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Transforming State Systems to Improve Outcomes for Children with Disabilities

Getting Strategic about Systems Alignment

An Improvement Stance to Changing Results

Rorie Fitzpatrick, Director
National Center for Systemic Improvement / WestEd

State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) National Meeting
October 2019 / Washington, DC

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Our Plan Today

The What
- Scaffold Implementation Science to set the stage for learning about Improvement Science principles
- Delve into Six Core Improvement Principles to get concrete about how to consider the need for and alignment of SPDG with other initiatives and priorities
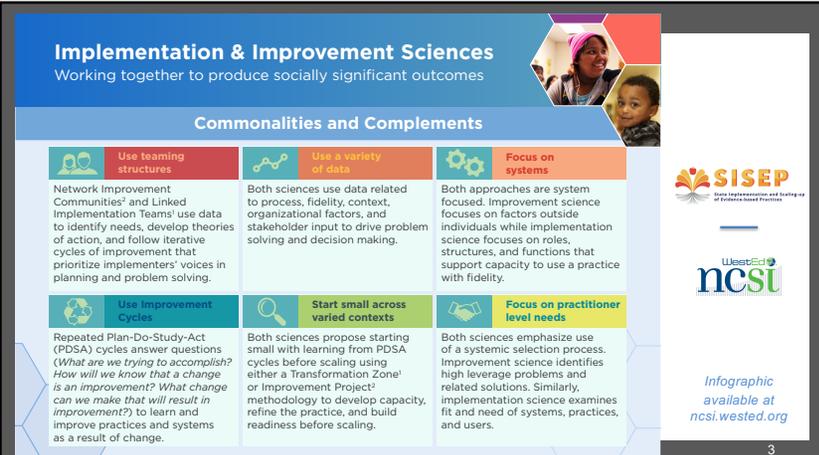
The How
- Quick review of the commonalities and complements of the two bodies of research
- Whole group presentation plus opportunities to work in teams to apply concepts, strategizing who, what, how, when, and why, using provided notetaker

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Implementation & Improvement Sciences
Working together to produce socially significant outcomes

Commonalities and Complements

Use teaming structures
Network Improvement Communities[2] and Linked Implementation Teams[1] use data to identify needs, develop theories of action, and follow iterative cycles of improvement that prioritize implementers' voices in planning and problem solving.

Use a variety of data
Both sciences use data related to process, fidelity, context, organizational factors, and stakeholder input to drive problem solving and decision making.

Focus on systems
Both approaches are system focused. Improvement science focuses on factors outside individuals while implementation science focuses on roles, structures, and functions that support capacity to use a practice with fidelity.

Use Improvement Cycles
Repeated Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles answer questions (*What are we trying to accomplish? How will we know that a change is an improvement? What change can we make that will result in improvement?*) to learn and improve practices and systems as a result of change.

Start small across varied contexts
Both sciences propose starting small with learning from PDSA cycles before scaling using either a Transformation Zone[1] or Improvement Project[2] methodology to develop capacity, refine the practice, and build readiness before scaling.

Focus on practitioner level needs
Both sciences emphasize use of a systemic selection process. Improvement science identifies high leverage problems and related solutions. Similarly, implementation science examines fit and need of systems, practices, and users.

SISEP
State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices

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Infographic available at ncsi.wested.org

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Framing it up:
Six Core Principles of Improvement

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1. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered
2. Variation in performance is the core problem to address
3. See the system that produces the current outcomes
4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure
5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry
6. Accelerate improvements through networked improvements

Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahiew (2015) | Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning
https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/our-ideas/six-core-principles-improvement/

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Digging in:
Principles of Improvement

1. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered.
2. Variation in performance is the core problem to address.
3. See the system that produces the current outcomes.
4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure.
5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry.
6. Accelerate improvements through networked improvements.

Improvement starts with a single question:
"What **specifically** is the problem we are trying to solve?"

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Improvement stance:
1. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered.

Strategic SPDG Alignment

SPDG relationship:
What specific problem(s) is the SPDG trying to solve?

Systems alignment application:
What other programs/initiatives/individuals have data or insights to help untangle the complexity of the system?

Who else is worried about this problem, what do they know about it, and how can you help each other?

Which individuals/programs in the SEA share a commitment to understanding the problem(s) and investigating solutions?

What about related organizations and other stakeholders?

Can others' information and your information mutually increase understanding of the problem?

Can you help guide each other to understand what might be effective solutions to try out?

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Digging in:
Principles of Improvement

1. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered.
2. **Variation in performance is the core problem to address.**
3. See the system that produces the current outcomes.
4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure.
5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry.
6. Accelerate improvements through networked improvements.

The critical issue is not what works, but rather what works *for whom* and *under what set of conditions*. Why is something working well at one school/district but not working at others?

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Improvement stance:
2. Variation in performance is the core problem to address.

Strategic SPDG Alignment

SPDG relationship:
Are all your SPDG sites reaching the same results… and if not, do you know how other initiatives contribute to variation?

Systems alignment application:
What variation exists relative to the way the work is planned; implemented; tracked; monitored; and evaluated, at the state, district, and school levels relative to each SPDG site?

What other initiatives are in place in each SPDG site in your state?

Think about ESSA plans, legislative mandates, governor priorities, state and district superintendent directives, school climate projects, etc.

What is the impact of each unique initiative on each specific SPDG implementation site?

How is planning and implementation affected? How do the outcomes vary (i.e., better, worse, same)?

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Digging in:

Principles of Improvement

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> Every system is perfectly designed to achieve exactly the results it gets. It is hard to improve what you do not fully understand, so you must study conditions in real-world settings.

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Improvement stance:

3. See the system that produces the current outcomes.

Strategic SPDG Alignment

SPDG relationship:
What conditions exist that impact the results at each SPDG site?

Systems alignment application:
What is your process for understanding how the SPDG and related state and local initiatives are being planned, implemented, and monitored?

How do you engage with other SEA programs, districts, and schools to understand the conditions that are in place at each unique SPDG site?

What related processes are led by other SEA programs, districts, and schools?

How could collaboration in analyzing conditions yield meaningful data to inform improvement?

How can collaboration mutually improve better understanding of system functioning?

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Digging in:

Principles of Improvement

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5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry.
6. Accelerate improvements through networked improvements.

> Every improvement requires change — but not every change is an improvement. The purpose of measurement for improvement is to inform change ideas that are specifically tied to a working theory of improvement.

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Improvement stance:

4. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure.

Strategic SPDG Alignment

SPDG relationship:
Are performance measures sufficiently informing improvement in SPDG implementation and outcomes?

Systems alignment application:
How can the data that related initiatives are gathering contribute to understanding of how to improve the SPDG (and vice versa)?

To what extent are you gathering and using a combination of practical insight, theory, and evidence to inform your improvement effort?

What approaches are you and others taking to measure success and inform new change ideas to test out... at the SEA, district, and school levels?

How can you effectively and efficiently increase integration with other initiatives relative to data collection and use? What would be gained in so doing?

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Digging in:
Principles of Improvement

1. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered.
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Understand multiple dimensions of context. Engage rapid cycles of Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) to learn fast, fail fast, and improve quickly. The fact that failures may occur is not the problem; *that we fail to learn from them is*.

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Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle
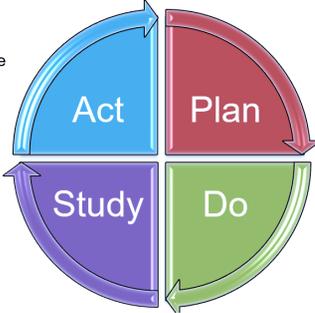
Act
- Decide what changes need to be made
- Choose focus for next PDSA cycle

Plan
- Establish objective
- Draft questions & predictions
- Create plan: who / what / where / when

Study
- Analyze data
- Compare data to predictions
- Summarize what was learned

Do
- Carry out the plan
- Document problems & unexpected observations

Langley et al. 2009, p. 97

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Improvement stance:
5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry.

Strategic SPDG Alignment

SPDG relationship:
How is the SPDG designed to learn and expand in the contexts in which improvement is being pursued?

Systems alignment application:
How are other initiatives informed by institutional context and how are they testing change and expanding as learning occurs?

How can the SPDG and other related initiatives build shared understanding of institutional context:

Can you inform each other about: The know-how of those being asked to change? Organizational capacity for change? The willingness and engagement of those in the change process?
Is there value in collaborating on improvement theories and testing change ideas through collaboratively implemented cycles of improvement (PDSAs)? Why/why not?

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Digging in:
Principles of Improvement

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5. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry
6. Accelerate improvements through networked communities

Embrace the wisdom of crowds. We can accomplish more together than even the best of us can accomplish alone.

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Improvement stance:
6. Accelerate improvements through networked communities.

Strategic SPDG Alignment

SPDG relationship:
Is the SPDG systemically pooling individual insights from across sites, in order to grow collective capabilities?

Systems alignment application:
How can the SPDG partner with other initiatives to systemically exploit the power of structured networks?

What are the various initiatives with which the SPDG could compare results and promote shared learning?

How can the SPDG provide leadership or partnership that supports the creation of a network hub that enables a structure for gathering and sharing amongst the network, those key insights that emerge as innovations spread, and which can be integrated into new contexts as the SPDG is scaled to new sites?

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Thank you!

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