



How to use the University of Alberta's Policy Readiness Tool.

featuring a story of implementation from the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention Subhead 1

Introduction

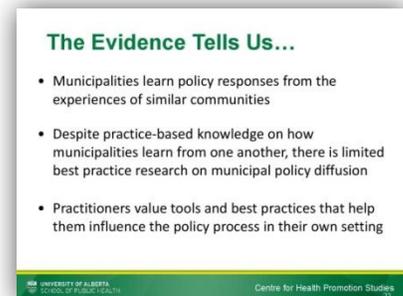
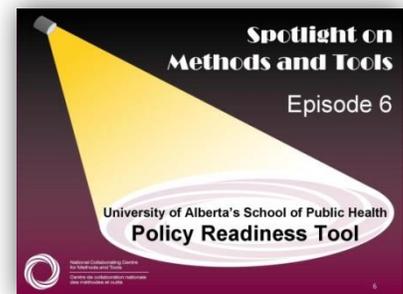
Thank you for joining us for our sixth installment in the Spotlight on KT Methods and Tools webinar series. This episode will feature Dr. Candace Nykiforuk, Assistant Professor with the Centre for Health Promotion Studies at the University of Alberta, and Shandy Reed, Policy Analyst at the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention, sharing their knowledge and experience with the Policy Readiness Tool from the University of Alberta.

What is the Policy Readiness Tool?

As Ms. Reed explains, the Policy Readiness Tool is an evidence-based tool aimed at fostering healthy public policy by making participation in policy change more accessible. It is simple to use, available in French and English, and provides users with a straightforward starting point for getting involved in public policy. It involves assessing an organization's readiness for a policy and matches it with strategies known to work with that readiness level. In Ms. Reed's words, it is "one of the most useful research products of all time."

Origins of the Tool

As Dr. Nykiforuk explains, the Policy Readiness Tool originated from a body of research on how and why policies are – or are not – adopted in different contexts. Existing evidence showed that, at the municipal level, municipalities learn policy responses from the experiences of communities that were similar in leadership style, socio-demographic profile, stance on an issue, or other factors. Despite this knowledge, there was limited evidence of how policy ideas spread between municipalities.



At the same time, there was an obvious need among frontline workers for a tool to help them participate in the policy process in their own setting. From this need started the development of the Policy Readiness Tool, which sought to elucidate municipal adoption of policy and empower practitioners to get involved. To accomplish this, Dr. Nykiforuk employed the Theory of Diffusion of Innovations, which examines how something new (innovation) spreads from place to place over time (diffusion). The Theory of Diffusion of Innovations led to the idea of level of innovation, which refers to the degree to which an adopter is relatively earlier or later in taking up a new idea than other members of a system.



Readiness and Level of Innovation

In order to build on the idea of level of intervention, Dr. Nykiforuk examined 40 years of policy data across 800 municipalities in two provinces. The results showed that, regardless of whether networks were geographically, demographically, or philosophically oriented, municipal decision-making within networks tended to follow consistent patterns. For example, municipalities who were the first to adopt a bylaw were often the first to strengthen the bylaw as well. Based on these patterns, different type of adopter characteristics emerged that were suggestive of municipalities' readiness relative to others in the same context/network.



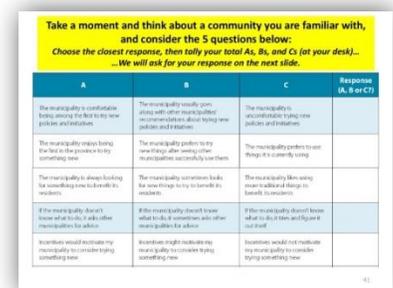
Development of the Policy Readiness Tool

The emergence of these adopter characteristics led to the development of a pilot tool in 2011. The first phase was to test the theory that municipal decision-making occurred in common patterns, which was compared to data involving 16 municipal bylaws over a 100-year span. When the data supported this theory, the second phase involved testing the tool with municipal representatives from 24 Albertan communities that ranged in size and location. With positive results from these tests, the research team returned to the literature and to key informants to find evidence-based strategies that could be linked with the various stages of readiness that the tool could focus on.



Components of the Policy Readiness Tool

The resulting Policy Readiness Tool was geared to accomplish three tasks for users. Primarily, it assesses organizational readiness for policy change. Following this, it provides targeted, evidence-based policy change strategies for taking action, specific to the organization's level of readiness. Finally, it recommends general evidence-based resources to foster healthy public policy regardless of the level of readiness of the organization.



The central tenet of the Policy Readiness Tool is the identification of three readiness categories among municipalities: Innovators, The Majority, and Late Adopters. In this context, readiness refers to the relative tolerance for risk for a new policy. Both Ms. Reed and Dr. Nykiforuk stress that these are not a value judgment and there are no “good” or “bad” categories – only patterns of behaviour. Similarly, it should be noted that readiness is not static, and can differ over time and from issue to issue.

Using the Policy Readiness Tool

The highlight of the tool is a checklist with 11 rows, each containing three descriptions of an organization. Users are to select the descriptor (labeled A, B, or C) in each row that best describes the organization related to the issue in question. Once all 11 rows are completed, the responses are tallied to give a total number of A’s, B’s, and C’s, and the organization is labeled with whichever of the categories has the greatest number of responses. Organizations with mostly A’s are Innovators, those with mostly B’s are The Majority, and C-heavy organizations are Late Adopters for the issue in question.

Innovators

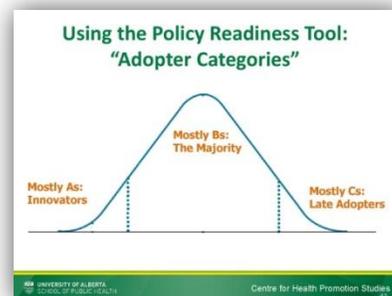
Organizations who are Innovators are generally described as adventurous; these organizations are typically attracted to high-reward initiatives, and value being viewed as leaders in a particular area. Innovators may be influenced by what similar municipalities are doing or considering, so providing supporting evidence and awareness of other municipalities’ policy decisions is often sufficient action to inspire policy change.

The Majority

Those in The Majority are described as “deliberate” because they tend to require both time and evidence to determine whether adopting a new policy is right for them. They seldom lead the pack in terms of enacting a policy, but are not oblivious; they monitor the policy environment closely. Convincing organizations in The Majority requires concrete evidence of both effectiveness and public support. Therefore, investing effort in demonstrating community interest in a given policy is recommended for sparking policy change among The Majority.

Late Adopters

Late Adopters are described as “traditional” and may be reluctant to risk precious resources taking chances that may not work, believing that policy requires substantial supporting evidence before being adopted. Educating stakeholders is essential, but in some cases it is more effective to target efforts toward Innovators and The Majority rather than Late Adopters. The



Using the Policy Readiness Tool

- Complete the short checklist (found on page 5 of the tool)
- Choose the 'closest' description (A, B, or C) in each row that describes a characteristic (there are 11 rows)
- Tally up the total number of As, Bs, and Cs
- Select the category (A, B, or C) that has the most responses

Let's try it together...

Mostly As: Innovators

- Are described as “**adventurous**” and often serve as initiators or role models within their social networks
 - Attracted by high-reward initiatives and are “risk-takers”
 - Can cope with elevated levels of uncertainty associated with the new policy
 - Typically willing to cope with initial problems & able to identify solutions to these problems

Mostly Bs: The Majority

- Are described as “**deliberate**” because they require time to consider the evidence and determine whether to adopt a new policy
 - Seldom leads the pack
 - Is often of the philosophy that it is better to change as a group than to be one of the first to change
 - Tends to adopt policies at about the same time as the average adopter

Mostly Cs: Late Adopters

- Are described as “**traditional**” and may be skeptical of new ideas (without substantial evidence) or eager to maintain the status quo
 - Usually wait until the majority of others have adopted a policy
 - May need to be pressured into policy adoption
 - May never adopt the policy unless required to

A resource from the National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools www.nccmt.ca

These webinar companions summarize *Spotlight on KT Methods and Tools* presentations. The webinar series is presented in partnership with the University of Ottawa’s CHNET-Works! How to cite this document : National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools. (2013). Webinar Companion : Spotlight on KT Methods and Tools. Episode 6. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University.

benefit of doing so is that by having these groups adopt a policy, it will lead to the issue being considered on agendas at a higher level, which can force the hand of Late Adopters.

Experience from Practice

Familiarity with the Policy Readiness Tool came to Ms. Reed's aid in her role with the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention (APCCP) in July 2011. That summer, the neighbouring city of Leduc had enacted a smoking ban in cars with minors present. Hoping to bring this to her city of Sherwood Park, Ms. Reed completed the Policy Readiness Tool and found that her city was labeled an Innovator on this issue. Following strategies laid out in the tool, Ms. Reed set out leveraging Sherwood Park's image as a policy leader by submitting a letter to the local newspaper that highlighted how Sherwood Park had fallen behind Leduc in legislating smoking bans.

The response to her letter validated Ms. Reed's assertion, and public attention to the issue soon followed. Through all her experience working with the Policy Readiness Tool, Ms. Reed stresses that paying attention to the different organizations involved is important. She believes supporting innovators as essential, as they are great allies, and making innovations visible is pivotal regardless of their success. Indeed, she views failure as grounds for more innovation to create stronger policy.

Strengths & Limitations of the Tool (Slide 58, 57)

In the eyes of Ms. Reed and Dr. Nykiforuk, the Policy Readiness Tool is a straightforward, helpful, and empowering asset for any practitioner working toward policy change. With this in mind, they caution that users should be aware that Diffusion of Innovation Theory works in one direction and is time-specific, meaning it is a static instrument trying to explain a dynamic process. Additionally, it is possible that policy change may be ongoing at the time of your readiness assessment, which can skew results.

Despite this, the Policy Readiness Tool can be a vital component of any effort to participate in changing public policy. According to Ms. Reed and Dr. Nykiforuk, the greatest strength of the tool is that it builds personal and community capacity around involvement in the policy process. It helps to build knowledge through intersectoral collaboration. Furthermore, it helps to address resource capacity through time-saving, specific targeting of strategies.

