Managing risk in navigation implementation research: an evidence-based project management approach

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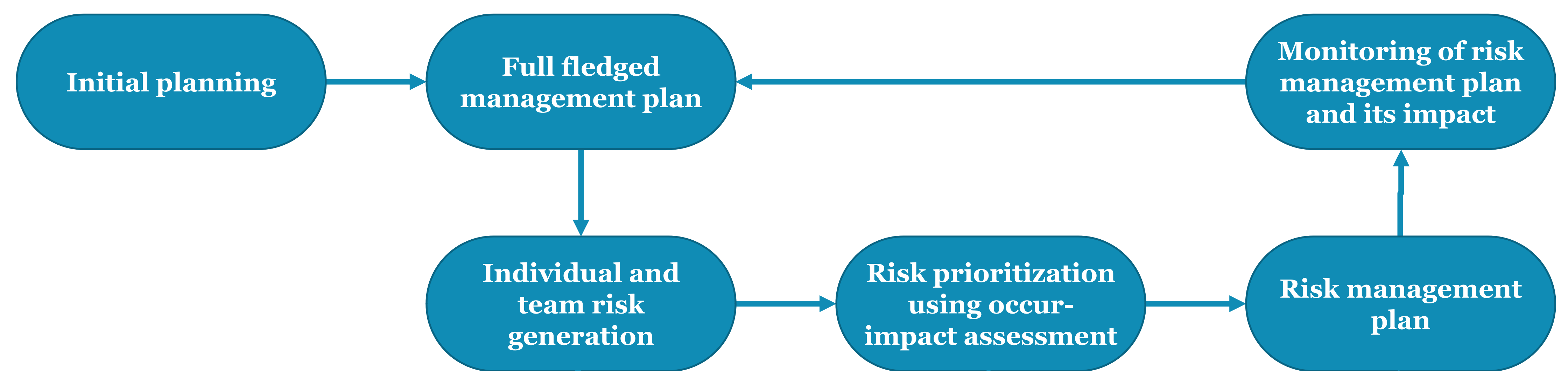
Objective

- The Access to Resources in the Community (ARC) research aims to improve access to community resources in the Champlain and North East LHIN regions of Ontario.

- Multi-stakeholder research on the implementation of patient navigation services in primary care is challenging.

- **Risks that are not addressed early can derail the conduct of the research itself or the implementation of navigation services.**

- Our objective is to identify and mitigate risks associated with managing complex research in primary care.

Approach

- Risks are unknown or unclear concerns, issues, situations, or events with the potential to impede project processes or outcomes.

- A Delphi-type multi-step risk management process modeled on evidence-based project management research was conducted with the ARC research group.

- Steps included electronic anonymous individual consultations to identify, rate and prioritize risks based on likelihood and impact, followed by consensual group discussions to design a risk management plan to optimize the conduct of the research.

Results

- Research team members (N=13) generated a consolidated list of 69 risks thought to hinder the successful conduct of the research.

- Risks with the highest likelihood and impact (i.e., 14; 20%) were included in the risk management plan.

- The plan consisted of 29 concrete actions to prevent or mitigate risks. These actions were then included in the regular project planning.

- Example of a potential risk:
  - One risk was primary care practices champion's lack of engagement.
  - Risk management actions included "clarifying champions' roles and responsibilities at the onset" and "meet champions one on one periodically to review roles and responsibilities".

- Subsequent team meetings included three topics:
  1. assessing the effectiveness of the risk management actions,
  2. discussing whether other actions would be necessary, and
  3. adjusting the project plan accordingly.

Conclusions

Evidence-based approaches from the field of project management have not permeated into health care implementation research projects. Using the ARC study, we demonstrated the value of conducting risk management prior to and throughout the conduct of implementation research projects to maximize the likelihood of delivery of the research as planned.