

The Implementation Science at Work Podcast

Transcript - Episode 9: Readiness

Guests: Adam Holland and Rebecca Roppolo, The Impact Center at FPG, UNC-CH
Host: Meera Kumanan
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Meera (00:00):

From the Impact Center at UNC's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, this is Implementation Science at Work. In this episode, we talk about readiness. What does it mean to be ready, and how does that relate to implementation practice?

Rebecca (00:21):

Remember, readiness isn't a feeling, it's a decision. Trust yourself. Take one small step today, which felt very much like a fortune cookie to me.

Adam (00:28):

I was going to say, it feels like something you would find on the lid of your Dasani yogurt.

Meera (00:35):

That's Rebecca and Adam, two of our Impact Center implementation specialists here to talk more about readiness.

Rebecca (00:44):

I mean, really the question is, are you ready, Adam? <Laugh>?

Adam (00:49):

The answer to that will always be no <laugh>. So we , again, we might as well just go.

Rebecca (00:54):

It's the perfect intro for an episode about readiness that even if you don't feel necessarily ready, just dive on in.

Adam (01:02):

Spoiler alert, <laugh>. Yeah, so I, I'm Adam Holland. I'm an Implementation Specialist at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute as part of the Impact Center. And I'm joined by Rebecca.

Rebecca (01:16):

Rebecca Roppolo. I'm also all of those things. We are excited to speak with you all today about readiness, motivation and how they intersect and how we use them in the field of implementation science.

Adam (01:32):

Do you want to give us a working definition for readiness, Rebecca?

Rebecca (01:37):

Yeah, so when we think about readiness, we're thinking about being ready, being prepared to take some sort of an action or behavior change. When we're thinking about it, it's answering the question of, am I both willing and able to make this change, to do this behavior now? So that's both in your own head, are you psychologically willing and in a place where you're ready to go as well as more practically, are you in a context and environment? Is this a good time? What's going on in your environment that also is influencing whether or not this is a good time for you to be taking action.

Adam (02:24):

Right. And you're, you know, you're talking about it individually, but we could also think about it on an organizational level. So, are we as a collective group, you know, ready to do something? So, you know, and I think it's actually really useful to think of it both ways. Oftentimes we think about how we motivate people individually, but also how we think about it at an organizational level. It's because a lot of times it's more than just the sum of its parts. It's not just once 50% of the people are ready, we're good to go, or, or something like that. It really is that they're almost separate constructs to think about organization versus individual.

Rebecca (03:02):

Yeah, and it's tricky too because, you know even on a team, it's made up of individuals, you have this almost nesting doll of individuals make up teams, teams make up organizations, and tracing that line of intent up and down. Where can an organization be ready for change unless the individuals within that organization are also ready? Can the individuals within that organization be ready for change if the organization from a policy and practice level isn't conducive to that kind of work? So kind of zooming in and out of, is this an individual readiness issue? Is this an organizational readiness issue? Does it have to be both? At what level do individuals and teams and organizations need to be before you hit that inflection point where change is possible?

Adam (03:55):

Yeah, and, and you know, it's interesting because we talk about readiness a lot of times as if it's dichotomous, it's on or off. You either are ready or you're not ready. But, I personally think of it as being much more of a spectrum. There are organizations that are so far away from readiness <laugh> that, that you can't imagine them pivoting it on anything. And then there is organizations that are very nimble. And they're very motivated and they have the

capacity and they're, you know, ready for change and sometimes ready for any change, sometimes ready for a specific change. I think there is sort of, probably a, almost a cut point. Where you have to be past a certain point or anything you try is going to fail, or you have to be past a certain point, you know, in readiness for a specific thing or, or it's going to fail. And then anything after that is going to facilitate implementation, it's going to make it easier. Things are going to get scaled up or taken up more quickly.

Rebecca (04:55):

I think that's part of what makes this tricky too, is we're talking about a thing, but we can't even really define where the edge of that thing is. So I a hundred percent agree that readiness is a spectrum. And at what point in time along that color gradient are we ready to roll? You know, maybe if we think about the spectrum as literally the color spectrum, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, I might not be ready to make a change until I'm way readier than you would be.

Adam (05:27):

And probably the initiative too. If the change is, we're going to start washing our hands, that is probably something you don't need an immense amount of readiness for. But if the change involves a new 12-step procedure or a completely new way of interacting with clients or, or a 100% different way of running a classroom that is a complete 180 from what teachers have been doing, your readiness level is going to have to be higher before that can be implemented. And so, it's tricky because it, it varies based on all of these different things. And so it's almost impossible, I think to just go stamp an organization or a person or a group and say, ah, you're ready. And the other thing that I think is tricky is, we think about readiness a lot of times at the beginning, but readiness is an ongoing thing.

Adam (06:26):

It is something that is always got to be present because organizations involve turnover. You know, it's great if you are super-ready now. If every employee that's here now is gone in six months, do you think your organization would still be ready? Probably not. And there's other systems things that could change either internally or because of external factors that also, and so, I often tell clients, it's not that you are ready or you aren't ready. Readiness is an ongoing effort and process. We're always trying to improve readiness.

Rebecca (07:05):

Yeah, I agree. Even that we continue to use the same word readiness to talk about both of those things for me is part of why I'm so interested in the theoretical predecessors of behavior change. Readiness isn't just one thing. It's made up of a number of different factors and drivers and, you know, ingredients, if you will, that are going into what is readiness. It's not, you know, it's more of a cake, right? We might call it a cake, but it's made up of a lot of different ingredients and the knowledge and skills, the attitudes and norms that go into washing your hands is very different from knowledge and skills,

attitudes and norms and agency between like , we are installing a new way of interfacing with clients.

Adam (07:56):

Yeah, for sure. And I also rely on theory a lot and I do that simply because theory sort of tells us what to pay attention to and what not to pay attention to. And so as we're sort of talking here about the fact that there's a lot of different ingredients. I want to be really clear with anybody that's listening. It doesn't mean any ingredient, you know, if you start adding weird stuff to your cake, you're going to get a weird cake, you know flour, sugar, butter, eggs. These things might vary in their amounts depending on the cake, but theory really does draw our attention to these are the things that we know from experience and from trying this out. Are the things that are going to really impact our efforts to scale up or implement change or, you know, do something new in our organization and these other things are maybe less important, you know? And, and so I think that's, that's why theory for me at least is really important also, as I totally agree. Yeah.

Rebecca (09:01):

I also appreciate how it gives us common language as we talk about these things. You know, I was throwing around things like attitudes and norms and control and agency and knowledge and skills, and these things all play together obviously, or they wouldn't all be a part of willingness and readiness, but they are different and it's important that they're different because there's different ways in which we would talk about addressing norms. For example, what do my colleagues think about this? What do my leaders think about this? What does my funder think about this? And, the ways in which we would go about raising awareness and addressing societal norms is very different from how we would go about addressing issues of efficacy or control. Like, I don't think I am currently capable of doing x, y, z skill is very different from Adam doesn't think I should be doing x, y, or z skill. And both of those are examples of theoretical drivers of behavior change. And talking about them specifically gives us, as implementation practitioners, as just individuals in our lives try to do stuff, more tools to move towards change to build readiness.

Adam (10:17):

Yeah. And those different categories also I think allow us to be really intentional because if we are just throwing spaghetti against the wall hoping something sticks, then it's fine to not differentiate any of these things. But if I want to make real change in my organization, I really want to build readiness. I have to do, you said earlier, I have to think, is this a norms issue where, I don't feel I have permission to do this new thing, or is this an efficacy issue where I feel I can't and, and not just me, right? But leaders in organizations have to think about this for the organization. Do all of the people working in my organization feel they can't do new things or feel they can't try things that are outside the box or can't do things that are different than the way that we've done them for years.

Adam (11:11):

Either because there's a person in the organization who is very rigid or the funder is very rigid or there could be other hierarchies and things, or is it that they really don't know how to do it? Those are addressed in completely different ways. If, if the issue, the core issue is that people don't feel they have permission to do it, all the trainings in the world and all the coaching in the world is not going to shift that. Every time they step on the floor, if their boss looks over their way and they immediately, I feel they have to stop doing it, then it's never going to work. So having these categories, I think really allows us to be intentional and match our efforts to build readiness to the needs of the organization and even more fine grain, sometimes the individual.

Adam (11:59):

I think this is a nice lead in to talk about, how do we build readiness in people? Or in a workforce? So I would, I would sort of venture that the first thing that I would say is, it's done intentionally. It's something that we use an assessment, we go collect some information. Maybe it's talking to people, maybe it's just sitting down and with a checklist and thinking through things. You know, maybe it's getting a team together and doing that, but it's being intentional about getting some information and then using that information to drive whatever comes next. So I think the, the first thing is always to get a little information and know what's going on so that you can direct efforts.

Meera (12:43):

Adam then goes on to share a story of his early efforts in building organizational readiness.

Adam (12:54):

So I think, you know, a lot of people, when I first started doing work, I didn't think about readiness. And unfortunately, I suppose most of my reasons for doing readiness arise from seeing projects fail because we didn't attend to it. And so one of the projects I worked on early in my career was a pre-K-3 reform project that was really focused on going into schools and helping them align practices and align their sort of pedagogies and ways of running classrooms in a more sort of consistent, thoughtful way so that children weren't coming into pre-K and having one type of experience and then transitioning to kindergarten and having a jarringly different experience. And then in second grade, moving up to third grade where in a lot of states testing starts and moving again from one type of experience into a very jarringly different experience.

Adam (13:55):

And so the first schools that we went into during this project, we just went in and started doing the things that you do; we started providing technical assistance, started providing coaching, started asking them to make changes in how they were doing things. And what we found was that our results were inconsistent at best. I mean, if I'm being honest, I would say out of the maybe seven or eight schools that we started out in, we saw really good results in only a couple of them. And looking back on it, I can see that what had happened was those schools were ready. They were already, they had already, you know,

promoted a level of readiness to engage in a change in general, but the sorts of specific changes that we were going to ask them to do. And so, you know, one of the big questions when we talk about readiness is always readiness for what?

Adam (14:54):

And, and those are the two that I often think about. There's a general sort of readiness to change, the ability to do new things, try new things in an organization to, to switch from the way things are being done, to the way things could be done. And then there's readiness for specific changes. If I ask a teacher to do something specifically different in her classroom, or I ask an administrator at a school to do something different, or, you know, if I'm working out in the community and I'm asking families that live in a particular area to change something about how they are going through their day-to-day lives, all of those involve a sort of general nimbleness and readiness to change as well as the ability to do a specific thing. And, and those, I think sort of when you combine them often form what I think of as being readiness.

Adam (15:46):

And so when we went into these schools, what we found was the ones who just happened to be ready not through anything that we did were the ones that were changing. And so it really helped us almost back into this idea of building readiness before starting to do the, the change efforts that we were going to do. And as we started looking at building readiness with, within these schools, we were looking again, not through the theoretical framework that I think we have now because this was many years in the past, but almost because good ideas are convergent. We started focusing on the things that we've been talking about during this podcast. And so specifically we started thinking about motivation. So the willingness and interest of people to do something. And then the second piece was, was organizational capacity.

Adam (16:41):

There's this idea of I really want to do this thing, but I can't. I want to spend time meeting with other teachers and talking about our practices, but we don't have any time to meet, you know they're motivated in that case, but there was no capacity. They didn't have coverage in the classrooms that would allow teachers to step out for a minute. They didn't have maybe the money to provide subs on days when teachers needed to be out, things like that. And so we started working before we ever suggested a single change in motivating people and in working with them to build some of that organizational capacity. And we approached it in a number of different ways. And they, I think there are as many ways to approach this as there are organizations, but I'm just going to share what we did in this particular case.

Adam (17:36):

The first thing that we did as far as motivation went was not just settling for leadership buy-in, but rather trying to get top to bottom buy-in. We'd had schools in that first cohort where

the leadership was bought in, but the sort of people on the ground in classrooms were not bought in. We had the reverse even in one school where the, the sort of rank and file teachers and practitioners were very interested, but the leadership was not interested. And we found that in both of those cases the lack of interest from one group or the other sort of canceled out any positive gains. So we were looking for really top to bottom interest. And that can be tricky to get in organizations because a lot of times leadership decides we need to do this thing, and then the sort of rank and file practitioners are voluntold that they're going to do this thing.

Adam (18:28):

And so they participate, but it's begrudging and it's something they're not really interested in. And we were not looking for that. And so we really sort of settled on a screening procedure at the beginning where instead of having the leadership write an application or respond to a request for applications we included in that process interviews with the teachers, interviews with the teaching assistants, the instructional assistants, the paraprofessionals, the support staff throughout the school, the school psychologists. So we, we were really looking to not just see principals who were interested in taking part, but everybody who was interested in taking part. And when I, when I talk about this general interest, I'm really talking about a general readiness for change. So they didn't know specifically what we were going to ask them to do. They knew sort of broadly, we were, we're involved in pre-K-3 reform, but they didn't know exactly what we were going to come in and tell them to do or ask them to do.

Adam (19:28):

And so that, that sort of motivation that we were looking to build was sort of a general readiness for change. And then we asked specific questions of them that really were about some of the things that we were looking for. You know, are you comfortable giving children more autonomy in the classroom? Are you interested in hands-on learning? Are you interested in combining developmentally appropriate practice with rigor? And, and so really getting to some of these specific things. And so part of what we did was have them sort of self-select into this. The other key thing that we did as part of this motivation piece was we had them at the very beginning of this project, say what they were going to do. And I think having a memorandum of understanding or something that is pretty common in university district state partnerships, that sort of thing.

Adam (20:16):

But what we were really looking to do was have them publicly declare what they were going to put in here, the effort level that they were going to put in and say very clearly not just to themselves, but in front of other people we are going to put this level of effort in. And, and that is just sort of an old motivational trick that when we say a particular thing or we're going to do a particular thing, we're more likely to do it, particularly if we say it in front of other people. And so having them on record saying, we are going to attend, you know, every quarter of professional development, we are going to do this, we're going to do that

because we want to sort of align with what we say we're going to do. We all want to think of ourselves as being authentic people.

Adam (21:02):

We, we tend to then follow through on those things that we have publicly stated more often than if we, if the expectations are unclear or if we have not said that we're going to do them. So so we really sort of leveraged those things to increase motivation. And then throughout the project, I think we were a little more mindful about just motivating in the moment. And, and, and this is something that I talk about with my current projects a lot, is it's critical for you to understand anytime you're working with practitioners, anytime you're working with anybody, what are they trying to get out of this? You know? And so we started asking our, that question directly of the teachers but then also sort of constructing and understanding based on the feedback we were getting and the things that they were saying.

Adam (21:49):

So it, we wanted, you know, more aligned practice, but they wanted help with challenging behavior. And for us, it's about looking at that Venn diagram and figuring out what's in the middle of that, what's the crossover between developmentally appropriate practice or more aligned practice and solving this challenging behavior problem. And we would go in and instead of saying, you need to change how you're individualizing instruction, we would say, this is true when children are, you know, challenged just enough and the instruction is on something that they can sort of do, but they're really perfecting, ? It's in the zone where they are you know, a little bit competent, but trying to learn more. They're going to be more engaged. And when they're more engaged, we're going to see fewer challenging behaviors. And sure enough, once teachers started doing these things, their challenging behaviors went down, and then it becomes a virtuous cycle.

Adam (22:39):

They would see that they had success, they would feel more confident, they would feel more confident, and so they would in turn be more bought in. And we ended up in this good to better to best situation where the motivation increased as the project went on. That was one key piece was shifting motivation. The other key piece was thinking about that organization organizational capacity, thinking about that organizational capacity and how we sort of tell them what they need to have in place before we start. And again, that goes back to that clear expect expectations piece that goes back to just being upfront with them. And, and it also goes back to the way that we were looking at the schools and selecting - I think the first time we went in we were thinking , oh, we really want to be in the schools that need it the most, but sometimes those schools did need it the most, but just weren't ready to do it.

Adam (23:36):

And so we were really looking for that combination of schools that really needed the assistance, but also had some of the resources needed to start, you know, a change

process. You really, you can't be overwhelmed with so many other initiatives that you can't be involved in this one. You can't have all your resources allocated elsewhere and then think that you're just going to get to it down the line. And so upfront we said, you're going to need to have enough wherewithal to have subs. You know, we're going to come into the school once a month and we're going to need you to have coverage in the classrooms. And so think about it, can you do that? And for a lot of them, it was not an issue all along of could or couldn't they, it's that they had these competing initiatives and when we didn't properly prepare them, they didn't allocate the resources they needed to this particular initiative.

Adam (24:27):

And so being upfront with them ahead of time and really thinking through the process ahead of time helped us to ensure that the necessary organizational capacity was there so that when they were motivated, they could actually do the work. And so those, those are really key lessons for us to learn throughout that project and have continued to serve me well as I've worked with organizations to try to be as upfront as possible at the beginning to try to really clearly think through what are the necessary things that are going to be involved with capacity and actually doing this work, and then making sure that those are in place from the very beginning with some flexibility so that if we need to change things it, it can be changed, ? When people are motivated, they're more likely to allocate those resources. When the resources are there, people are going to feel more motivated than when they feel they're trying to swim through mud.

Adam (25:19):

So these things really work together and create some nice positive effects when they're both there. And that's what we found in this project when we started switching things up and we started being intentional about how we recruited and who we recruited. Everything didn't go perfectly, it never ever does, but we ended up feeling we had made much more significant lasting changes in these organizations and that they were more bought in and that they were really doing things throughout the process that were benefiting teachers and children. And that really in the end, made the biggest difference.

Rebecca (25:55):

What you talked about is just so important and speaks to why thoughtful proactive implementation support can be so helpful because we can get bogged down in the organizational change process, you know, we have to do this thing and it's a part of a million other things we're doing in our day to day. And now just one more thing on my pile of my, my thing pile for the day. And it's can be hard to step back and look at things intentionally. I don't know about from your experience, Adam, but I've seen folks fall back into the knowledge and skills trap more than once where it's so easy to label a lack of readiness as a lack of knowledge about a topic or even opportunities to practice a topic which both are incredibly important and in and of themselves are not sufficient for behavioral or organization change.

Rebecca (26:55):

I mean, Adam, I know you ski. I am, I'm here in Colorado. I ski from time to time, so I grew up here. There's no lack of knowledge or skills on my part, but have I been on the slopes in several years? No, I have not. And I have a positive attitude about skiing. I, my friends and family do it. The norms out here are very much get on the mountain, but it is not currently in my control to go and do that. I have two small children and a husband who does not ski. So the idea of leaving these other needs and going and doing that is so high that I am not ready to ski despite having all of the things and skills and whatever in my toolbox to go. It is just not my time and place. I do not have the agency to go and do that now. And I think just having that perspective and stepping back, it's not about building my readiness necessarily, it's about identifying where in that chain my weak point is if this is something that I really want to do.

Adam (27:55):

Yeah, that's the perfect analogy too, because I totally agree with you that training is the default sort of change method that almost every organization I've ever worked with with employees. And I don't want to denigrate training because it is a key part, right? It often is a significant barrier but it is often a significant barrier in conjunction with other barriers, you know? And so that I think is often a result of the fact that it's the easiest thing to do. It's so easy to bring a one day speaker in, it's so easy to send folks to a conference. So when we are thinking about what can we do, that's the first thing that comes up, you know? And I just want to note that's a budget decision, not necessarily a decision that is driven by carefully examining the needs and the drivers and the barriers and then reacting to that.

Adam (29:04):

And so I, I think that just underlines the importance of gathering information first, and, and then once you have that information, then using it to, to make decisions. And again, it's an ongoing thing. The other mistake that I see people do with training is they go, great, we trained all our teachers on this way to handle challenging behavior and we will be done forever. Amen. But then you have 40% turnover and then you have 40% turnover again the next year. And by the time somebody walks into that school in two years, you may have increased your readiness two years ago, but readiness again is an ongoing process. So it's not just about collecting the data once and saying this was our big barrier. It is absolutely about always having an ongoing way to collect that information so that you can always react and build the sort of things that you need to build a as well as always overcoming the barriers that you need to overcome.

Rebecca (30:11):

Yeah, and I mean, we talk about assessment and it doesn't have to be a big deal. This isn't like some long 85-item instrument. It can be a conversation of we're trying to do this. How are we, how are we feeling about this now? We've identified these previous barriers in the past. Do they still exist? What do we think we need? And just acknowledging that those things can and do change, as you mentioned, turnover is an important part of our life. At

what point in time do we need to intercede on those pieces? And those can be different for these various elements. Also, you know, if there was a major environmental context switch and you just lost a bunch of funding, for example, there is going to be changes, but also windows of opportunity that I feel will raise or lower the bar amongst whatever, wherever you are for readiness and change and attending to those things too I think can be helpful when you're trying to understand current readiness is, are there things going on that are making this a more conducive environment for the change that we're hoping to have happen within our world?

Rebecca (31:28):

Or, or what else?

Meera (31:30):

Adam goes on to share more about how his project assessed readiness in the real world, the school setting.

Adam (31:38):

Again, this really predates me even knowing about implementation science. So we just created the stuff, I have a fair read on motivation and I have a background in quant psych. So, I just made the tools, and they were almost all Likert-survey type tools, but also included some pointed questions about things that we specifically knew, the ability for teachers to step out for an hour of planning time three times a week. And so we asked very, those very pointed yes no questions; can your teachers do this? And then the other ones were sort of Likert style questions around you know, how often do you feel you have support to make changes? How comfortable are you with trying something new in your classroom? You do get some positive things - known validity, known reliability, things like that.

Adam (32:33):

But also I always tell people , don't be shy about asking a question you just want to know the answer to. If it all hinges on teachers being willing to, you know, tear up their behavior plan, then ask them directly, are you willing to tear up your behavior plan? You know, that will get you the best information in the shortest amount of time. And it's all you really want to know anyway. So, don't feel you need to go to the so and so, so and so scale from so and so university. That for, for something that's not measuring a tricky underlying construct, it's just measuring can they do these actual things you need them to do? Think that the most effective sort of change interventions and the most effective implementations that I've ever been a part of, readiness is something that comes up at every meeting.

Adam (33:29):

People talk about, are we still motivated? Has our motivation changed? Do we still have the capacity to do this? Has our capacity changed? And inevitably the answer is yes sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. But when it's always talked about and

always attended to, and we are always ensuring that we are constantly ready every time we meet we end up in a better place because we address issues before they become large problems. And we ensure that we are always sort of on the right track and we're putting our resources and time and energy towards something that we believe in and are motivated by and that we can actually do. So I think this idea of a transition from one of the other is sort of a misnomer in as much as yes, at some point we start implementing, but that does not mean that we don't continue to do the readiness work.

Adam (34:20):

We always do the readiness work. There's always new people coming in, new people that need to get not just trained but motivated, right? It's not enough for somebody to come into the organization. We say, well, this is what we do. Why do we do it that way? How do we, you know, help frame this as the way that our culture works, but also the why that you are going to spend time and energy invested in training and coaching and learning how to do this particular thing or this way of doing things. And so I think that there's never a 'we're done with readiness and now we start implementing,' we're always implementing or we're always doing readiness as we implement. But as far as when that moment comes to start implementation, I think that it's critical for organizations to think really carefully about what they learned during the readiness building process.

Adam (35:15):

Whether it's you know, responding to applications that people put in, whether it is the commitments that people have made, we do best when we implement in a way that fits the particular evidence-based innovation into what people want and need. And so I, I talked earlier about, you know, we wanted to have more aligned practice. Well, teachers really wanted to have help with challenging behavior. And so instead of just going in with our 101 for what we were doing, we used the challenging behavior piece as an entry point. And we said, you have this problem, great, we can help you solve it, and here's how. And that was the first thing we talked about. And not everything in the TA package that we were planning to deliver touched on challenging behavior. But once they saw the positive things that came out of solving their problem, they were much more on board and willing to engage in some of these other efforts and other things.

Adam (36:20):

And, and that was a real difference from the first set of things that we did, where we went and talked about what we thought was the most important, to going in and really listening carefully to them and building on their own motivation to talk about what they felt was most important, got us a lot more buy-in. So again, readiness is not something we have, and then we step off into implementation. We were constantly thinking, how are we motivating people throughout this process? How are we attending to their problems? How are we responding to their needs?

Adam (36:59):

It's gotta be part of the ongoing culture or part of the ongoing procedures. To sit down and think about these things and talk about these things. You know, we always joke that what you measure is what you get. But I think it's true to a certain degree. Or, or at least what you talk about is what you get. You know, if you once a quarter sit down and carve out 15 to 30 minutes during your leadership meeting or during your implementation meeting to talk about readiness and to really think about this, you're always going to be considering these things and you're always going to be attending to them if it's something you want and done. If it's something that you think about once, you know, a year, once every other year, if you are reactive, if you only start to think about stuff when it starts to break, that's, that's tricky.

Adam (37:56):

You know, it's hard to maintain readiness when that's the attitude and the approach. So I think it just, it's just got to be an ongoing thing. And it's tricky because there's so many things that compete for our attention and our time and our resources. But you know, if you think about the training paradigm that we talked about a second ago, you know, how much money have we spent on trainings? Thousands and thousands of dollars on trainings, resources, books, modules, things that maybe increase our readiness for a short period of time, or maybe they increase our knowledge and skills for a short period of time. But then a year later there's no real change, no evidence that those thousands of dollars did anything. So it's about prioritization, you know, we've got to it, it's better to do a few things really well than to try to do everything and just kind of do it halfway.

Rebecca (38:54):

Yeah. And I think that speaks so much too to what we know about building motivation and the virtuous cycle of doing a small thing can kickstart a larger positive cycle of doing more and more things. And I feel that's true in organizational change as well. You know, we talk about it's a big thing and you know, sometimes it is changing a policy in your organization can be a big thing and it should be a big thing because of all of the various elements that it can influence downstream. However, you know, we know from a lot of continuous quality improvement work that there are smaller bite sized change cycles that you can run through. You can do a plan, do study, act, tiny PDSA, and just start making little changes when you feel that readiness. And then having seen, and that success is going to improve your attitude towards whether or not this change is going to be effective, which can, you know, foster that drive for a larger change and you know, on and on and hopefully leading to that larger organizational change that you're hoping to implement by just starting at that smaller, more bite-sized, more manageable piece and letting that foster and fan the flames of, yeah, we really can do this.

Rebecca (40:15):

We've seen that it's been effective. We've seen that it can get the outcomes we want. We've seen that we have control and agency over doing these things, and we can then also bring that evidence to our leadership and say, Hey, look, we tried it, it was super awesome. Can we now try it at a larger, more sustainable, more institutionalized level?

Adam (40:35):

Yeah, I like that because I think it does, it sort of takes a lot of the burden off this question of when are we ready? We're always ready to make small changes with small groups. So maybe we start there, you know, and we learn from that, and then we use that information to scale up or we, you know, we're able to take that information, see what didn't go well, figure out how to overcome those barriers, and then we're more prepared the next time we want to implement something or when we want to implement it with a different group. So it's not necessarily a 'we are ready', 'we are not ready' to get back to that sort of false dichotomy idea, but it's, you know, what are, what are we ready for? You know? Yeah. How ready are we?

Rebecca (41:18):

Well, and I think too, I mean, just starting small, you know, I, for me, this is also why I tend to gravitate towards starting with individual change rather than organizational change. Even though organizational change is our goal because the individual is the smallest unit of change that we have. So, and especially in some smaller organizations in some ways that's what you got. This is the team, this is your team of one, and this is the person who we need to become the champion. Who is the champion.

Adam (41:51):

Yeah. I mean, I actually think, you know, having a champion is necessary, maybe necessary but not sufficient. But I've never seen true organizational change happen without somebody in that organization really wanting it. Because the bottom line is implementation, no matter how well done is going to be difficult at times. There's going to be times where the barrier seem insurmountable. There's going to be times where change is hard. There's going to be times where you've worked really hard for six months, you see good things happening, and then something outside your control causes you to have to take two steps back. And my experience is that somebody's gotta be willing to step up and say, yeah, we gotta, we gotta keep moving forward. And so I, I do think it, and I want to be clear, it doesn't have to be a person. I think there's actually some real utility in having implementation teams, advisory boards, leadership teams, because then you are to some degree spreading out that sort of notion that we are going to keep going, that we're going to keep moving forward and it's not contained in one person. because if that one person is wiped out in a freak napalming incident or slips on a banana...

Rebecca (43:10):

Or wins the lottery...

Adam (43:10):

Yeah, wins the lottery, I, I'm planning to win it next week. So, you know, who even knows where you guys are going to be <laugh>? But you know, and that person steps away. Then you've got a group of people that are still there that still sort of have that positive forward movement that they can bring to the table. And so again, it's not that it has to be a person,

but I think there's gotta be people whose role it is to move the idea forward. And, and it can't be that they're there to move everything forward, but, but move this specific thing forward. Because again, there's just going to be times when things get tricky and sticky and hard and somebody or somebodies have to step up and say, yeah, we're going to, we're going to keep moving this, you know?

Rebecca (43:57):

Yeah. So having a collective identity behind it, and also some diffusion of authority to keep each other honest. I agree. And, you know, that's in part why it's so important to have teams versus just an individual champion of nothing else. So they can respond to your emails. Well, you know, you're out at, you're out at Beaver Creek enjoying the fresh powder. You know, there's got to be some level of shared responsibility. And you know, that's something that we do as implementation specialists too, is continue to be that guide by the side of like, 'Hey, you guys were really making some progress about this. How is it going now?' You can be doing all the things. And sometimes it's really important to have somebody from the outside perspective be like, 'Wow, it really seems like maybe your attitude about this has changed. Can we talk about that?' Maybe it's something in your context that has changed a little bit. How can we leverage this moment? Or how do we need to adapt?

Adam (44:54):

Here's my final thought on the matter.

Adam (44:59):

There's no need to wait. I do feel sometimes people are like, we gotta get ready to be ready, but , there's no time like the present and there is no on off switch here. You go in today, you start getting information about people's motivation, about their capacity, about, you know, what's going on in the organization. You look at the drivers maybe you get a little help. Maybe you call somebody who does implementation support and say, 'Hey, we're, we would like for you to start working with us.' And you recognize this is not going to change overnight. This is a long haul thing. And so the, you know, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. So we're just going to take that first easy step today by starting to think about what our organization looks like. And I guess that would be my, you know, sign off is just say if you're considering change, if you're thinking about doing something small or large, there's no time like the present.

Rebecca (45:57):

Yeah, I think that's beautiful. I think 'don't overthink it' is just generally a great rule of thumb.

Adam (46:02):

Never overthink it. Rebecca.

Rebecca (46:04):

You're so in luck.

Adam (46:06):

I think I'm physically incapable

Rebecca (46:07):

<Laugh>

Adam (46:09):

So yeah, I'll just say thanks. This has been lovely. It's been a little slice of heaven. And I'm excited for the next time we get to talk about implementation.

Rebecca (46:20):

Talk to you again soon.

Meera (46:27):

This episode was produced by Meera Kumanan and Sandra Diehl, original music by Robin Jenkins, artwork by Julie Chin. Special thanks for concept and creation to Sandra Diehl, Meera Kumanan, Devon Minch, and Will Aldridge. Technical advice from Katherine Neer and funding from the Duke Endowment and the North Carolina Division of Social Services.