

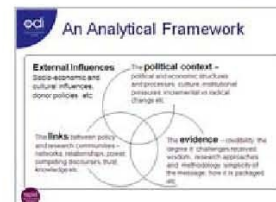
Working with complexity: Six steps to maximise the impact of research on policy and practice

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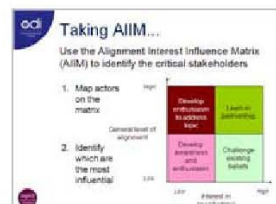
RAPID's work on the research-policy interface has shown that it is complex, multi-factorial, non-linear, and highly context specific. What works in one context may not work in another. Developing effective strategies in complex environments is not straightforward. Simple tools such as cost benefit analysis, logical frameworks, traditional project management tools and others may not work as they fail to take into account the existing complexity. This paper describes how a series of tools can be used in sequence to develop strategies to maximize the impact of research-based evidence on policy and practice. It draws on concepts of complexity¹, on outcome mapping tools developed by the International Development Research Centre² and tools for policy engagement assembled and developed by the ODI Research and Policy in Development Programme³, which have been field tested through over 30 workshops and training courses worldwide.



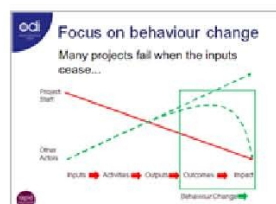
Starting from an intention to use some research-based evidence to promote a specific policy or practice, the first step is to **map the policy context** around that specific policy issue and identify the key factors which may influence the policy process. The RAPID framework⁴ provides a useful checklist of questions for this, including questions about the key external actors (What is their agenda, and how do they influence the political context?); the political context itself (Is there political interest in change, Is there room for manoeuvre, How do policy makers perceive the problem?); the research-based evidence (Do you have it? Is it credible, Is it contested?); and the other stakeholders (Who else can help to bring it to the attention of policy makers? Who are the key organisations and individuals? Are there existing networks to use?). A range of other more sophisticated context mapping tools are also available. Many of them are described in Mapping Political Context: A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations (Hudson et al, 2006)⁵.



The second step is to **identify the key influential stakeholders**. RAPID's Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM) can be used to map actors along three dimensions: the degree of alignment with the proposed policy (on the y axis), their level of interest in the issue (on the x axis), and their ability to exert influence on the policy process (on the z axis – or by otherwise indicating their degree of influence on the 2-dimensional matrix). Actors who are highly interested and highly aligned should be natural allies and collaborators, actors who are highly interested but not aligned are potential obstacles, and need to be brought into alignment, or somehow prevented from creating obstacles. Stimulating enthusiasm among powerful actors who are highly aligned but not interested can increase the chance of success. Stimulating enthusiasm among actors who are not highly aligned risks creating more enemies unless they can also be brought into alignment. Their level of influence will help identify key target audiences.

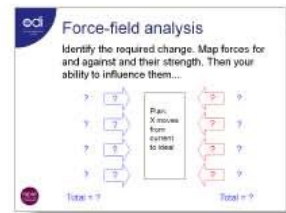


The third step is to **identify the changes needed** among the key stakeholders if they are to support the desired policy outcome. Outcome Mapping⁶ emphasizes that long term impact only occurs through behavior change that surpasses the life-time of the project. Focusing on those actors it is possible to influence it is important to describe as precisely as possible their current behavior, the behavior that is needed if they are contribute to the required policy process (the "Outcome Challenge") and short and medium term intermediate behaviours (or "Progress Markers") which can be monitored to ensure



the priority stakeholders are moving in the right direction and responding to the efforts of the programme. The short term behavior change is usually a direct reaction to project activities, the medium term often demonstrate stakeholders taking the initiative, while the final behaviours should describe stakeholders influencing others.

Having identified the necessary behavior changes, the fourth step is to **develop a strategy** to achieve the milestone changes in the process. There are many strategic planning tools that can be used for this. Force Field Analysis⁷ is a flexible tool that can be used to identify the forces supporting and opposing the desired change and suggest concrete responses. The forces can be ranked first according to their degree of influence over the change, and then according to the degree of control it is possible for the project team to exert over them. Activities can then be identified to reduce the high negative forces and to increase low positive forces. Sometimes it is not possible to influence actors directly and it is necessary to target others who can influence them. This might mean rethinking the priority stakeholders. A Strategy Map⁸ can also be a useful way of visualising the emerging strategy to identify common lines of action and facilitate coordination.



The fifth step is to **consider the competencies required** to successfully operationalise the strategy. Complexity theory conceptualizes competence as an evolving set of systems, processes and skills to enable actors to make the right decisions and act, rather than a pre-determined set of capabilities. Focusing on strategy development, learning-oriented management techniques, collaboration mechanisms, knowledge capture and storage, knowledge sharing and learning, and resource mobilisation, the 6 competencies framework can be used to identify the required competencies, the existing competencies, the steps in between, and as a capacity monitoring tool. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis is another useful tool to identify whether a project has the necessary resources to achieve its objectives, which also recognizes the potential impact of external influences⁹.



The final step is to **develop a monitoring and learning system**, not only to track progress and make any necessary adjustments, and assess the effectiveness of the approach, but also to learn lessons for the future. Simply recording the results of using these planning steps, noting the attainment of progress markers and achievement of improved competency levels, and simple logs of unexpected events should allow the team to produce and use knowledge about policy content, context, the strategy and activities, outcomes (behaviour changes), the skills, competencies and systems necessary. A wide range of more complex tools for monitoring and evaluating the impact of research and policy are available in "Making a Difference: M&E of Policy Research (Hovland 2007)"¹⁰. Crucial to the collection of knowledge is sharing it and using it. Intranet systems can be very useful, but sometimes the most basic face to face or phone to phone communications can produce the best results. Understanding how people learn is also important as learning methods need to take this into consideration.



¹ Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts. Ben Ramalingam et al, ODI February 2008. http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Publications/RAPID_WP_285.html
² The International Development Research Centre, Canada; <http://www.idrc.ca>
³ The RAPID Programme at ODI: <http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid>
⁴ Bridging Research and Policy in International Development: An Analytical and Practical Framework. RAPID Briefing Paper 1, October 2004. http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Publications/RAPID_BP_1.html
⁵ Mapping Political Context: A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations. Robert Nash, Alan Hudson and Cecilia Luttrell, ODI July 2006. http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Mapping_Political_Context/Index.html
⁶ Outcome Mapping: http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26586-201-1-do_topic.html / <http://www.outcomemapping.ca>
⁷ Force Field Analysis: http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/Forcefield_analysis.html
⁸ Strategy Maps: http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-28388-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html (towards the bottom of the page)
⁹ SWOT Analysis: http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Tools/Toolkits/Policy_Impact/SWOT_analysis.html
¹⁰ Making a difference: M&E of policy research. Ingie Hovland, ODI Working Paper 281, July 2007: http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Publications/RAPID_WP_281.html