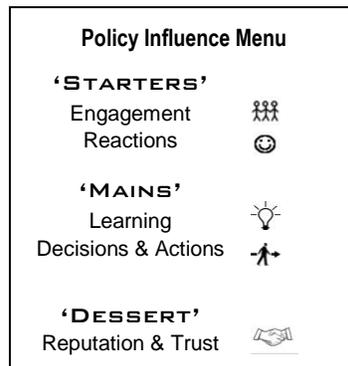


A Structured Menu For Policy Influence

Steve Montague, October 2014



Policy processes and functions are ubiquitous in public management. Getting a clear definition is difficult. A quick perusal of popular definitions suggests that policy processes involve problem identification, policy development – which may include advice, consensus building and advocacy, policy implementation and evaluation – as well as other activities. We know that policy functions relate to decision making and its support, but that not all decisions represent policies.

If policy processes and functions have been difficult to define, they are arguably even more difficult to monitor and evaluate. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the UK has articulated several challenges:

1. It can be difficult to determine the links between support activities, influencing activities and subsequent changes in policy.
2. It is difficult to establish causality, especially because a counterfactual is difficult to construct. It is also difficult to judge the contribution of one organization to any given change.
3. A clear success in terms of achieving a specific expected change is quite rare.
4. Policy change tends to occur over long time periods.
5. The political nature of policy makes it difficult to assess and interpret the accounts of different policy actors.¹

Given these difficulties, analysts have established various theoretical frameworks to help explain and examine policy functions. Practical analysts and evaluators do not have time to explore all of these when looking at a public policy function or activity. Could there be a way to explicitly link policy results to commonly understood theories of change? Can potential policy results be categorized and possibly organized into a logical results chain? **Table 1**, constructed by the author, draws on the work of the various analysts and practitioners, as well as practice observation. It has been found to be useful in helping people to frame and to understand the nature of policy influence and results.

¹ Learning about Theories of Change for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Research Uptake, IDS Practice Paper In Brief 14, September 2013
<http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/2995/PP%20InBrief%2014%20FINAL.pdf;jsessionid=549510C35842BD8473D4E17344845D4A?sequence=1>

Basic Result²	Description	Policy Influence Impacts³ 'Menu'
Decisions and Actions	<i>level and/or extent</i> of adoption of new and/or specific policy content and/or changes to policies (content), practices, protocols, processes and/or delivery.	<p>Changing institutions – influencing policy, strategy and resource allocations, including developing legal, regulatory and social frameworks.</p> <p>Changes in the way policy is delivered – substantive change in the way policy is implemented and/or the way policy is delivered to intended recipients.</p> <p>Changes in policy content – substantive changes in the content of policy and/or resources allocated.</p>
Learning	<i>level</i> of changes to awareness, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, skills, aspirations, commitments and /or priorities.	<p>Agenda setting – changes in policymakers' priorities, with attention to previously underemphasized policy issues.</p> <p>Developing capacity – improving high-level understanding of an issue, and improving how policymakers respond.</p> <p>Shifts in policy framing – changes in the way that policymakers understand a problem or the possible responses to it.</p>
Reactions	<i>type</i> (positive or negative) and <i>level</i> (extent of positive or negative) of thoughts, feelings and reactions from the experience	Changing perceptions – increasing awareness and shaping public opinion.
Engagement	<i>type</i> (e.g. network, cooperating, coordinating, collaborating – see Frey, Lohemeir <i>et al</i> (2006)) <i>extent</i> (i.e. level, coverage of groups, dosage, intensity) and <i>quality</i> (degree of openness, information sharing, transparency among actors, communication directness/clarity, timeliness and 'good faith' as appropriate to the desired type.	<p>Building networks and partnerships that support the delivery of change.</p> <p>Promoting dialogue exchange and learning among (network) members.</p> <p>Convening organizations or people</p>

The categories in this framework form a prospective checklist or 'menu' of results which can be reviewed with study respondents, planners, managers and others. They also form a sort of results logic showing the extent and depth of change which may occur from any given set of policy activities or functions. In other words, one can judge one's progress along the results chain of policy influence. (e.g. We got good engagement and some positive early reactions from target groups – now do we see evidence of true agenda change and sustained policy actions?) In practice we have found that offering such categories actually provides a broader and heightened perspective on the impacts of any given policy initiative. In other words, this framework provides more options to find beneficial outcomes for policy support programs and functions.

In one recent case it was found that virtually none of the specific recommendations from a study were adopted in a given recipient policy community. Upon review using this framework, it was clear that while the specific recommendations were not adopted due to organizational resistance and 'politics', that the policy work had succeeded in reframing users' understanding of a particular issue and that they went on to profoundly change plans and actions as a result of that improved understanding. In this way we argued that learning and an agenda change *had* occurred – even though specific recommendations were not adopted. (Note that 'proportion of recommendations adopted' is often used as an indicator of performance in review or advisory functions. In this case such an indicator would have been grossly misleading in terms of the true value of the policy support work.)

² Derived from basic results change theories of Kirkpatrick (1954-1995), Bennett (1979-1995) and the work of Rogers (1995).

³ Drawn from categories established by Sumner 2009, Steven 2007, Pollard and Court 2005, Portes and Yeo 2001, Mendizabel 2006.

Another use of the results framework for policies established in **Table 1** can be to construct a success definition for analysts performing case studies, evaluations and reviews. The accumulation of the changes noted in this framework can be taken as progress markers for success.⁴

The framework developed, tested and described in **Table 1** can be used as a good start to lay out one's perspective on a policy function's influence and results. It is expected that this framework will continue to evolve as it is informed by generative practice.

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⁴ For a related article see *Checklists for Context, Policy and Program Delivery: Helping to Assess What Works* <http://www.pmn.net/wp-content/uploads/Checklist-for-Context-and-Policy-Instruments.pdf> Steve Montague, March 2013.