

Local Authorities, Innovation, Best Practice, and Policy Learning

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How Organizations Learn

- Direct Learning
 - Knowledge from experience (performance monitoring and policy feedback)
 - Knowledge gained from organizational turnover (i.e., new organizational members)
 - Knowledge gained from searching and scanning
- Learning from Others (Policy Transfer)

Prior Study Focusing on Innovation Through Policy Transfer

- Study by Hal Wolman and Ed Page, funded by Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Wolman, H. and Page, E., “Policy Transfer among Local Governments: An Information Theory Approach,” Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration, Oct., 2002, vol. 15 (4), pp. 477-501.

Learning from Others: The Logic of Policy Transfer

- Identification: Is there a policy elsewhere that has been applied to a problem similar to the one a local authority faces?
- Assessment: Has that policy been successful? How do you know?
- What are the policy's main features?
- Would the policy be successful here if transferred? (What is different here that might make replication of success unlikely)
- Can features of the policy be adapted to increase chances of success here? Which ones and how?

Policy Transfer as a Form of Policy Learning: Four Critical Steps

- Communications
- Processing
- Assessing
- Utilising

Communications: Where Does Information Come From

How do you find out about the activities of other local authorities that interest you in the field of regeneration. Please indicate for each of the following types of information source a) how often you use it and b) how useful you find it.

Please give a mark out of 10

Source	<i>Frequency of use</i> Average Score	<i>Usefulness*</i> Average Score
Government publications	6.07	6.28
Conversations with officials	5.86	6.73
Good practice guides	5.45	6.09
Practitioner journals	5.13	5.82
Newsletters	4.91	5.20
Presentations at seminars	4.87	5.45
Electronic information	3.43	5.18
Conversations with researchers	3.09	4.88
Academic journals	2.69	4.46
Study tours	2.04	5.21
Conversations with councillors	1.86	3.82

Findings: Processing

- Certain kinds of information more likely to be paid attention to:
 - Information that can be seen – information on physical development was received more favourably than information on social development.
 - Information received through informal contacts with peers and through networks and consortia rather than through formal publications or presentations.

Findings: Assessment

- Receivers of information (local authorities) have virtually no means of assessing the validity of information they receive – and most do not even recognize this as a problem.
- Producers of information (such as good practice guides) also had very little ability to assess whether the information they were providing was accurate.

Findings: Utilisation

- Utilisation: A high proportion of respondents agreed that learning from the experience of others is important, only a small minority (13%) said it played a big or significant role in decision making.

Who Learns through Policy Transfer

- Local Authorities most likely to engage in policy transfer are:
 - Partnerships participating in networks or consortia.
 - Partnerships with higher needs as measured by deprivation scores.
 - Partnerships in metropolitan districts
 - Partnerships who received regeneration funding from multiple sources.

Next Steps

Innovation and Best Practice: finding out what works

- Project funded from the Higher Education Investment Fund, from September to March
- Carried out by Peter John, Hal Wolman, Tessa Brannan, and Catherine Durose
- From September 2005-May 2006

Research Questions

- How Do Local Authorities Innovate – Where Do New Ideas Come From?
- To What Extent Do Local Authorities Use “Best Practice” As a Means of Innovation?
- How Useful Are “Best Practice Guides”?
- What Are Problems Local Authorities Face in Undertaking Successful Innovation?
- What Are Barriers to Effective Implementation of Innovations?

Project Methods

- Two policy areas: regeneration and community safety
- Literature Review
- National Survey of Local Authorities
- Case studies in the North West based on extent of innovation
- Seminar with findings for practitioners

What answers might the project make

- Deliver a verdict on the effectiveness of best practice
- Find out what sources of information are most useful
- Work out what leads to effective innovation
- Discover why it is that implementing new ideas is so hard on the ground
- Give lessons about the search for and introduction of innovations