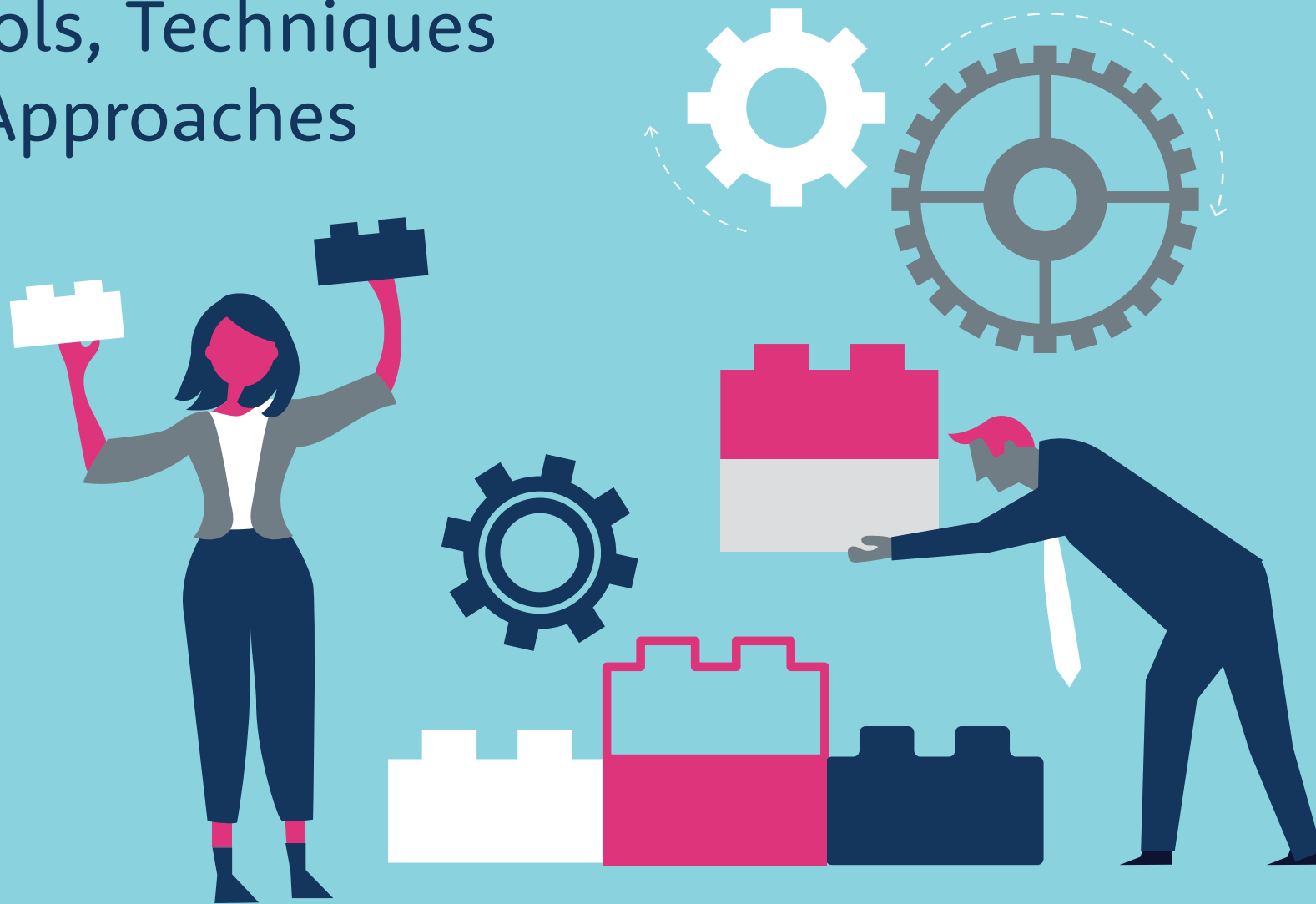


Exploring Policy Innovation: Tools, Techniques + Approaches

May 2018



The Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship (BII+E) is an independent and nonpartisan institute, housed within Ryerson University, that is dedicated to making Canada the best country in the world to be an innovator or an entrepreneur.

BII+E supports this mission in three ways: insightful research and analysis; testing, piloting and prototyping projects; and thoughtful policy innovation approaches. These three disciplines/areas of focus reinforce the others, and are supported by a culture of collaboration, community engagement and impactful partnerships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Karen Birkemoe, Designer
Alex Conliffe, Director, Policy Innovation Platform
Chad Story, Senior Projects Officer
Cheryl Hsu, Lead Researcher
Erin Hesselink, Communications Assistant
Heather Russek, Acting Director, Policy Innovation Platform
Vivian To, Designer

For more information, visit brookfieldinstitute.ca.

 [@BrookfieldIIE](https://www.facebook.com/BrookfieldIIE)

 [/BrookfieldIIE](https://twitter.com/BrookfieldIIE)

 [The Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-brookfield-institute-for-innovation-entrepreneurship)

20 Dundas St. West, Suite 921
Toronto, ON
M5G 2C2



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Scope of Work	4
Understanding Policy Innovation in Context	5
Approaches to Policy Innovation	8
Challenges in the Traditional Policy Process	11
From Insights to Opportunities	14
Conclusion and Next Steps	23



INTRODUCTION

There is growing appetite within the public service, in Canada and abroad, to experiment with innovative approaches to policy development in order to better address the needs of individuals and communities. In 2017, public service leaders across Canada made a commitment to support public sector and policy innovation with a Federal, Provincial and Territorial Declaration on Public Sector Innovation.

This research report provides a sketch of the policy innovation landscape in Canada, with specific reference to the tools, techniques, and approaches occurring at all three levels of government. Through this analysis, we have identified the challenges and opportunities that lie before public sector innovators and point to future areas of research. This work is guided by the question: **What are the factors that impact successful policy innovation and development?**

The research scope focuses on novel approaches to policy development, rather than an assessment of broader public sector innovation. It should be emphasized that this is not a comprehensive research project, but a starting point to explore insights and opportunities for policy innovation in Canada.

Findings from this research are intended to provide useful insights and public benefit about policy innovation. As more and more government innovation units, labs, and hubs emerge across Canada to meet demand,

they might benefit from this research to help shape their mandates and deal with the inevitable “fuzziness” many new ventures experience. We also hope that this research incites further exploration of this space including exemplar case studies and a body of knowledge.

“We need design, as well as the time and space for experimentation, at the fuzzy front end of policy development. We need to innovate on how government sets the rules of the playing field.”

– Alex Ryan, MaRS Solutions Lab

SCOPE OF WORK

In February 2018, the Policy Innovation Hub (PIH) asked BII+E to identify leading examples and models of policy innovation.

This research is based on the following approach:

- + Literature review: A preliminary literature review was conducted to better understand leading examples of policy innovation, public sector innovation and policy design.
- + Expert interviews: Six expert interviews were conducted in order to shed light on Canadian examples of policy innovation.
 - Dr. Alex Ryan, VP of Systems Innovation and Program Director, MaRS Solutions Lab
 - Nisha Haji, Manager, Public Engagement and Education, Anti-Racism Directorate, Ontario Public Service

- Jerry Koh, Director of Systems Innovation, MaRS Solutions Lab
- Ryan Hum, Director, Service Insights and Experimentation, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- Roya Damabi, Senior Systemic Designer, Alberta CoLab
- Dr. Peter Jones, Associate Professor, OCAD University

The research team acknowledges that there are many more leaders and experts that should be consulted to support this exploration. Given time constraints, the insights contained in this report are limited to this scope of work.

UNDERSTANDING POLICY INNOVATION IN CONTEXT

“We are recognizing that the system is not set up to succeed around complex issues – we need more cross-sector collaboration.”

– Nisha Haji, Anti-Racism Directorate,
Ontario Public Service

INNOVATION IN THE FACE OF COMPLEXITY

The political appetite is high across jurisdictions in Canada to experiment with new approaches to problem solving through policy innovation. One of the key drivers of this shift is a growing awareness that current policy processes and instruments are ill-equipped to address growing environmental, social, and economic complexities, so called “wicked problems”.¹ The wave of digital-era disruption has also opened up new opportunities and technologies for government to engage and co-design with the public, and meet interconnected needs in networked ways.

These wicked problems cannot be addressed by a rational and/or linear problem-solving process, nor by any single government actor or stakeholder. It necessarily requires a “whole of government” approach where public sector offices and agencies have to work together across departments and collaborate with stakeholders outside of government. Government must also become more porous to the ideas and perspectives of citizens and people outside of bureaucracy in order to collaboratively understand and

address issues. This demands new and innovative ways by which government can solve problems through policy.

Christian Bason from the Danish Design Centre writes about the need to change the traditional policy model from a “rational man” approach to a “sense-making approach” in environments of growing complexity.² Below is a summary of the paradigmatic shift required for policy professionals to address complex problems.

Table 1
Towards Design for Policy

From: Current policy model	To: Design for policy
Resisting Complexity	Embracing Complexity
Problem-Oriented, Reactive	Vision-Oriented, Proactive
System Focus	Citizen Focus
Unilateral action	Shaping New Alliances
Facilitation	Stewardship
Strategy	Impact Emphasis

Source: Christian Bason, *The Frontiers of Design in Policy*, 2017.

Interest in policy innovation has propelled the creation of public sector innovation labs and hubs that are meant to apply novel approaches to policy development. The Government of Canada has introduced a series of innovation and design labs including the Impact and Innovation Unit in the Privacy Council Office, and innovation labs in Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Natural Resources Canada. The Government of Ontario established the Policy Innovation Hub in 2016.

WHAT IS POLICY INNOVATION?

It is imperative to understand how policy and innovation are defined. Definitions of policy vary and are fuzzy, but it is often defined as the methods, levers, and guidelines which government uses to solve problems and achieve its goals. There is a diverse range of mechanisms that government has access to – from codified legislations and acts to grants and funding – in order to “make choices”³ and decisions about how to achieve policy goals. To make policy is to propose “how people should relate to each other, conduct themselves, and be governed”.⁴

To innovate is to “**apply new insights, resources or approaches** that can be **demonstrated to improve outcomes** for the public compared to the conventional ways of doing things”.⁵

Definitions of policy innovation differ but there is general consensus that policy

innovation encompasses both the “**what**” (the **policy instrument or artifact** that gets created) and the “**how**” (the **processes and tools** by which policy is created and developed). As defined in an interview with Jerry Koh from the MaRs Solutions Lab, policy innovation is “about creating new policies or regulations and programs and services that could lead to a very significant improvement in outcomes or experiences for the public.”⁶ These may include innovative methods of engaging the public in policy, program and service development (e.g., participatory budgeting, crowdsourcing), innovative methods of evaluating the efficacy of policies, programs and services (e.g., behavioural insights, service design methods) and innovative methods of funding (e.g., social finance).

What is the difference between public sector innovation and policy innovation?

There isn’t a clearly defined difference between policy innovation and public sector innovation based on the literature reviewed; in fact, the terms are often used synonymously. From the expert interviews, public sector innovation differs from policy innovation in that it encapsulates a wider range of structural and capacity-building efforts to enable and accelerate innovation within government, which might include integration of new public sector technologies and services. Policy innovation has a narrower focus on the policy development process and the innovativeness of the resulting artifact or instrument.

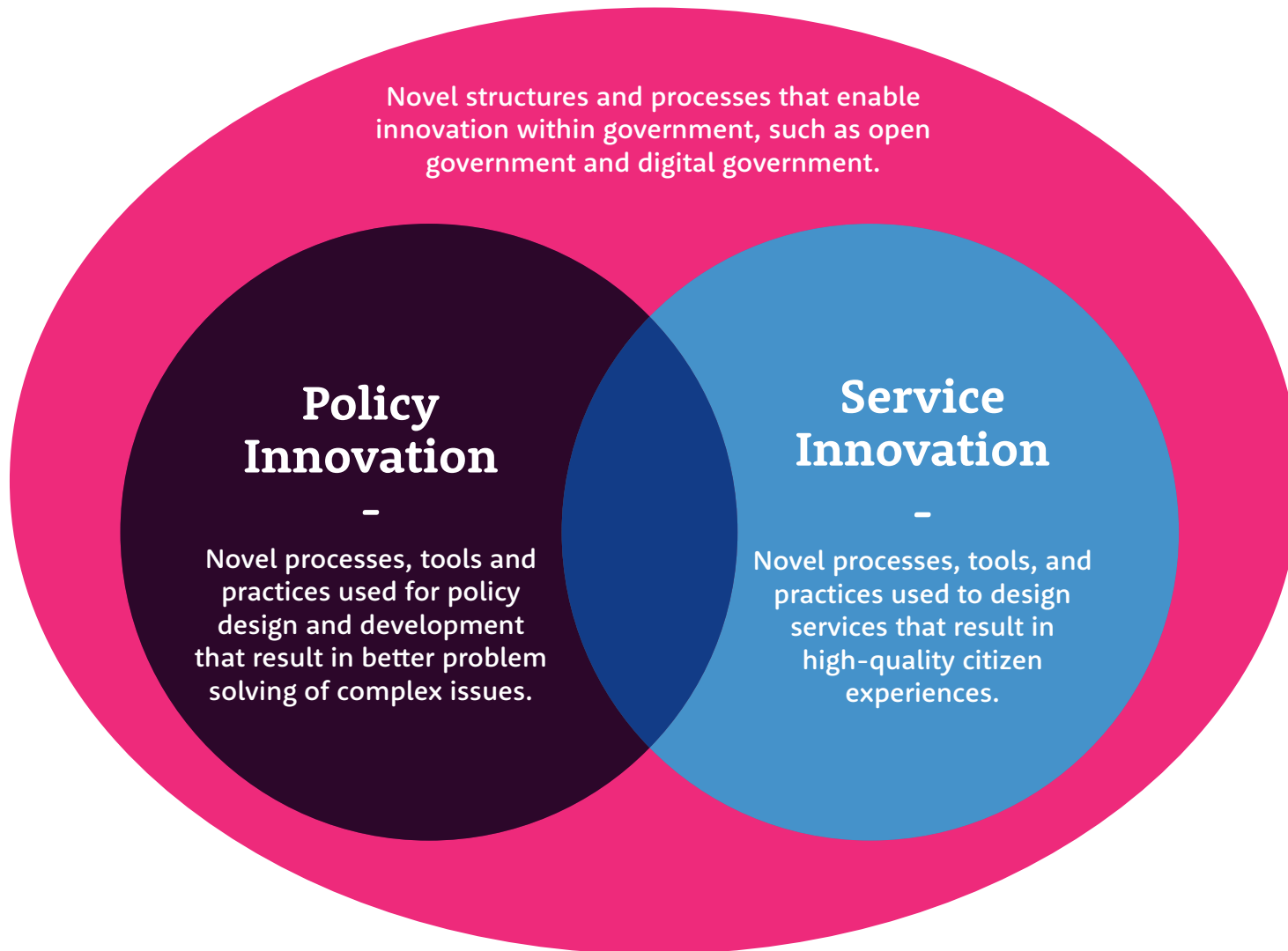
Through the interviews, service innovation was also identified as a subset of public sector innovation. Service design takes a user-centered design approach to developing programs that better meet citizen needs. Many successes in public sector innovation typically take place through service design since it reflects the tangible interaction point with the public.

For clarity, we have synthesized the findings from the expert interviews and literature review to converge on the following definitions going forward:

- + **Policy Innovation:** Novel processes, tools, and practices used for policy design and development that result in better problem solving of complex issues.
- + **Service Innovation:** Novel processes, tools, and practices used to design services that result in high-quality citizen experiences.
- + **Public Sector Innovation:** Novel structures and processes that enable innovation within government, such as open government and digital government.

Figure 1
Definitions of public sector, policy and service innovation

Public Sector Innovation

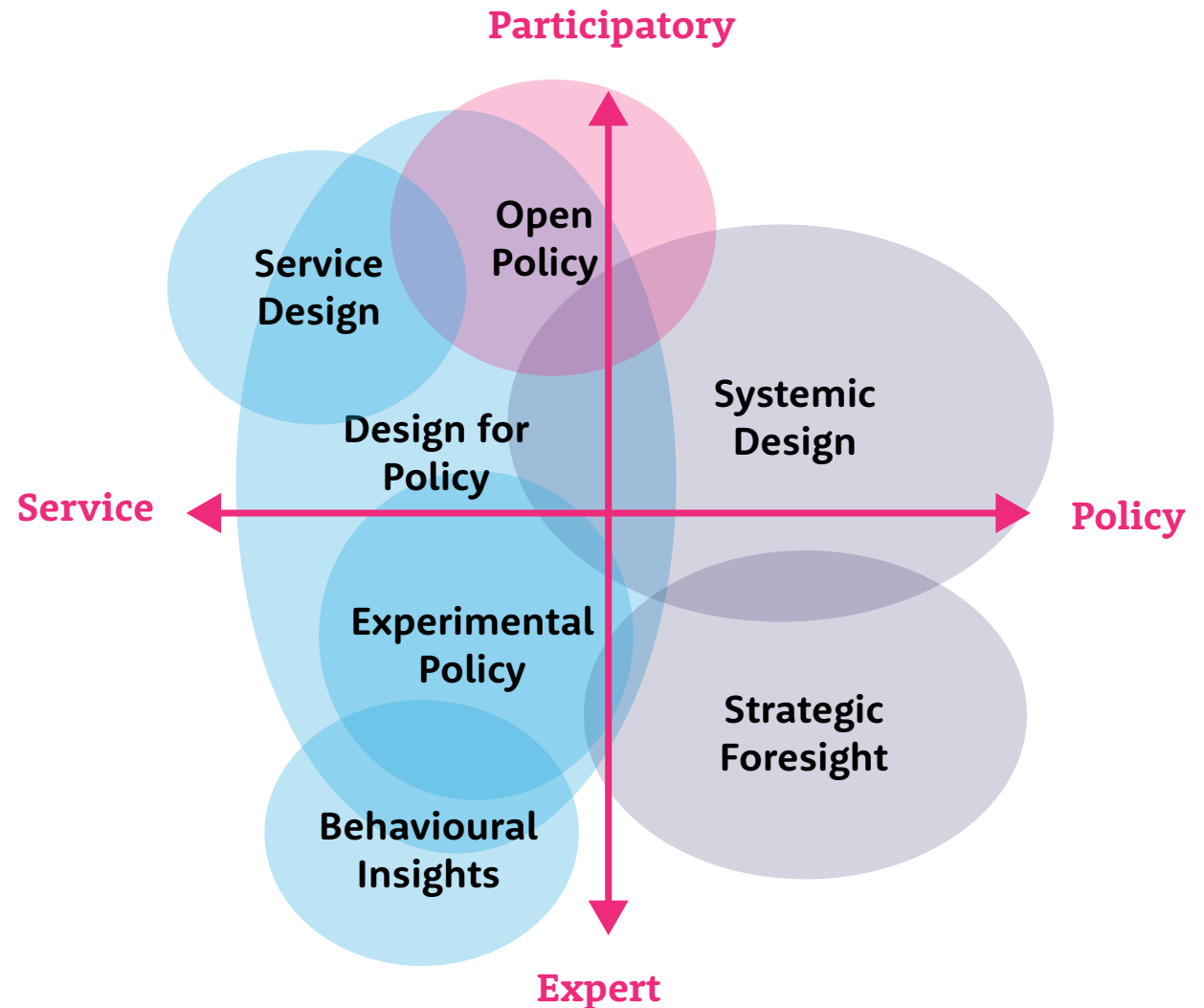


APPROACHES TO POLICY INNOVATION

There are a wide range of approaches to policy innovation. These frameworks overlap and share tools and processes, but come from varying fields of study and differ on how and when to intervene in the policy process.

Figure 2 illustrates the policy innovation landscape, and maps the dominant and emerging approaches to policy innovation along a spectrum from participatory (design with) to expert (design for), and service (public-facing) to policy (government-facing). These approaches to policy innovation are summarized below.

Figure 2
Map of approaches to policy innovation



DESIGN FOR POLICY

Design thinking, a concept first popularized by firms like IDEO and later the Stanford D-school, is increasingly finding a home in the policy development process. While design can be more broadly defined as the endeavour of converting existing into preferred situations,⁷ design thinking as a process brings a new toolkit and logic to human-centred problem solving and the lean and agile testing of possible solutions. There are many resources that explain the design thinking process, and as such, we have not replicated it here.

The adoption of design thinking into the policy development process focuses on citizen-centeredness, imagining new futures, and collaboration inside and outside of government.^{8, 9, 10} In fact, the design process has much in common with and closely marries the traditional policy development process,¹¹ but with one exception: proponents of “design for policy” argue citizens must be treated as active co-designers of government policies, regulations and services. This marks a movement away from developing policy for people to designing policy with publics.¹² However, there is some criticism about the limitations to applying design thinking to policy making, in particular the naivete to the politics of the policy process.¹³

Design thinking tools, such as empathy mapping and journey mapping, along with a host of policy-specific tools, such as the UK Policy Lab Policy Canvas, are becoming essential parts of the policy-

making toolkit. In particular, these tools give policy professionals access to qualitative data which, in many cases, is better suited for communicating the lived experience of people, as compared to aggregate and quantitative data. Used together, lived experience and aggregate data can help connect the particular to the general, something neither can do on their own.

Other emerging design practices, such as service design, are being used to create higher-quality public services that better meet the needs of citizens. Processes inspired by user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) design invites a user-centred approach to the design and beta-testing of public services. For instance, the Ontario Digital Service team recently launched the [Digital Service Standard](#), a 14-point guide for building better digital public service.

SYSTEMS THINKING AND SYSTEMIC DESIGN

Organizations like the Alberta CoLab and MaRS Solutions Lab are using an approach to policy innovation that blends systems thinking and human-centred design. Known as “systemic design,” this perspective allows policy practitioners to get a bird’s-eye view of actors within a system and to examine relationships between them, helping to reveal areas for design intervention. Systems thinking draws from complexity theory to understand the dynamics of inter-dependent parts of a system and map how changing one part of the system might impact another part. CoLab has created a guide to systemic design

titled [Follow the Rabbit: A Field Guide to Systemic Design](#).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT AND FUTURES THINKING

There is increasing interest to bring strategic foresight into government policy and program development in order to offer insights to decision-makers to prepare for and adapt to future events and possibilities. Tools like horizon-scanning can be used to monitor social, economic, environmental, and technological trends and changes, enable more long-term planning and steer towards preferable futures.¹⁴ Entire organizations have been set up within governments, such as Policy Horizons at Employment and Skills Development Canada which carries out this function and trains policy practitioners in the craft of foresight.

OPEN AND DIGITALLY ENABLED POLICY

Emergent digital tools are creating opportunities to bring citizens closer to the policy development process and government closer to citizen needs. Mass participation in policy-making has historically been challenging to implement, however cloud-based digital software, such as [IdeaScale](#), is making it easier for citizens to electronically participate by submitting, prioritizing, debating and selecting policy priorities.¹⁵ Other examples include the City of Calgary’s Civic Innovation YYC program used to support online crowdsourcing, and Budget Talks in Ontario. The Open Government initiative

launched a digital public engagement platform designed to involve Ontarians in the budget making process. While digital tools should play an important role in any public engagement, they must be coupled with analogue forms of engagement that facilitate in-person deliberation, debate, and discussion.

BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS AND INSIGHTS

“Nudge theory” borrowing from behavioural psychology and economics, has been popularized as a way to reinforce positive behaviour in policy and encourage uptake of programs and services.¹⁶ Knowledge about the kinds of behavioural heuristics and cognitive biases that impact human decision-making is a useful counterpoint to a traditional way of viewing humans as rational thinking agents, and can be used by policymakers to design the environments and “choice architectures” that steer choices towards desired outcomes. For example, Ontario’s Behavioural Insights Unit was created in 2015 to apply behavioural insights methodologies to improve policy and program design, finding success in nudging and increasing organ donation consent rates by 143 percent.¹⁷ While there is interest in “behaviourally informed” policy-making, there has been some critique about the ethical issues around unconscious psychological manipulation by government.

EXPERIMENTAL POLICY

Policy experimentation focuses on arriving at evidence-based policy by testing the effects of policy interventions in real-world settings and measuring the impacts.¹⁸ These experiments are done to systematically learn about what works and what doesn’t work in order inform decision-making, and are typically done in a lab context. For example, Alberta CoLab in Canada and the Policy Lab in the UK are set up to promote and develop experimental approaches in government for generating, establishing and validating hypotheses.¹⁹ Other governments like Finland have set the priority of experimentation through the Prime Minister’s office and created an Experimental Finland team. In Canada, the federal government has set a mandate to commit a fixed percentage of program funds to experimenting with new approaches to existing problems and measuring the impact of their programs.²⁰ Policy experimentation is still an emerging field and is in the process of building methodologies, best practices and tools for evaluating meaningful performance measurement.

TOOLS

There are a range of different methods and tools that are available to support the different approaches to policy innovation. Below are some examples:

Design for Policy:

Empathy, Ethnography, Co-Design, Collaboration

Service Design:

Service Blueprints, Journey Mapping

Systems Thinking:

Rich Picture, Conceptual Mapping, Lever Dashboards, Geographic Maps

Strategic Foresight:

Horizon Scanning, Trends Analysis, Scenario Planning, Three Horizons

Open Policy:

E-Government, Open Data, Big Data, Analytics

Behavioural Economics and

Insights: Nudge Strategy, Incentives

Policy Experimentation:

Labs, Prototyping, Evaluation, Outcome Testing

CHALLENGES IN THE TRADITIONAL POLICY PROCESS

“The classic policy cycle is in theory, never in practice”

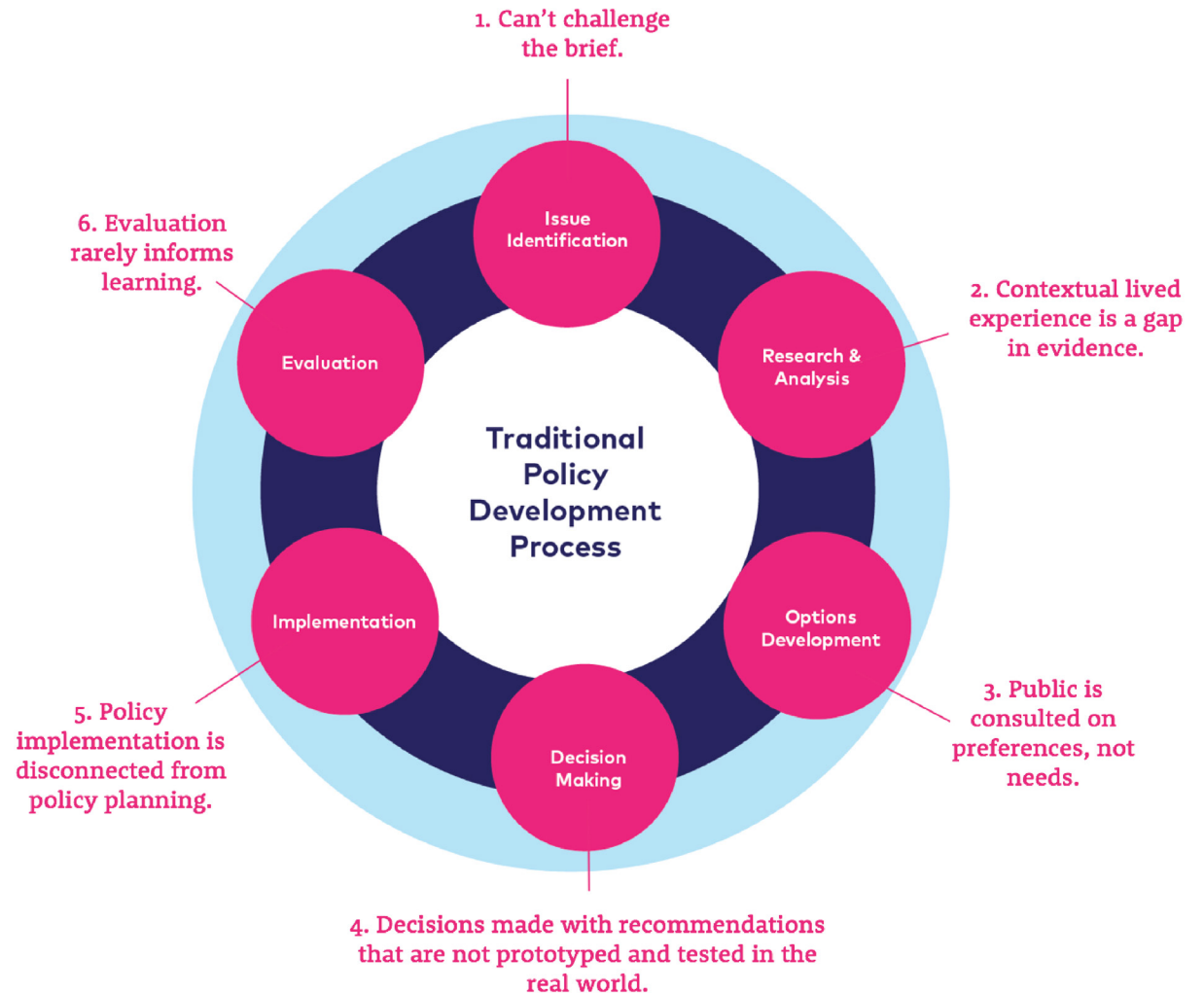
– Ryan Hum

The generally accepted orthodoxy around the process of policy development is a linear cycle with anywhere between five to eight steps from problem identification to evaluation (as illustrated in Figure 3). This policy cycle modeled from Harold Lasswell is considered a useful tool to teach and understand policy making.

The interview participants agree that the traditional policy development cycle works in theory, but rarely happens in practice within realistic time-constrained environments. The more realistic scenario expressed by interview participants is that a “window of opportunity” exists to respond to a policy problem where policy professionals respond with “whatever is pre-coded” as quickly and efficiently as possible as a solution to the issue.

Below is a synthesis of the traditional steps to policy development from the interviews and literature, including the challenges for policymakers that exist at each step.

Figure 3
Challenges faced in the traditional policy development cycle



ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

Issue identification typically begins with a specific mandate given to policy professionals in reaction to a problem that needs to be addressed by government.

Challenge: Can't challenge the brief

There is very little room to “challenge the design brief” as described by OCAD associate professor Peter Jones; the mandate dictates what is to be designed.²¹ This means that innovation is much more challenging at the fuzzy front-end of the policy development process and there is little room for problem definition and framing.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

The policy professional must inform herself as much as possible on the issue by systematically collecting information and providing a body of evidence. While some problems are explored with stakeholder teams and public consultation, the majority of the research is done at the desk through analyzing existing literature, frameworks and models, as well as a jurisdictional scan of best practices happening in other places.

Challenge: Contextual lived experience is a gap in evidence

There are systemic barriers to doing the kind of deeper public engagement (e.g., field research, ethnography, co-design) that enables policymakers to access the lived experience and needs of people impacted by the issue. As Alex Ryan from MaRS Solutions Lab says, “At-desk analysis is a-contextual and apolitical - we need thick data (contextual, situated, cultural knowledge) that is in situ with people’s needs.”²² There is also an epistemological bias towards evidence that is quantifiable (e.g., statistics) and reliable (e.g., worked in other places), which means that much of the evidence is derived from desk research and divorced from the lived experience.

OPTIONS DEVELOPMENT

Options development involves creating a set of recommended solutions (policy options) to inform decision-making. Ideally, the options that are developed are shared with the public to elicit feedback.

Challenge: Public is consulted on preferences, not needs

Engagement with the public usually entails sharing a set of options and understanding their preference, as opposed to doing primary research on the contextual and situated needs of the impacted population.

DECISION MAKING

Decision makers and their position is determined by the scope and type of issue that is being addressed by the policy. Policy professionals are expected to share a “final product” of recommendations that have gone through rigorous quality assurance and approvals.

Challenge: Decisions are made with recommendations that are not prototyped and tested in the real world

Due to a culture of not sharing – “don’t share notes, share the final project” – policy professionals may develop policy solutions that are reliable in terms of best practice across jurisdictions, but lack validity in terms of fit to the specific context. Options are not sufficiently tested in the “real world”, but are planned and funded based on hypothetical needs, and then handed off for implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the policy is where a policy action occurs to address the problem. At this point, the policy proposal is put into effect and implemented by respective administrative agencies and service providers.

Challenge: Policy implementation is disconnected from policy planning

There is a recognized gap between policy planning and implementation, where policy analysts and planners are unable to address the practical on-the-ground needs of the policy implementers and service providers. This can create a vicious cycle where policy planners build intentional flexibility into policy advice, assuming that policy implementers have the autonomy to change the entire thing. There are limited communication channels to enable learning between the two parties.

“The current policy cycle works well for simple problems with low uncertainty - you can have a guidebook to follow step by step.”

– Jerry Koh, MaRS Solutions Lab

EVALUATION

Typically, the goal is to monitor and evaluate the policy programs for their efficacy and intended impact. Ideally, evaluation is able to bring in data to inform learning about how to improve the policy and program delivery.

Challenge: Evaluation rarely informs learning

While evaluation is hypothetically recognized as important, it is rarely implemented for learning nor does it feed back into the policy development cycle as an iterative process given the three to five-year time horizons involved. Novel approaches to evaluation such as Michael Quinn Patton’s developmental or principles-focused evaluation allows for real-world extensive guidance and learning for long-term planning.

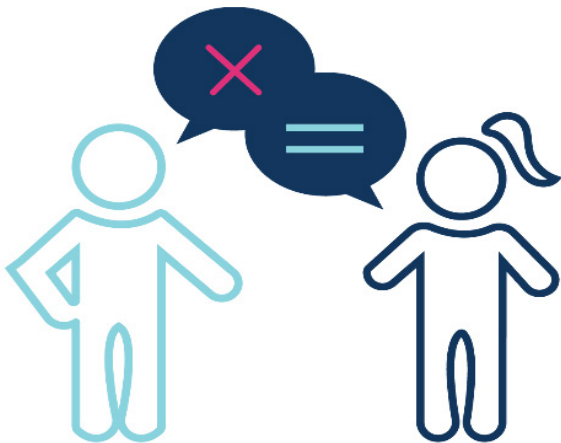
FROM INSIGHTS TO OPPORTUNITIES

An analysis of the expert interviews and literature review reveal seven key insights and opportunities that policy innovation practitioners should be aware of:

1. CONFLICTING DEFINITIONS OF DESIGN, POLICY, AND INNOVATION MAY RESULT IN UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION OF EFFORTS

The glut of definitions, frameworks and examples of policy innovation has created a fragmented pool of knowledge about the practice and leads to a redundancy in the work around policy innovation.

It is difficult to know when to apply new approaches to policy development and what tools to use.



THE OPPORTUNITY

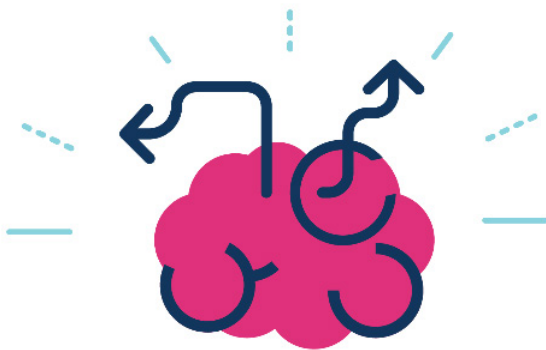
Facilitate cross-jurisdiction knowledge sharing, and co-create a Canadian-focused body of policy innovation best practices and case studies that follows the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Declaration on Public Sector Innovation.

More regional and international events can support knowledge mobilization inside and outside of government; for instance, the Policy Community Conference organized by the Canadian government allows policymakers around the world to connect and share skills around policy making.

The Systemic Design eXchange (SDX), run by Alberta CoLab and the Skills Society Action Lab, has sought to advance the practice of systemic design within government through cross-stakeholder convening.

2. THERE IS VERY LITTLE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (I.E., INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY) THAT EXAMINES AND LEARNS FROM THE EVERYDAY REALITIES OF THE POLICY PROFESSION

Public servants are constantly confronted with complexity and uncertainty. It is in these routine, and often overlooked, places that micro-innovation occurs – workarounds, resourcefulness, compromises – that can serve as important inputs to the craft of policy innovation. As policy innovation expert Ryan Hum states, “The real policy innovators are in line departments; they are not convinced things are working, and are innovating in real world, bureaucratic, conditions. They are experimenting without credit and coverage.”²³



THE OPPORTUNITY

Allocate more resources to better understanding the lived realities of policy professionals. This “thick description” will allow for the development of tools, training and frameworks that most accurately respond to the needs of policy professionals.

For instance, OpenLab at the University Health Network developed a handbook, [From Patients Who Know: A Hospital Handbook](#), to document and guide the patient experience of the Ontario healthcare system.

A similar approach can be taken to give policy professionals a handbook or “cheat sheet” that highlights advice and workarounds.

3. THERE IS LITTLE ROOM FOR EXPERIENTIAL RESEARCH IN POLICY-MAKING DUE TO A BIAS TOWARDS QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

There is a thirst to do more public engagement at the front end of policy planning, where qualitative research, such as ethnography, can play an important role in documenting and communicating the lived experience of people impacted by the problem. There are “phantom rules” or orthodoxies in government around what is allowable and qualifies as valid evidence that may inhibit policy professionals from innovating. These are unwritten or unsubstantiated rules around what is allowed and permissible within government that reinforces risk averseness.



THE OPPORTUNITY

Create a culture that invites a balance of quantitative and qualitative evidence for problem solving; quantitative data explains what to create, while qualitative data explains why. Echoing this sentiment, Jerry Koh from MaRS Solutions Lab, argues, “If you can’t probe and sense in reality, how accurate is the data you are generating?”²⁵

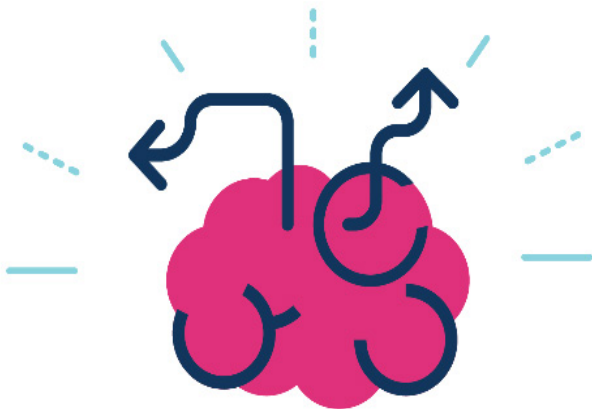
Qualitative research like ethnography can supplement and deepen understanding in spaces where the data doesn’t reveal enough information. For example, government programs and services may indicate that a program or service is serving a small proportion of marginalized populations. By understanding the experience of clients for the specific program or service, it may be possible to better understand why this population is having difficulty accessing the service.

To support the adoption of qualitative research, MindLab in Denmark built a series of design-inspired tools to specifically address the needs of public administration, such as the “[project journey](#)”. The UK Policy Lab is also using a “people-centred” design approach to policy-making and have published an [open policy-making toolkit](#) as a resource for others.

With projects like Recover: Edmonton’s Urban Wellness Plan, the MaRS Solutions Lab has modelled successful ways of integrating ethnographic research methods into understanding the needs of the community it is trying to serve. A practitioner’s guide to qualitative experiential research can support the education for this type of approach.

4. POLICY DECISIONS TEND TO BE INFORMED BY PROXIES (STAKEHOLDERS, EXPERTS) WITH LESS ATTENTION GIVEN TO THE “RAW” EXPERIENCES OF CITIZENS

Increasingly, public sector innovation labs are being used as workarounds to directly engage with citizens and de-risk solution experimentation. One of the experts, Nisha Haji, says, “We’re currently treating the lab as public engagement in order to bring in community collaboration.”²⁶ It is becoming common practice to depend on the opinions of external stakeholder groups -- acting as “proxies” -- to gauge public sentiment. The perspectives of these groups is no doubt an important input to the policy development process; however, relying too heavily on these opinions risks misrepresenting the wishes and desires of the public.



THE OPPORTUNITY

Continue to experiment with tools and ethnographic research methods that give direct access to the “raw” opinions and experiences of the public in order to better understand the issue, build evidence and develop policy options. The UK Policy Lab used film ethnography to build empathy and better understand how to prevent and help people exit homelessness. The films also allowed the team to share the everyday experiences of homeless people with policymakers.²⁷

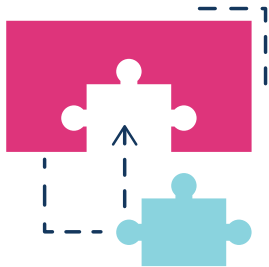
While labs are a useful conduit for government to connect with outside stakeholders, there can be other avenues by which policy professionals can directly access the experiences and needs of citizens, especially those of underrepresented groups.

New digital tools have enabled participatory forms of public engagement, for example Budget Talks in the Government of Ontario used crowdsourcing and other digital technologies in order to supplement traditional public consultation methods. It is also critical to consider the varying degrees of citizen participation and empowerment through different public engagement methods.

Sherry Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation is a useful reference framework, which illustrates the differences between genuine participation (e.g., partnership and delegated power) and tokenism (e.g., rubberstamp advisory committees and group therapy).

5. THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN POLICY PLANNERS AND POLICY IMPLEMENTERS MEANS THAT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND BUDGETS MIGHT BE SET WITH LIMITED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT POTENTIAL REAL WORLD RESULTS

The systemic silos blocking feedback and collaboration between policy planning and implementation means that a lot of the policy planning is based on untested hypotheses (see Figure 4). As Roya Damabi from the Alberta CoLab explained, “There is a difference between learning in practice and learning in concepts. When I think about my previous policy life, I learned about what others did and packaged it, but I didn’t learn about what those concepts mean to people impacted by it, I didn’t learn about how it works in the Alberta context, and I never got to action because I was focused on the framework.”²⁷ Other interview participants echoed this, noting that assessment or evaluation is often left out once policy moves to “implementation” because those involved believe “once it’s out there, it’s out there.”



THE OPPORTUNITY

Enabling a feedback loop between policy planners and front-line public servants so that planners can access the wealth of insights and test with on-the-ground knowledge to inform policy planning and iterative learning (see Figure 5).

This collaborative learning can also happen through interdisciplinary teams or rotational program-policy-service fellowship programs.

A practice-based learning culture enables experimentation and prototyping at the service level for testing and assessing of the impacts at the policy and strategy level.

For instance, the BC Service Design team used co-design to help identify necessary improvements to how the Province administers the Medical Service Plan.

The results of this work filtered back up to the policy layer, and gave policy practitioners a better sense of how policies were being interpreted and experienced on the ground.

Figure 4
Gap between policy planning and policy implementation

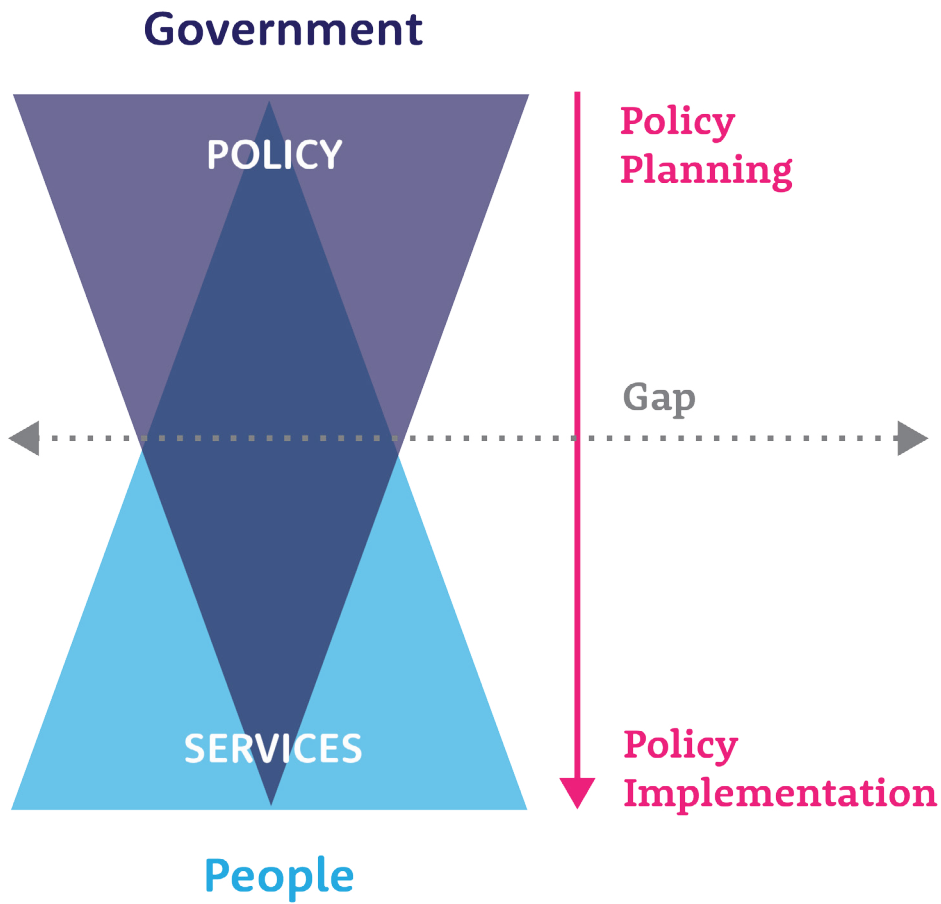
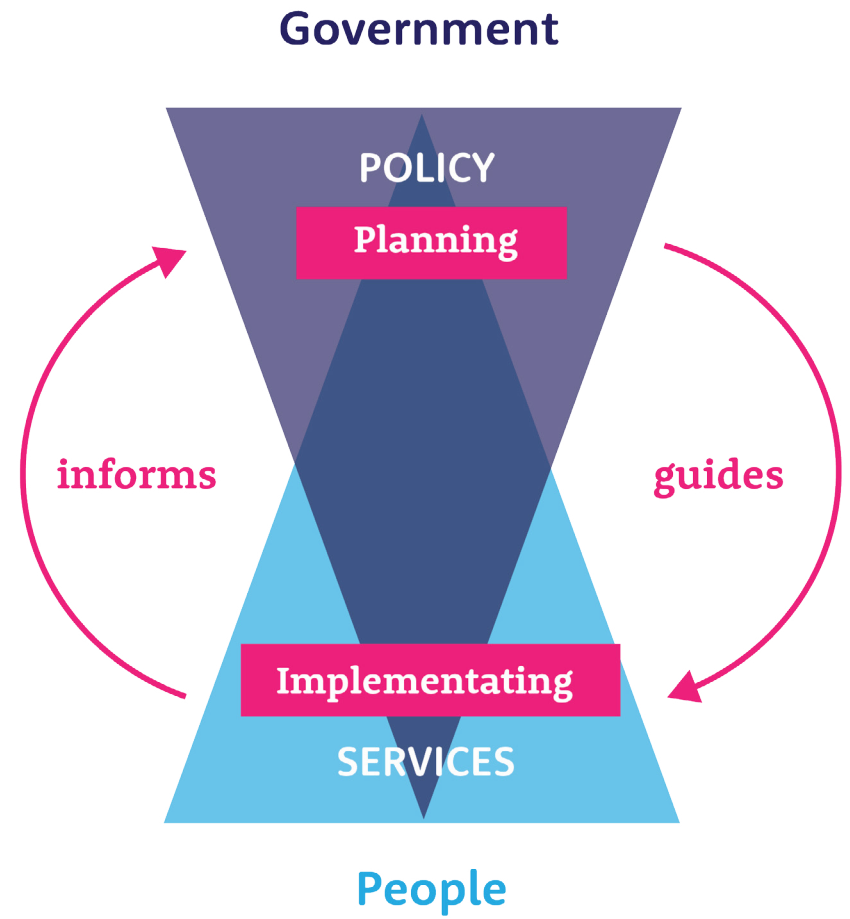
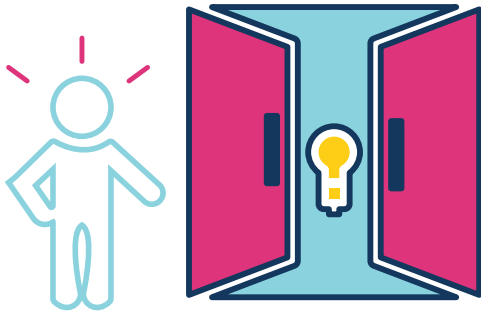


Figure 5
Feedback Loop to connect policy planning and implementation



6. THERE IS A DESIRE TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND UNPACK THE ROOT CAUSES OF COMPLEX WICKED PROBLEMS, BUT POLICY PROFESSIONALS NEED THE TIME AND RESOURCES TO DO IT

A reactive policy environment has left policy practitioners with less time to understand the root cause of complex problems before implementing structural corrections. Jumping too quickly to a prescription based on a symptomatic problem yields symptomatic solutions that can lead to unintended consequences and may even reinforce the issue (See Figure 6).



THE OPPORTUNITY

Make time and space for upstream policy innovation to understand and potentially reframe complex problems. As Alex Ryan from MaRS Solutions Lab says, “We need design (as well as the time and space for experimentation) at the fuzzy front end of policy development. We need to innovate on how government sets the rules of the playing field.”²⁶ The varying complexity of problems require different sense-making approaches; Snowden and Boone’s Cyefin framework is useful for identifying the differences between simple (sense, categorize, respond), complicated (sense, analyze, respond), complex (probe, sense, respond) and chaotic problems (act, sense, respond).

In an interview with Alex Ryan, he used the iceberg model to reveal the underlying patterns, structures and mental models that drive events that we see on the surface of the water.²⁷ Complex wicked

problems require longer timelines to dig deeper below the surface to understand the root causes, and resources that enable cross-stakeholder consensus building and context-specific qualitative research and experimentation.

When possible, solutions get practically tested and evaluated in the real world, they can inform the kind of long-term structural changes that are necessary (See Figure 7). There is increasing interest in bringing the spirit of experimentation to government (See: Experimental Policy in Approaches to Policy Innovation) and create innovation prototypes that can be tested in the real world.

Convening spaces to facilitate cross-stakeholder problem solving and experimentation are also being stewarded by organizations like Evergreen and the McConnell Foundation to impact policy.

Figure 6
Symptomatic prescriptions lead to symptomatic solutions

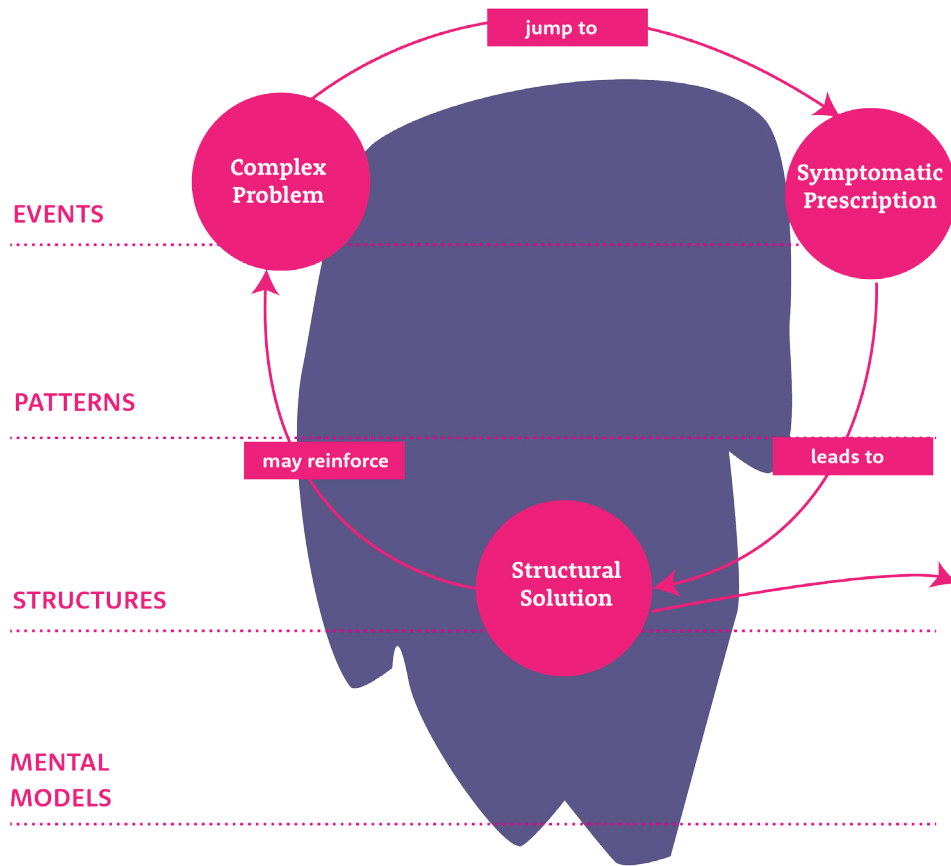
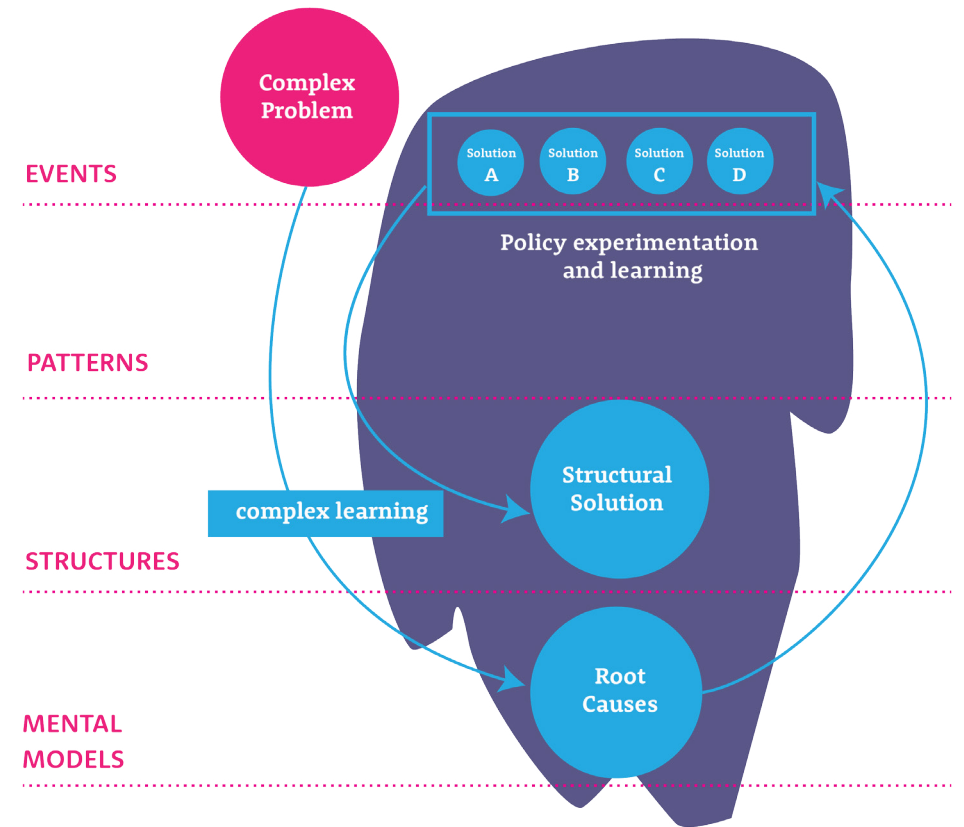
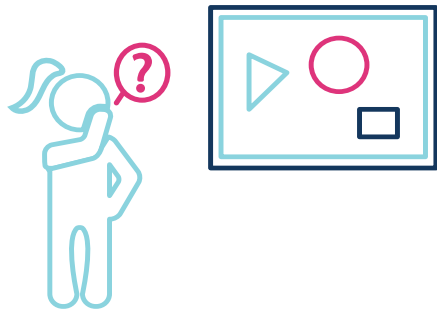


Figure 7
Complex problem solving through understanding root causes and policy experimentation and learning



7. THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM IS THAT ISSUES ARE DIRECTED BY POLITICAL MANDATES, AND THE SUCCESS OF POLICY SOLUTIONS ALSO DEPENDS ON ALIGNMENT WITH “WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY”

Although policy aims to be objective, the kind of research and policy being made are directed by and are accountable to political mandates. As professor Peter Jones states, “If there is no political mandate, all good ideas are on advisement.”



THE OPPORTUNITY

Enable policy professionals to identify and take advantage of “windows of opportunity” – spaces where a legitimising mandate, political alignment and broader public interest intersect for effective change to happen.²⁸ Political mandates are informed by constituents and reflect public opinion, and are powerful leverage points to enable policy innovation.

For example, the Ontario government has created cross-cutting cabinet level mandates on issues like anti-racism and poverty reduction that legitimise complex problem framing and inter-departmental collaboration. Recognizing the need to maintain an objective and non-partisan position when providing public policy advice, while also acknowledging that political alignment can be a lever for innovation, can help policymakers better understand the political layers in the policy development process.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This report is meant to explore policy innovation and provide a primer on the landscape in Canada. The insights presented in this report are only the beginning in understanding policy innovation.

The proposed next phases of work are to:

- + **BETTER UNDERSTAND AND CREATE A THICK DESCRIPTION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF POLICYMAKERS**

Conduct design research and ethnographic engagements with policymakers to get the raw information on their experiences, and understand the workarounds, barriers and enablers to creating innovative policy.

“What is important is a sense of possibility – whether it is a sense of what could be, a mindset shift, something new to try. We need to tell policymakers ‘you can do this right now.’ ”

– Roya Damabi, Alberta CoLab

- + **DEVELOP GUIDES FOR POLICY INNOVATION, INCLUDING SPECIFIC TOOLS, CAPABILITIES, AND TRAINING NEEDED TO SUPPORT POLICYMAKERS**

Develop resources that complement the Ontario Public Service of the Future Action Plan to encourage, support and evaluate innovative public service initiatives, including the kinds of tools and capabilities needed to create a collaborative practice-based learning culture within the organization.

- + **CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC INDEX OF POLICY INNOVATION PROJECTS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

Conduct a jurisdictional scan to map existing projects, case studies and actors in policy innovation for knowledge sharing. This index can help policy professionals better understand all of actors and opportunities within the policy innovation landscape and learn what is working well to influence innovative policy development.

- + **OPERATIONALIZE THE FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, AND TERRITORIAL DECLARATION ON PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION, WITH A FOCUS ON POLICY CHALLENGES THAT AFFECT MULTIPLE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT**

Seek fruitful partnerships with the federal government and/or other provinces and territories to share insights on policy innovation and solve the big challenges faced by Canadians.

There is an opportunity to further develop the policy innovation landscape in Canada. We hope that this report provides some insights to inform public sector jurisdictions across Canada.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Crowley and Head, 2017.
- 2 Bason, 2014.
- 3 Ryan, 2018.
- 4 Shore, Weight, Pero, 2011.
- 5 Koh, 2018.
- 6 Koh, 2018.
- 7 Simon, 1996.
- 8 Bason, 2010.
- 9 Kimbell, 2015.
- 10 McMullin, 2012.
- 11 Mintrom and Leutjens, 2016.
- 12 Bason, 2010.
- 13 Clarke and Craft, 2018.
- 14 Policy Horizons Canada, n.d.
- 15 Kalampokis, Hausenblas, and Tarabanis, 2011.
- 16 Sunstein, Reisch, and Rauber, 2017.
- 17 Government of Ontario, 2018.
- 18 Danish Design Centre, PEEP, n.d.
- 19 Christianson, 2017.
- 20 Government of Canada, 2015.
- 21 Jones, 2018.
- 22 Ryan, 2018.
- 23 Hum, 2018.
- 24 Koh, 2018.
- 25 Drew, 2016.
- 26 Haji, 2018.
- 27 Damabi, 2018.
- 28 Haji, 2018.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arnstein, S. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. Retrieved from: <https://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>
- Bason, C. (2014). Design for policy. Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Gower.
- Bason, C. (2016). Designing policy experimentation: how to identify design, run and learn from innovative policy interventions. Danish Design Centre. Retrieved from: <https://www.slideshare.net/Designcentret/designing-policy-experimentation>
- Centre for Public Impact. (2017). Looking long term: how governments can use strategic foresight. Retrieved from: <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/governments-can-use-strategic-foresight/>
- Chen, K., Bendle, N., and Soman, D. (2017). Policy by design: the dawn of behaviourally-informed government. Retrieved from: <https://www.rotman.utoronto.ca/-/media/Files/Programs-and-Areas/BEAR/White-Papers/PolicyByDesign-BEAR.pdf?la=en>. Toronto: Rotman School of Management.
- Christiansen, J. (2017). Towards an experimental culture in government: reflections on and from practice. Retrieved from: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/towards-experimental-culture-government-reflections-and-practice>
- Clarke, A., and Craft, J. (2018). The twin faces of public sector design. Wiley Online Library. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/gove.12342>
- Crowley, K., and Head, B. W. (2017). The enduring challenge of ‘wicked problems’: revisiting Rittel and Webber. *Policy Sciences*, 50(4), 539–547. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-017-9302-4>
- Damabi, R. (2018). Interview.
- Drew, C. (2016). Preventing homelessness. *Policy Lab*. GOV.UK. Retrieved from: <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2016/10/25/preventing-homelessness/>
- Government of Ontario. (2018). Behavioural Insights in Ontario: Update Report 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/behavioural-insights-ontario-update-report-2018>
- Haji, N. (2018). Interview.
- Hum, R. (2018). Interview.
- Impact and Innovation Unit. (2017). Annual report: Central Innovation Hub. Government of Canada. Retrieved from: https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pco-bcp/documents/pdfs/inn-inn/annual_report2016-17_eng.pdf
- Jones, P. (2018). Interview
- Kalampokis, E., Hausenblas, M., and Tarabanis, K. (n.d.). Combining social and government open data for participatory decision-making. In *ePart 2011: Electronic Participation* (pp. 36–47). Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-23333-3_4
- Kimbell, L. (2015). Applying design approaches to policy making: discovering policy lab. United Kingdom: Policy Lab; University of Brighton. Retrieved from: https://researching-designforpolicy.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/kimbell_policylab_report.pdf
- Koh, J. (2018). Interview.
- Ly, K., Mažar, N., Zhao, M., and Soman, D. (2013). A practitioner’s guide to nudging. Toronto: Rotman School of Management. Retrieved from: <http://irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/po/nudge-experiments-in-human-nature/nudge-section.pdf>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- McMullin, J. (2012). Design for Policymaking. In *Usability in Government Systems* (pp. 347–358). Elsevier. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-391063-9.00054-7>
- Mintrom, M., and Luetjens, J. (2016). Design Thinking in Policymaking Processes: Opportunities and Challenges: Design Thinking in Policymaking Processes. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 75(3), 391–402. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12211>
- Monafu, D., Chan, S., and Turnbull, S. (2018). Is experimentation just the latest policy buzzword? *Policy Options*. Retrieved from: <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/february-2018/is-experimentation-just-the-latest-policy-buzzword/>
- Mulgan, G. (2014). Innovation in the public sector: how can public organisations better create, improve and adapt? NESTA. Retrieved from: https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/innovation_in_the_public_sector_how_can_public_organisations_better_create_improve_and_adapt_o.pdf
- Nejrup, C. (2016). Policy experimentation by design. Retrieved from: <https://danskdesigncenter.dk/en/policy-experimentation-design>
- Pearman, J. (2018). Embedding experimentation in government: Lessons from Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/embedding-experimentation-government-lessons-canada>
- Policy Horizons Canada. (2018). Who we are. Retrieved from: <http://www.horizons.gc.ca/en/content/who-we-are>
- Policy Lab. (2017). Introduction to Policy Lab. Government of the United Kingdom. Retrieved from: <https://www.slideshare.net/Openpolicymaking/introduction-to-policy-lab-uk-winter-edition-2017>
- Research Data Canada and CANARIE. (2016). Open data for innovation innovation and prosperity. Government of Canada. Retrieved from: <https://open.canada.ca/en/idea/open-data-innovation>
- Rittel, Horst, and Melvin Webber; “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,” pp. 155–169, *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 4, Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, Inc., Amsterdam, 1973. [Reprinted in N. Cross (ed.), *Developments in Design Methodology*, J. Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1984, pp. 135–144.]
- Ryan, A. (2018). Interview.
- Prime Minister of Canada. (2015). President of the Treasury Board of Canada Mandate Letter. Retrieved from: <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/president-treasury-board-canada-mandate-letter>
- Schmidt, J. M. (2015). Policy, planning, intelligence and foresight in government organizations. *Foresight*, 17(5), 489–511. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-12-2014-0081>
- Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2011). Conceptualising policy: technologies of governance and the politics of Visibility. In Shore, Cris, S. Wright, & D. Pero (Eds.), *Policy worlds: anthropology and the analysis of contemporary power* (pp. 1–26). London: Berghahn Books.
- Sørensen, E. (2016). Enhancing policy innovation by redesigning representative democracy. *Policy & Politics*, 44(2), 155–170. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1332/O30557315X14399997475941>
- Sunstein, Cass R. and Reisch, Lucia A. and Rauber, Julius. (2017). Behavioral Insights All Over the World? Public Attitudes Toward Nudging in a Multi-Country Study. Retrieved from: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2921217>
- Wimmer, M. (n.d.). Open government in policy development: from collaborative scenario texts to formal policy models. In ICDCIT 2011: Distributed Computing and Internet Technology (pp. 76–91). Retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-19056-8_5