



Absorptive capacity in the adoption of innovations in health: A scoping review

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Summary

We looked at how health care organizations, define and measure absorptive capacity (e.g., the ability to find, understand and use new knowledge to make changes to existing systems) when adopting innovations.

None of the articles provided a new definition of absorptive capacity. However, the current definition was looked at in different healthcare contexts and refined to suit the health care organizational context in which they were used.

What does this mean?

As health care is quickly changing and evolving, an organization's ability to make informed decisions relies on its ability to understand both current best practices. This highlights the importance of understanding absorptive capacity in health care settings.

This review showed the need for a **clear definition and way to measure** absorptive capacity in health care organizations. This will allow practitioners, managers, and administrators to understand their organization's current capacity and what supports the success of innovation.

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What is the current situation?

Absorptive capacity refers to an organization's ability to find, understand, and use new knowledge to make changes to existing systems, which is important for informed decision making. In recent years, there has been growing interest in what helps organizations adopt new innovations, especially those that may lead to improvements in clinical practice. While individual level change have been described (e.g., access and awareness of knowledge, knowledge gain, etc.), organizational-level factors or changes have been less studied.

What questions did we aim to answer in our research?

How do health care organizations define and measure their ability to find and understand new knowledge (i.e., absorptive capacity) when adopting innovations?

How did we approach these questions?

- We involved colleagues from Health Canada throughout the review (e.g., integrative knowledge translation), and experts in organizational change to join our discussions.
- We looked at online scientific databases and grey literature (such as reports and government or policy papers). Two reviewers screened the studies and collected the data.

What answers did we find from our research?

- **None of the articles offered a new definition** of absorptive capacity (e.g., the ability to find, understand, and use new knowledge to make changes to existing systems). However, the current definition was looked at in different healthcare contexts, including:
 1. **Exploring capacity that is already in place to impact improvement and innovation in health care settings** (involves learning from current practices).
 2. **Describing factors that influence an organization's ability to spread and sustain improvements and innovations** (e.g., potential use versus actual use of knowledge).
 3. **Identifying ways to measure and test how knowledge is applied** (e.g., using frameworks to assess planning, progress and decision-making as a way to help organizations move change forward)
 4. **Clarifying the concept of absorptive capacity** (e.g., coordinating, making sense of, and prioritizing the information from different sources and partners from across multiple regions).

How confident are we in these findings?

As absorptive capacity is still a new idea in healthcare, agreement on how to define or measure this concept was not seen. Therefore, some studies may have been missed, and more research is needed on this topic.