me what the concrete purpose of the 'product' is - and I am using 'product' here because the article itself is not clear on whether you have developed a framework, a classification system, or a logic for categorising strategies - the article uses all three descriptions. The term 'logic' is probably the one that surprises me most as I could not see any interconnections described between the different types of strategies, which would be a prerequisite for a logic. I think this needs to be aligned and clarified.

2. Secondly, it also remains unclear to me what the purpose of the product is. To begin with, it seems as if you wish to develop a classification system, which would support researchers in differentiating between different types of strategies. However, in the discussion section you highlight that (a) the different categories of implementation strategies are not mutually exclusive and a strategy therefore could be located under several categories, and (b) the framework contributes to the challenges to communication within the field of IS and
practice - which almost undermines your ambition to create greater structure and clarity in this field?

3. Thirdly, some of the strategy categories are difficult to clearly differentiate from each other. I therefore wonder how you decided on exactly these categories: Did you use the ERIC strategies as a starting point? Did you work inductively with them to develop these categories? Creating greater transparency around your method may help in making it clearer what the categories mean.

  o For example, the description of an implementation process strategy as 'ensuring that an integration strategy fits the needs and characteristics of a context' is too abstract and leaves the reader in doubt about what behaviours or what type of 'doing' is implied in this process of tailoring. If what you mean is that process strategies aim to create an enabling environment for the use of integration strategies, then this needs to be explained with greater clarity and examples of concrete process strategies should be given to help readers understand. I am not sure if that solves the problem re the blurry boundaries between process and integration strategies but it could be a first step in that direction.

  o Another example relates to my comment below (see point 5) about capacity building potentially also taking place in the delivery system itself. If that is the case and capacity building strategies indeed are enacted by the delivery system, what does that mean for the product? Would capacity building strategies then become integration strategies? Supposedly not. Is it then important to define strategies by the system level at which they are used?

  o The same question could be raised for scale-up strategies, which at times also may be enacted by the delivery and not only the support system - what consequences would that have for your thinking?

4. You aim to describe how the product can help implementation scientists pay greater attention to implementation strategies. It is difficult to understand how you see it applied in e.g. an empirical study testing different implementation strategies. As a heuristic? If so, the fact that single strategies can be assigned to multiple categories may make this a difficult heuristic as its reliability - if e.g. used for coding processes - may be weak. Furthermore, it worries me a bit that you have not discussed the potential use of the product for practice. I think in a field like implementation, this is close to a 'must'.

The bottom line of these four comments is that I think that there needs to be greater clarity around (a) what product you provide, (b) the purpose of the product, and (c) the conceptual clarity of the elements that form the product. In addition to these overarching comments, a couple of more specific thoughts that emerged while reading your article:

5. On page 7, the section on determinants could use two or three examples of what a determinant is.
6. On page 8 you describe the support system as often being external to the delivery system, and while this may be correct in a U.S. system, this may not be the case in other parts of the world, where especially the development of general capacities would be in the hands of the delivery system itself - which makes the reading of the reminder of the article tricky.

7. The article uses a large number of abstract terms, and not all of them will be immediately familiar to readers. A glossary (maybe in a text box) will help readers keep an overview of the terminology and should include terms such as

- Determinant
- Strategy
- Indicator
- Implementation intervention (including multicomponent vs multi strategy)
- Provider
- System (used on page 13)
- Vertical strategies
- Setting-level (used on page 15)

Some of the above may be defined in different ways by different readers, e.g. the term 'provider' sometimes is used for 'provider agency' whereas you seem to use it for an individual delivering services directly to clients. Through a glossary you will be able to avoid misunderstandings.

I hope the above is of use - very happy to read the next iteration of the article.

Kind regards

Bianca Albers

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