How to use the "Is Research Working for You?" tool from the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (now called the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement)

featuring a story of implementation from Julie Charlebois, Health Promotion Consultant with Toronto Public Health

Introduction

Welcome one and all to the fourth Spotlight on KT Methods & Tools. In this episode we will learn about the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF). This session will feature input from Dr. Anita Kothari, Assistant Professor with the faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Western Ontario; Julie Charlebois, Health Promotion Consultant with Toronto Public Health; and Dr. Jennifer Ellis, Director of E-Learning and Distance Education at CHSRF. This Spotlight will focus on the purpose and use of the tool, examples of its implementation in the field, advantages and challenges of its use, and a peek into what the future holds for the tool and users.

The Knowledge Translation Landscape

At the root of the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool is the concept of Knowledge Translation (KT), which Dr. Kothari explains simply as referring to using research in decision-making. Distinguishing it from tailoring a message, she says KT revolves around identifying the target audience for a message, and finding effective ways to deliver it. Dr. Kothari recounts that in the early 2000s, the health community was gaining the sense that KT had less to do with individual critical appraisal and searching skills and more to do with organizational structures that support evidence-informed decision-making.

The "Is Research Working for You?" Tool

This ideological shift set the stage for the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool, which is a self-assessment tool to help organizations understand their own capacity to use research. The tool was a very early attempt to integrate organizational change and attention to KT into mainstream discussion about decision-making. The goal of the tool was to focus on

1) What is the *Is Research Working for You Tool*?

- An early attempt to get organizational change, for knowledge translation, on the table

- A tool to help organizations understand their capacity or ability to use research.

1) What is the *Is Research Working for You Tool*?

Are we able to acquire research?
Are we looking for research in the right places?

Can we tell if the research is valid and of high quality?
Can we tell if the research is relevant and applicable?

organizational support of individuals trying to use research in their practice.

Using the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool
The "Is Research Working for You?" Tool covers four domains in its assessment of organizational research capacity, the first half of which are "Acquire" and "Assess". "Acquire" refers to the organizational ability to find the research that it needs, while "Assess" speaks to the organizational ability to determine whether research findings are reliable, relevant, and applicable. Each domain includes a collection of specific questions, which are rated on a five-point Likert scale.

After "Assess" comes "Adapt", which refers to the organization's ability to present evidence to decision-makers in a useful way. Finally comes "Apply", which assesses whether the skills, structures, processes and culture in the organization suit the promotion and use of research findings in decision-making. Users rate the specific questions within each of these domains on the five-point scale, and from there are able to draw conclusions about the research capacity of the organization.

Research on the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool
In an effort to study the validity of the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool, Dr. Kothari's research team conducted a study with organizations from four sectors: long-term care, government, non-governmental organizations, and the community. Subjects were asked to complete the tool about their organization independently and then participate in a focus group with other subjects from the organization to come to a consensus on responses. The final responses were compared to external ratings of organizations' KT aptitude to determine whether the Tool was consistent in its rating.

Study findings suggested that the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool was successful at differentiating between organizations of high and low KT capacity during the "Acquire" and "Assess" domains. This result was not observed during the "Adapt" and "Apply" domains, though it was not clear whether it was because all organizations needed support in these domains, or the tool was unable to note these differences. However, Dr. Kothari discusses that the most salient finding involved the value of the focus group discussion. Participants found the exchange of ideas and perspective between frontline staff and decision makers to be an extremely illuminating discussion for all parties.

1) What is the *Is Research Working for You Tool*?

Can we summarize results in a user-friendly way?

Do we lead by example and show how we value research use?
Do our decision-making processes have a place For research?

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2) What did we learn about the Tool in our Research?
- Measurement properties: could discriminate among community sector (16), LTC (6); NGOs (8); 2 Gov't [32 Focus Groups, 66 filled out tool]

- Measurement properties: could differentiate between high KT orgs and low KT orgs for *Acquire and Assess* (not *Adapt and Apply*)

2) What did we learn about the Tool in our Research?

Using the tool in Toronto Public Health

As part of the Partnership for Health Systems Improvement with Health Evidence, Julie Charlebois of Toronto Public Health used the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool to assess and improve organizational capacity for Evidence-Informed Decision Making. In order to do this, frontline staff and managers completed the tool from their own perspective together followed by a discussion of findings. Despite there being some initial variation in answers due to differing perspectives, consensus was eventually reached and conclusions could be drawn from it.

Results from Toronto Public Health

Through using the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool, Toronto Public Health was able to identify gaps around the use of research evidence, specifically regarding not using research evidence consistently and the need to build staff skills. Toronto Public Health is looking forward to documenting this process as well as using the information garnered from the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool to support the organizational learning strategy and their commitment to excellence.

User Experience with the Tool

A repeated criticism of the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool is the length of the process, as it can be very time-intensive to get through the full tool. Additionally, confusion over which perspective respondents should use – be it frontline staff, manager, or the organization as a whole – can lead to variability in answers. Finally, clarity of questions is commonly cited as a source of confusion, where unfamiliar terminology and questions that refer to more than one construct present challenges to users.

However, Toronto Public Health lauds the tool for its ability to guide structured, honest reflection on organizational KT capacity. Toronto Public Health stresses the importance of engaging in discussion about the tool's questions rather than simply submitting answers. The tool was considered very thorough in addressing all the important issues as they relate to research capacity, and as such Toronto Public Health strongly recommends other health units employ it as a form of formal or informal self-evaluation.

Future of the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool

10 years after the initial development of the "Is Research Working for You?" Tool, Dr. Jennifer Ellis of CHSRF is able to weigh in on what future iterations of the tool may bring. The new version, currently being revised collaboratively with a group from the University of Saskatchewan, will aim to take out redundancies and so-called "double-barreled questions," add areas for responses from different perspectives, include demographic questions and areas for open-ended feedback. This updated version, currently being piloted with very positive response, should take approximately six minutes to fill out. Dr. Ellis plans to convert it to an interactive online format in order to make facilitating self-assessment of organizational KT capacity even easier.