Policy People Capability Workshop

8 August 2017

The Policy Project

Responsive today,
shaping tomorrow

Purpose and intent

The Policy Project brings agency policy capability leads (people nominated by their department as responsible for building policy quality and capability) together to:

- Hear about and contribute to Policy Project work-in-progress
- Share experiences of using the Policy Project improvement frameworks and tools in their agencies
- Reveal common 'pain points' and challenges for lifting policy capability that might be tackled collectively
- Share their promising practices that could be spread across the policy community –'steal with pride'
- Build a network to sustain the sense of collaboration and collective impact across the policy community.

The main focus of the workshop was policy people capability, including a discussion on survey findings and analysis of the policy workforce, pathways to improve capability, and collective formal training initiatives. Given this, agency leads were invited to bring a Human Resources (HR) or Organisational Development (OD) representative with them. This was the third of the Policy Capability Leads workshops. The next bi-monthly meeting is scheduled for 4 October.

Participants

Peter Carr
Ministry of Transport

Greg Campbell
Ministry of Justice

Sarah Metwell
Land Information
New Zealand

Glen McCloy
Land Information
New Zealand

Rosalind Wilson
DPMC

Justine Cornwall
Ministry for Social
Development

Richard Braae
Inland Revenue

Jolyon Swinburn
Ministry for the
Environment

Nicky Niclaus
Ministry for Primary Industries

Grahame Morton
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
Trade

Sela Finau
Ministry for Pacific Peoples

Veronica Jacobson
Ministry of Business,
Innovation and Employment

Kate West
Ministry of Business,
Innovation and Employment

Harvey Steffens
Ministry of Health

Ruksana Shaikh
Ministry of Health

Eleanor Turley
Statistics New Zealand

Policy Project team

Diane Owenga
Programme Director

Simon Olsen
Senior Advisor

Alpa Modi
Team Coordinator

Policy Project progress update

The 'Start Right' tool/concept – priming for the behaviours, thinking and planning that will lead to better analysis and advice

BETA versions of the Start Right tools (for ensuring policy quality from the outset) are now available:

- Start Right Guide
- Start Right Commissioning Conversation Prompts
- Start Right Green Light Framework

Thanks to the many people who helped co-design these. We know they are in demand, and look forward to any feedback on how they work in practice so we can continually refresh them.

Let us know if you want to be put in touch with early adopters, or want to connect with a potential 'buddy' e.g. partner up on improving early-in-process challenge
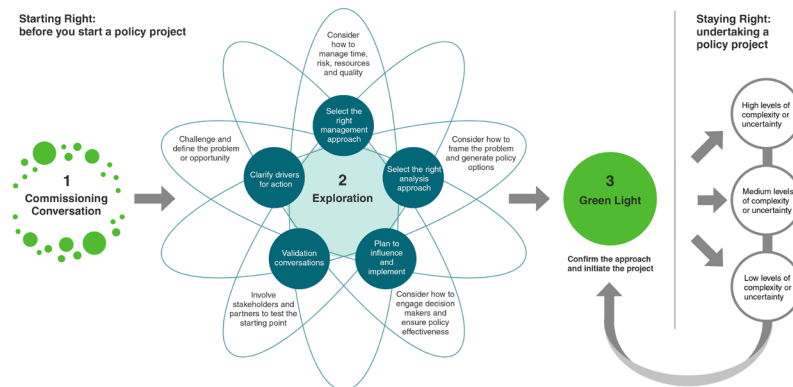
Policy Methods Toolbox: This provides online access to information about a wide range of policy development methods in a central location. The toolbox will go live on the Policy Project webpages on 29 August 2017. Tools included in Release 1 beyond Start Right, encompass design thinking, behavioural insights and public participation. We will co-design Release 2 with policy agencies in a series of workshops later this year.

Policy Stewardship: The Policy Project is starting to consider how to codify policy stewardship for giving free and frank advice to successive governments, and what advice to provide on other system changes to support this. Watch this space.

Policy workforce and capability improvement

We discussed the paper: The policy workforce and pathways to improved capability (available here)

Key points of discussion on the analysis and insights from a survey on Public Service agency practices related to policy people capability and potential options for collective policy workforce initiatives follow.

Workforce profile

- Gender balance – women are well represented at Analyst and Senior levels; why are they not progressing?
- The capping policy – this is incentivising more use of contractors.

Contractors

Contractors tend to be Seniors or Principals sitting at the top of the pay band wanting more income, people wanting flexibility (e.g. mothers), and generalists.

- There is variable use of contactors; they typically are used for capacity reasons (to cope with 'seasonal peaks') and/or capability reasons (when specialist skills are not regularly required).
- Referee checking, being selective about recruitment agencies, and building a network through 'word of mouth' are key to getting the right person for the job.
- Do we need to track the proportion of contractors vs permanent staff?

Attraction and retention

- What retention rates are realistic for people in their 20s? Good to go to private sector or overseas, then return.
- Unplanned turnover (the rate at which permanent staff resign or retire) hurts smaller agencies most –some is 'loosely planned' (performance managed).

Progression and deployment

- Career pathways for good Analysts can get blocked by weaker Seniors staying; Principals staying (where to next?) can block progression of good Seniors.
- We should second more to give staff experience
    - the problem is that agencies may get nothing back. How to address this?

Skill development

- The level of demand for different skills is variable (Minister's are often focused more on getting immediate advice on the issue of the day, than on things that require strategic thinking and the application of evidence, insights and evaluation to longer-term issues).
- Applied learning helps stretch and grow analysts – this is in agencies' interest too.
- More clarity is needed on what agencies need to do regarding policy stewardship (what, why, and how).

The policy workforce and pathways to improved capability

Collective formal training initiatives

We discussed a 'top pick' for collective workforce initiatives: collective formal training. Work to make secondments easier, and embed the Policy Skills Framework for more consistent JDs, is also wanted and will be progressed.

We used design-thinking to identify key collective training challenges and how we might address them.

Storytelling

Jolyon Swinburn, a Policy Analyst from MfE, told his story to the group about: what training he had when he joined MfE; why he wanted more; what training he got; and what value it gave him (and his agency and sector). This was a useful orientation to the needs of a key customer group for policy-related training.

Why use design-thinking techniques?

- Brings in diverse customer and implementation perspectives
- Facilitates inclusive, safe participation
- Helps navigate uncertainty and messiness with reduced anxiety to build buy-in and momentum
- Broadens perspectives for more 'surprises' that trigger learning and mitigate biases
- Produces 'higher order' and hypothesis-driven solutions in user-friendly way

Persona empathy exercise

Sub-groups workshopped the goals, motivations, frustrations and needs for training of the following four key customer segments – identifying possible lines of enquiry that could inform subsequent consultation with these groups:

- Policy Practitioners: want foundational training to support their development and transition 'from theory to practice'
- Policy Managers: want training that is short and sharp, and to know what is useful (e.g. a 'trip advisor' function)
- HR/OD leads: want quality, consistency with frameworks used, and to leverage broader expertise
- Sector groups (e.g. NRS): want common training, best practice, relationships, shared understanding, and to address resource constraints

Collective challenge, and next steps

A challenge then emerged for collective formal policy training, along with different dimensions and tradeoffs, and some next steps.

Our collective challenge

How to efficiently provide foundation courses across the Public Service that are quality, consistent,and aligned with the Policy Skills Framework (PSF)?

Content dimensions

What PSF content is more foundational, and needs formal training the most (as opposed to informal and on the job learning)? What are the key formal training needs, gaps and opportunities? How to balance targeting of developing (e.g. Analyst) and practising (e.g. Senior) audiences?

Delivery dimensions

With internal courses, how might smaller agencies get access to courses developed or delivered by larger agencies, noting the capacity (and cost) versus coverage trade-off?

How to incentivise agencies to invest in people capability building (e.g. providing training), rather than rely on those few who have a personal interest in it doing it voluntarily and in addition to their 'day job'?

With externally delivered courses, how to optimise quality, consistency, efficiency and fit with agency contexts e.g. access to 'off the shelf' content, or collective contracting?

Next steps

Peter Carr (MoT), Greg Campbell (MoJ), Sarah Metwell (LINZ), Veronica Jacobsen (MBIE) and Kate West (MBIE) volunteered to work with the Policy Project to develop a strategy for collective formal training, starting with an opportunity/problem definition. If you want to support this too (or easier secondments or consistent JDs) please email policy.project@dpmc.govt.nz

Acknowledgements

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