

Toward Public Centered Public Policies for Enhanced Service Delivery

Governments need to adopt innovative approaches to face contemporary challenges such as interconnected economic and social patterns, complex problems, blurred governance boundaries, and reduced trust in public service. This human-centered approach enables solutions that are progressively refined through an iterative process of providing voice to end-users and engaging them in shaping decisions.

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21st Century Challenges for Governments

Increased Interconnection

We no longer live in well-defined, discrete territorial systems of governance. Globalization has brought unprecedented opportunities but requires structural re-adjustment along global-national-local axes.



Increased Complexity

Modern challenges may relate to undefined societal goals like climate change, uncertain risks from chemicals or technologies, or lifestyle risks such as obesity and alcohol consumption.

Blurred Governance

Governments tend towards extensive legislation with complicated implementation processes. The executive frequently acts as regulator, administrator and arbiter, confusing traditional separation of powers.

Reduced Trust

Public institutions have experienced a steady decline in trust. This can significantly hinder policy implementation, making citizens and businesses more risk-averse and delaying investment and innovation.

Why people-centered public policies?

Shifting the Paradigm

A human-centered approach to public policy making puts end-users' needs i.e. **People** – rather than legacy and policy – at the center of the public policy formulation process. It bridges the analytical-logical mindset of bureaucracies with the more interpretative, intuitive mindset of creative process.

Innovative thinking in public policy design and implementation is a quest for policy effectiveness and efficiency, to communicate complex relationships.

Benefits of People-Centered Approach in Public Decision-Making

People-Centered Perspective

It places citizens and end-users at the heart of the process, ensuring solutions address real needs rather than perceived problems.

Comprehensive Problem Perspective

By examining issues holistically, this human-centered approach reduces risks of partial approaches, duplicated efforts, policy inconsistencies or overlaps.

Enhanced Synergies

This approach better addresses trade-offs, delivers integrated and better-targeted solutions, and provides stronger reality-checks at earlier stages.

Reduced Unintended Consequences

Through iterative testing and refinement, it increases the chances of delivering more complete and resilient solutions.



The People-centered Policy Making Process

Empathize

Understand the needs, experiences and motivations of the people affected by the policy or service through direct engagement.

Define

Clearly articulate the problem from the users' perspective, based on insights gathered during the empathy phase.

Ideate

Generate a wide range of creative solutions through collaborative brainstorming sessions with diverse stakeholders.

Prototype

Create low-fidelity representations of potential solutions to test concepts before full implementation.

Test

Gather feedback from stakeholders, the real users interacting with the prototypes to refine and improve the solutions.



Empathizing and Co-Design of Public Policies

Professional Empathy

Empathy is the capacity to understand and imaginatively enter into another person's feelings. It's the cornerstone of human-centered design, helping to bridge the gulf between regulators/service providers and users, i.e. the state and the citizens.

Developing empathy means bringing public administrators outside their offices, confronting them with real-life situations, and helping them directly grasp users' challenges and expectations.

Co-Creation

Co-creation multiplies productive capacities by involving people in creating new solutions to the problems affecting them. It's about "generative learning" resulting from shared experimentation and comparison of experiences across sectors.

Co-creation is key for addressing new societal objectives, such as shifting from "curing diseases" to "enabling quality of life" in healthcare, or from "finding people a job" to "enhancing employability" in employment policy.



Scaling and Prototyping

1

Scaling

Identifying problems as webs of factors, looking for direct and indirect causal relationships. Scaling makes the observer swing from macro to micro dimensions, enabling framing of multiple questions to address policy problems.



Prototyping

Creating early samples or models to test concepts. Policy prototypes reflect what designers call 'sketching' - spelling out ideas without requiring every detail to be specified yet.

3

Experimenting

Testing policy prototypes with real users to gather feedback. This refines solutions and supplies knowledge about users, which is another opportunity to build empathy.



Iterating

Continuously refining solutions based on feedback. People-centered built prototypes blur the lines between internal disciplines, hierarchies, and the decisional system and users.

The Concept of Stewardship

1

Translating Ideas

Successfully moving from concept to practice and implementation

2

Adapting to Change

Adjusting as implementation reveals new insights



Sustaining Momentum

Ensuring long-term viability of policy innovations

The people-centered approach in public policy making is intimately linked with the notion of 'stewardship' – the core ability to successfully translate ideas into practice to achieve desired outcomes. Stewardship is preferred to 'implementation' or 'execution' because making designed ideas operational is not a neat, linear process. Complex and challenging environments (crisis, conflict, fragile settings) impose re-calibration and adjustments.

Stewardship demands agility over adherence to a predetermined plan and bureaucratic rigidity. It requires the capacity to nimbly react to unexpected developments while sticking to set priorities and objectives. This gives public policy strategy a self-learning mechanism that grants intelligent flexibility and effective adaptability.

Case Study: Post-Tsunami Reconstruction in Chile

1

February 2010

A massive tsunami triggered by an earthquake devastated over half the port city of Constitución, Chile.

2

100-Day Master Plan

The Chilean Government and Arauco (a key local company) commissioned a sustainable reconstruction master plan to be delivered within 100 days.

3

Innovative Design Solutions

The plan included a forest along riverbanks to dissipate tsunami energy, public recreational spaces as buffer zones, and redesigned road infrastructure.

4

Implementation

The plan incorporated energy-saving solutions, waste management through reclassification plants, biogas recovery, and passive solar homes.



Success Factors in the Chile Case

1 Create Upside

By developing a plan that would meet immediate needs and also produce gains for citizens, the team entered into a broader political discourse about social equity. The people became both owners and advocates of the reconstruction endeavor.

2 Lead with a Proposal

The team began sketching solutions after only two weeks of information collection. They progressively considered broader 'deficits' related to poor planning and little ongoing public infrastructure investment, not only tsunami-related damages.

3 Hybrid Forums

These enabled public debate designed to balance the motives, capabilities and authority of experts, politicians, business leaders and citizens. Public forums and townhalls were prepared meticulously and facilitated with care.



Advancing Through Projects



'Projects' are the channel to drive existing organizations to act differently. They allow the necessary iterative approach to progressively create framework conditions for institutionalized creative thinking in public policy design. Projects are small enough to be grasped, organized, launched and implemented, yet big enough to deliver meaningful impacts, prove effectiveness and create momentum.

Over time, a series of successful people-centered-driven projects will profile itself as a credible and legitimate alternative arising from within the system. Unlike in the industrial domain, public sector innovators cannot develop new, parallel realities in isolation given the complexity and interdependencies of public service issues.

The Role of Design Labs



Innovation Catalysts

Design labs serve as catalysts for change, accelerating the cycle of collecting evidence, diagnosing, brainstorming, designing and experimenting with policies.



Cross-Cutting Structures

Labs neutralize vested interests, power plays, and organizational infighting by creating dedicated, cross-cutting organizational structures.



Independent Operation

The most effective labs have free operational discretion, financial autonomy, and mandates that stretch over election cycles.



Specialized Expertise

Labs recruit people with skills in communication sciences, ethnography, anthropology, sociology, architecture and design.



Notable Design Labs Around the World



Design labs have been established in various parts of the globe, both in industrialized and emerging economies. Notable examples include MindLab in Denmark (part of three ministries and one municipality), the Human Experience Lab in Singapore (part of the Prime Minister's Office), the UK Cabinet Office Policy Lab, and the Thailand Creative & Design Center established to connect creativity, skill, cultural assets and business.

Labs need not be established at the national level. The Surrey County Council in the UK established The Shift Surrey Project with local partners. There are advantages to including the local dimension, such as working with smaller administrative structures and acting at a closer interface with stakeholders and citizens.

Physical Space and Collaboration



Flexible Workspaces

Design labs typically feature open, reconfigurable spaces that can quickly transform from plenary sessions to small group work. Wheeled tables, movable chairs, and portable whiteboards allow for rapid adaptation to different collaboration needs.



Visual Thinking Tools

The physical environment supports visual thinking with ample wall space for posting ideas, journey maps, personas, and other design artifacts. These visual elements help make abstract concepts concrete and facilitate shared understanding to all stakeholders.



Neutral Territory

Policy Innovation Labs provide neutral ground where hierarchies are flattened, and diverse stakeholders can meet as equals. This environment encourages open dialogue and breaks down traditional power dynamics that might inhibit innovation in conventional government and public service settings.



Institutionalizing Public Policy Innovation Thinking

Skills Development

The right skills need to be identified, brought into decision-making, and nurtured within public administration. This includes design thinking methods, facilitation, ethnographic research, and prototyping.

Space for Experimentation

Government needs to afford the institutionalization of prototyping and creative experimentation. Senior public servants must be able to manage potentially diverging political agendas and various bureaucratic cultures.

Procedural Integration

Public policy innovation needs to fit with existing procedural requirements such as public consultation or regulatory impact analysis, while meeting imperatives like legitimate expectations and legal certainty.

Public Perception

Innovative solutions face the challenge of overcoming sometimes irrational or unconscious public perceptions and beliefs that may resist change.

The Importance of Values in Innovation

Beyond Economic Metrics

When introducing innovation to public policy domains, the value cannot be measured directly through economic productivity alone, as in private business. Public service innovation bears the potential for **prevention of marginalization, increased social security, and development of health care or education systems.**

Current public service provision often pivots around the provider rather than the 'user'. Innovative public policy designers seek to reverse this approach and **focus on demands from the public for greater personalization of services.**

Respecting Practitioner Values

Successful people-centered policy design approaches address potential clashes between practitioners' values and the values associated with innovation and change. There might be good reasons for rejections of innovation, such as important values in practice that practitioners want to retain.

A practical perspective acknowledges that practitioners' values and visions provide guidelines for what may reasonably be changed and what should be preserved. It also recognizes that practitioners' access to innovation discourses and initiatives is vital for both desired social change and skills development.

A New Social Contract for Innovation

Embracing Uncertainty

One of the main pre-conditions for successful institutionalized innovation in public policy making, is being comfortable with uncertainty. This implies suspending disbelief and maintaining trajectory through situations involving doubt and risk.

Political Leadership

Presenting the case for innovation and rewarding risk-taking requires clear political leadership and support. Public communication, if not ground education, is the direct corollary.

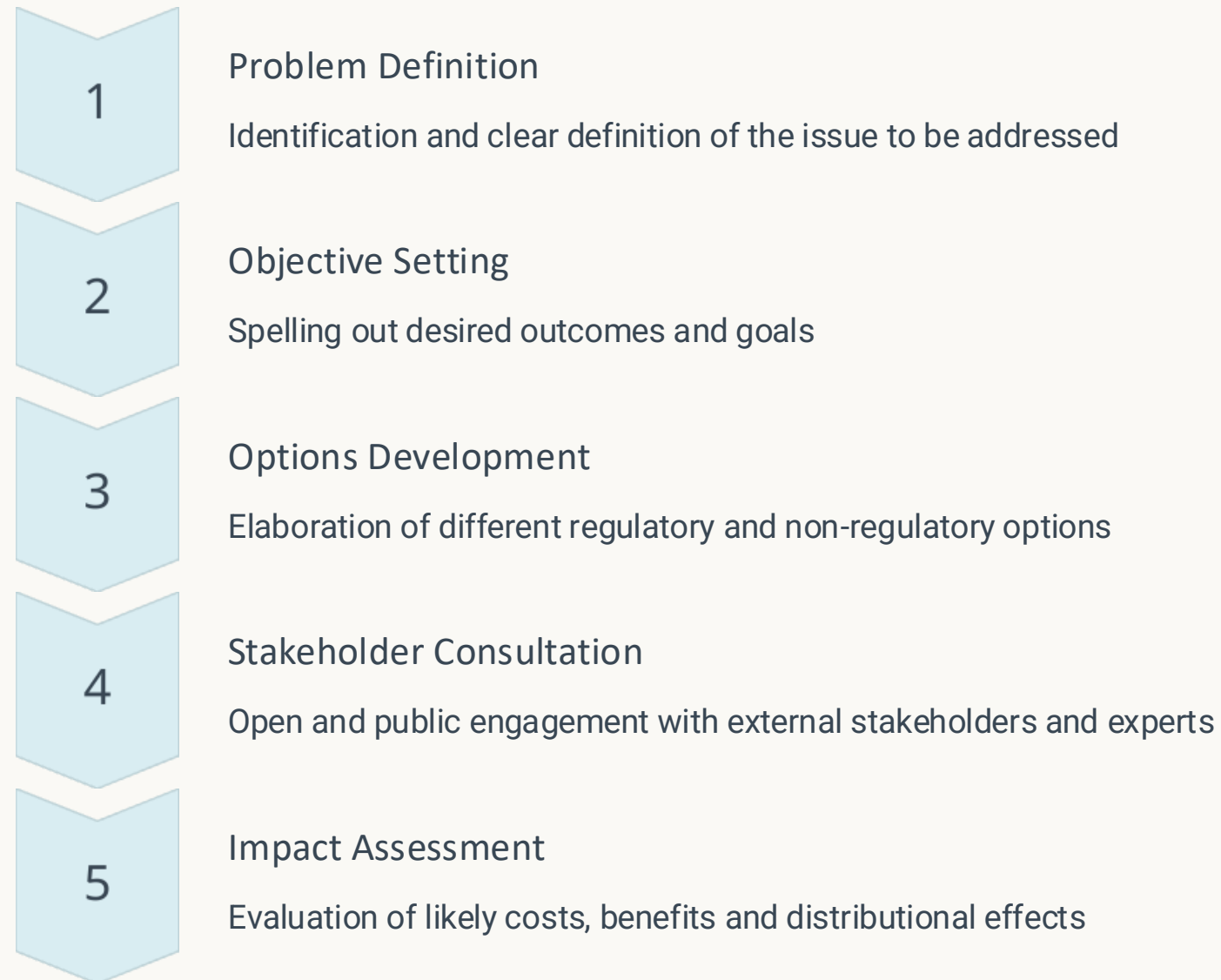
Incentive Systems

A system of adequate incentives for public servants to engage in experimental mode is needed, where failures are considered and valued as much as progress in the quest for effective solutions.

Building Trust

Direct engagement with 'citizen experts' and 'users' can potentially reward public officials with higher levels of motivation, greater levels of trust, and sense of purpose, contributing to a reinvigoration of the public service.

Leveraging Existing Tools: Regulatory Impact Analysis



Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) aims to be both a tool and a decision process for informing political decision makers on whether and how to regulate to achieve public policy goals. When conceived as a 'process,' RIA analytical steps bear the potential to significantly inform all stages of decision-making.

Concluding Thoughts

Managing Expectations

Managing expectations about what this innovative approach can deliver and at what pace is important. Developing small-scale, local yet illustrative projects is the best way to popularize the people-centered approach to public service delivery.

Universal Applicability

This innovative approach in public service delivery and policy making is not a prerogative of developed governance systems. It does not necessitate specific preliminary governance capacities which, if lacking, would prevent developing countries from embracing it.

In fact, emerging jurisdictions might encounter less organizational and cultural rigidity because their public administrations are possibly less formalized, more flexible, and suffer less from path dependencies and inherited bureaucratic imprints. This general potential is arguably the most promising feature for the diffusion of this people-centered approach in public service across the globe.