



Scottish Improvement Science Collaborating Centre *Research, Development and Evaluation*

The influence of contextual factors on healthcare quality improvement initiatives: what works, for whom, and in what setting? A realist review

Overview

Context shapes the effectiveness of knowledge implementation and influences health improvement. Successful healthcare quality improvement (QI) initiatives frequently fail to transfer to different settings, with local contextual factors often cited as the cause. Understanding and overcoming contextual barriers is therefore crucial to implementing effective improvement; yet context is still poorly understood. There is a lack of information on the mechanisms underlying *how* and *why* QI projects succeed or fail in given settings.

This realist review will examine the influence and impact of contextual factors on quality improvement in healthcare, and explore whether QI initiatives can work in all contexts. The review will examine:

- which contextual factors are important, and how, why, when and for whom they are important, within varied settings;
- the dynamic nature of context and change over time, and which aspects of context impact at key points in the improvement trajectory;
- the influence of context on improvement outcomes (provider and patient-level), spread and sustainability.

Aims

The overarching research question to be addressed is: how and why does context influence healthcare QI initiatives? The aims of the review are to:

- (i) identify the contextual factors that influence the implementation, effectiveness, sustainability and transferability of quality improvement initiatives in healthcare;
- (ii) provide a theoretical explanation of how, why, when and for whom these contextual factors are important;
- (iii) transform the wealth of data in this area into a cohesive evidence base of 'what works, for whom and in what circumstances', in terms of implementation in given contexts.

Stakeholder/expert input

An initial scoping exercise will be conducted by interviewing participants involved in supporting quality improvement initiatives. The aim of this input is to gather a range of perspectives on the issues around context and to provide insight into the varied experiences of implementing QI projects and programmes. This will 'map the territory' and create a framework for the review.

It is anticipated that these interviews will take between 30-45 minutes and will be arranged at the convenience of the participant.



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Outputs

The review will update and consolidate evidence on the contextual conditions for effective improvement. Through this distillation of knowledge, it is anticipated that the review will lead to recommendations for the design and delivery of effective, context-sensitive and sustainable improvement interventions.

This review complements the study of improvement programmes as vehicles of change and will strengthen the evidence base around healthcare improvement, by addressing whether QI initiatives can work in all contexts.

Outputs from this review are anticipated to be published in early 2018.

Further information

If you would like to participate in this initial scoping exercise, please contact Emma Coles: emma.coles@stir.ac.uk. For more information on the SISCC Context Research Theme: <http://siscc.dundee.ac.uk/work/context/>