

Policy Implementation and Evaluation Cycle

The majority of policy cycles tend to have implementation as one of the final steps. However, much of the literature recognises implementation as a complex process in its own right which is often poorly executed. We have developed the Policy Implementation and Evaluation Cycle as a companion heuristic to the policy cycle in recognition of the different constituents of the process. As with all such heuristics it is a simplified model of the themes and elements that appear as most important in the policy implementation literature. We are not intending to suggest that implementation and design are completely separate processes, but that policy design is often prioritised and receives more attention.

Reflecting the current implementation literature, this cycle is intended to help rebalance the focus and offer opportunities and guidance for future discussion and research into how best to deliver policy initiatives. We anticipate that the cycle will be adapted and applied to suit the specific context and challenges being faced in any implementation, but suggest that discussion of the different elements can offer a way to develop more complex and nuanced conversations.

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Focus on Desired Policy Outcomes

All implementation needs to remain focused on desired policy and end user outcomes. End users can potentially include clients, communities, populations, institutions, organisations or even states. The implementation group will need a shared understanding of both desired policy and end user's outcomes to

design not only the implementation but also to ensure communication with the range of relevant stakeholders. Enabling outcome achievement will need to be underpinned by values, collaboration, engagement and communication to create and sustain guiding coalitions. Attention to timing will matter but will be variable and outcome dependent.

Internal context

Recognising that every implementation context will be different, time needs to be taken to assess and understand elements of the inner context and how these interact to enable or constrain interventions. Elements might include but are not limited to values, culture and sub-cultures, approaches to diversity and inclusion, communication, organisational and power structures, history, formal and informal processes, system architecture, institutions, governance, financing and work arrangements.

External context

Recognising that every implementation context will be different, time needs to be taken to assess and understand elements of the outer context and how these interact to enable or constrain interventions. Elements might include but are not limited to political landscape, economic, environmental and global trends, history, communities impacted and citizen expectations.

Identify What Success Look Like

This is about discussion with policy designers, implementers and end users to create shared views of the desired purpose and outcomes. The overarching values and principles that should guide the approach to implementation will be identified. All these will then frame how the outcomes should be achieved. This will surface differences early and enable them to be negotiated.

Determine What System Changes Will Be Needed

Complex policy implementation will necessitate the creation of, or changes to, system architectures and processes, often across multiple organisations and levels; e.g. reflecting governance, political or enforcement issues. These need to be understood at a systems level to minimise unintended consequences and maximise the potential for new ways of working.

Identify Types and Location of Required Capabilities

For any implementation to be successfully enacted, the requisite capabilities need to be identified and where appropriate developed and/or supported. These could be at multiple levels including individual, organisational and community.

Assess and Plan for Risk and Communications

Explicit articulation of potential risks and the strategies to be adopted to mitigate and manage them. Explicit consideration of communications dimensions of implementation.

Plan Performance and Accountability, Measurement Review and Evaluation

Explicit articulation of accountability and developing lead and lag performance measures helps stakeholders to recognise how they will know when impacts and outcomes are being achieved. This will help teams conceptualise the project clearly and distinguish priorities.

Project planning and management to enact Implementation

This is when action plans are performed and people must work together within and between organisational systems to create desired changes. Outcomes start to emerge.

Ongoing Review and Revision

Continuous review, measurement and problem solving tests and embeds improvements, identifies unintended consequences. These feed into periodic evaluation, revision and the development of the next iteration of intervention.