Citizen-Centred Policy

Summary of training workshop

26 June 2017

Background and intent

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) hosted a workshop on citizen-centred policy, which was facilitated by MSD staff. Parts of it were delivered by staff from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).

The workshop was open to all Policy teams across MSD and the Ministry for Vulnerable Children Oranga Tamariki. It was designed as an interactive session for policy people to experiment and explore opportunities for including citizen/client involvement early within the policy cycle.

Aims of the workshop:

- Think differently about how to engage with citizens/clients, by introducing different tools and case studies.

- Consider what barriers to engagement may be present, and what the opportunities for improvement are.

- Find out how policy practitioners could best be supported for improving their practice.

The workshop's aims are supported by the Policy Project, which supports the Head of Policy Profession (HoPP) in working with policy leaders and practitioners to improve policy quality and capability (see our underline).

"We need to ensure our advice is grounded in as much evidence as possible – both quantitative and qualitative – about real people, the lives they lead, what motivates them and how they experience government. We need to learn more about when and how we can apply a variety of tools and methods to policy challenges and how they form part of a more sophisticated policy toolkit."
- Andrew Kibblewhite, the HoPP

The intent of this summary is to spread the learnings for the benefit of the broader policy community. Policy teams are encouraged to discuss this and decide what practical steps might help improve their practice.

Behavioural insights

Discussion on behavioural insights for public policy

The traditional economic model of human decision making includes three traits that we have:
- unbounded rationality
- unbounded willpower
- unbounded selfishness.

These three traits have now been challenged as unrealistic …

Behavioural economics demonstrates that we:
- do not value losses and gains similarly (loss aversion)
- context matters (reference dependence)
- prefer immediate benefits over future gains (hyperbolic discounting)
- take mental shortcuts (heuristics).

EAST is a useful framework for designing solutions

- Defaults
- Simplification
- Remove friction

- Salience
- Personalisation
- Incentive design

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- Key moments
- Habits
- Making a plan

- Norms
- Networks
- Reciprocity
- Commitments

Hot tips to remember…

"Intervention timing is everything."

"Understanding how we really behave helps design and implement better policies and services."

"The power of free – receiving something triggers a want to reciprocate."

"Be theory agnostic – no one framework to rule them all!"

Design-informed policy innovation

Discussion on design-informed policy innovation

Focus is important when undertaking a task, but being too focused can sometimes hinder us. We need tools to be able to mitigate this risk; the tools and techniques employed by designers can also be used in policy development, to 'zoom in' on a particular problem, and then 'zoom out' to give a holistic view.
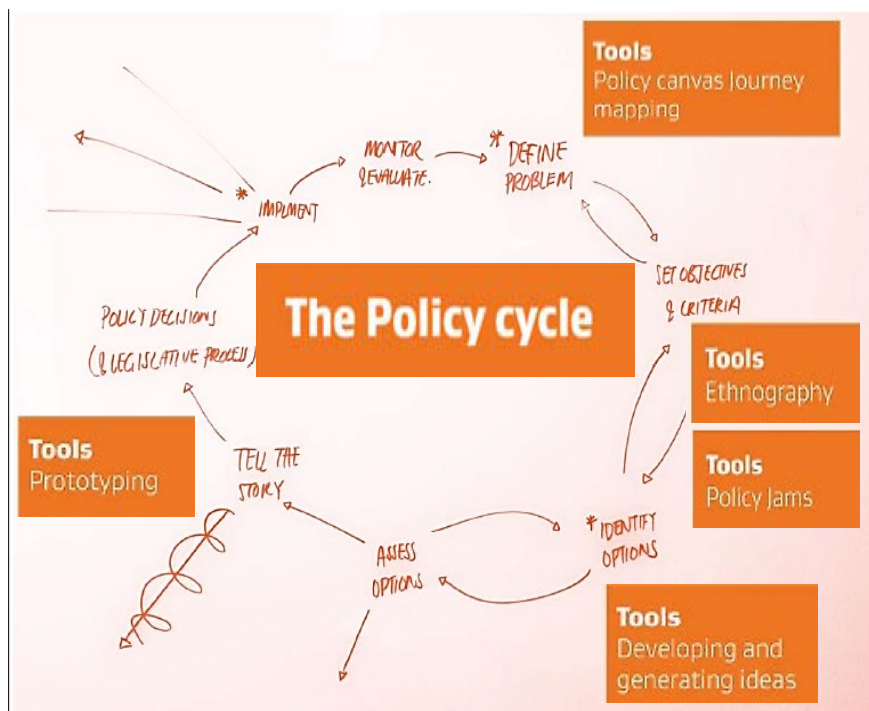
"We have things we can learn from each other. We need courage; a willingness to work outside of our comfort zones to get the best outcomes."

"As designers and policy makers, it is critical to understand and accept that no single person or discipline has the answers."
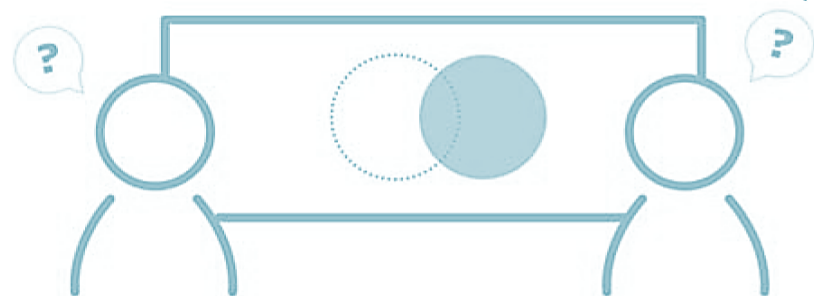
The Policy cycle, however depicted, provides a rational framework to develop policy. Coupling these processes with the empathic, but no less effective, design-related tools helps us to avoid selective attention. Using tools and techniques that are traditionally known as 'designers' tools' within the policy cycle will arm us with more evidence to be able to develop robust policy.

These tools are explained overleaf...

Putting design methods into practice

Putting design methods into practice, using real policy issues, got the group thinking about:

- What end-users /citizens might say?

- How they might behave?

- What needs are being met?

- What is happening in the context of their world? And what could be done to change this for the better?
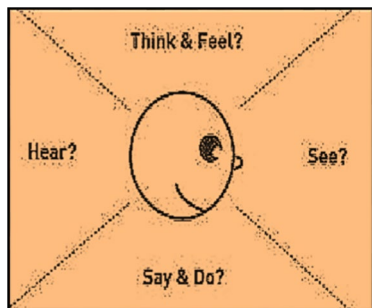
A policy canvas then helped the group quickly identify what the problem is, what needs to be achieved, and who needs to be engaged. This can be particularly useful if you have really tight timeframes. Fleshing out the canvas with affected stakeholders up front helps:

✓ provide valuable insights about types of problems encountered

✓ shape what any potential solutions might look like

✓ give Ministers good information on which to base decisions

✓ stakeholder acceptance of any outcomes or changes.


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Other useful design methods

The group also discussed other useful design methods for putting into practice later...

"Crowdsourcing via online surveys and social networks gets diverse perspectives from a range of people with varied skills and experiences."

"Policy jams/idea days help understand how people experience policies in the real world, and to build policy around actual needs and experiences."

"Prototypes make abstract concepts visible and tangible in the context of users' lives; help understand possible solutions and assumptions early on; and build momentum."

"Ethnography is observing people in a real world situation to understand the impact of their behaviours."
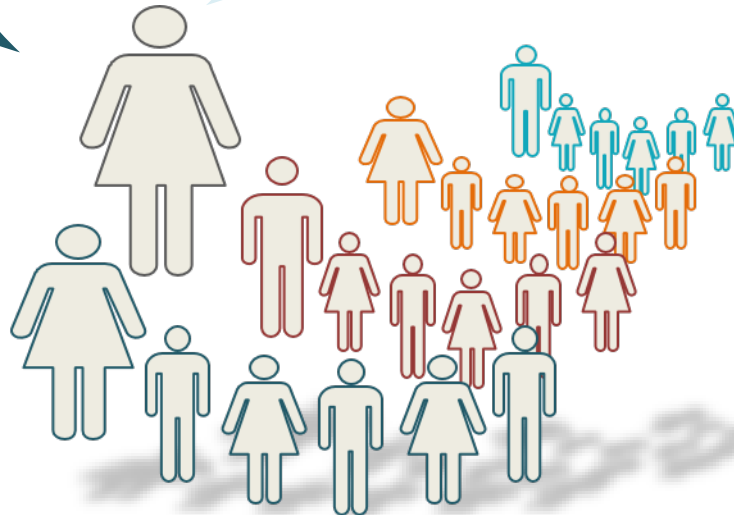
"Change cards are questions that help people think outside of the box and discuss possible directions."

Conclusion and support

Key points on how to do citizen-centred policy

1. **Talk early** – think about who to test ideas with, how to define problems and opportunities, and what you can do in a limited timeframe

2. **Establish 'how' to engage** – its not enough to just get out and talk to people, using practical techniques and tools can help have meaningful engagement

3. **Share what works** – tell stories about how you have used behavioural insights and design-thinking, including the value of understanding what the 'front line' knows

4. **Balance words with action** – sometimes its best to stop consulting and just do something (for example build a prototype to test).

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to those in MBIE who helped present, MSD's facilitators, and all participants for their energy and insights.

Want to know more or get help?

For more information on behavioural insights, design thinking and public participation, check out the Policy Project's new online Policy Methods Toolbox.

To ensure policy quality from the outset of a process, check out the Policy Project's Start Right Guide; Commissioning Conversation Prompts; and Green Light Framework.

For the Policy Canvas template and information on other tools, check out the Open Policy Toolkit and Service Innovation Handbook.

To see how human behaviour is part of an interacting system, check out the COM-B model ('capability', 'opportunity', 'motivation' and 'behaviour').

For information on the Government Economics Network training "Introduction to Behavioural Economics for Policy", for help applying behavioural insights to real policy issues, or to join a behavioural insights community of practice, please email info@gen.org.nz..

For any other queries or help, or to share any related training material, please email policy.project@dpmc.govt.nz.