From Nutrition Research to Policy Implementation

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Policy Process Research is the study of interactions among people and public policy.

http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nopren/
Samples of Our Recent Work in Policy Process Research


Analysis of the policy process to improve comprehensive and coordinated systems for breastfeeding equity

1. Which factors impede or facilitate the processes of getting breastfeeding policies adopted by state legislatures and government agencies, health care settings, and businesses?

2. Which factors account for successes in implementing breastfeeding policies and practices in four institutional sectors (hospitals, community clinics, child care, and worksites)?

3. In what ways do these factors vary across geographic and demographic differences?
Greenhalgh’s Conceptual Model

THE INNOVATION
- Relative advantage
- Compatibility
- Low complexity
- Trialability
- Observability
- Potential for reinvention
- Fuzzy boundaries
- Risk
- Task issues
- Nature of knowledge required (tacit/explicit)
- Technical support

COMMUNICATION AND INFLUENCE
- DIFFUSION (informal, unplanned)
  - Social networks
  - Homophily
  - Peer opinion
  - Marketing
  - Expert opinion
  - Champions
  - Boundary spanners
  - Change agents
- DISSEMINATION (formal, planned)

OUTER CONTEXT
- Sociopolitical climate
- Incentives and mandates
- Interorganizational networks
- Environmental stability

SYSTEM ANTECEDENTS FOR INNOVATION
- Structure
  - Size/maturity
  - Formalization
  - Differentiation
  - Decentralization
  - Slack resources
- Absorptive capacity for new knowledge
  - Pre-existing knowledge/skills base
  - Ability to find, interpret, recodify, and integrate new knowledge
  - Enablement of knowledge sharing via internal and external networks
- Receptive context for change
  - Leadership and vision
  - Good managerial relations
  - Risk-taking climate
  - Clear goals and priorities
  - High-quality data capture

SYSTEM READINESS FOR INNOVATION
- Tension for change
- Innovation-system fit
- Power balances
  - (supporters vs. opponents)
- Assessment of implications
- Dedicated time/resources
- Monitoring and feedback

ADOPTER
- Needs
- Motivation
- Values and goals
- Skills
- Learning style
- Social networks

ASSIMILATION
- Complex, nonlinear process
  - “Soft periphery” elements

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS
- Decision making devolved to frontline teams
- Hands-on approach by leaders and managers
- Human resource issues, especially training
- Dedicated resources
- Internal communication
- External collaboration
- Reinvention/development
- Feedback on progress

LINKAGE
- Design stage
  - Shared meanings and mission
  - Effective knowledge transfer
  - User involvement in specification
  - Capture of user-led innovation
- Implementation stage
  - Communication and information
  - User orientation
  - Product augmentation, e.g., technical help
  - Project management support
Data

• Interviews
  • 20 state level: legislators, leg & GO staff, Secretary of Health, WADOH, advocates and lobbyists
  • 20 Leaders of community breastfeeding coalitions
  • 90 from sectors (hospitals, clinics, child care, worksite)

• Document Review

• Media Analysis
Analysis & Dissemination

• Develop coding structure based on model
• Identify and interpret patterns and meaning
• Answer the primary research questions
• Disseminate results to the practice community so that they can improve policies, practices, and environments as part of comprehensive approaches to increasing breastfeeding rates and reducing disparities
The role of researchers in engaging with policymakers

“Science, when it has something to offer, should be at the policy table.”
Aims:
- Current practices
- Drivers
- Facilitators and barriers
- Beliefs
- Avenues for improvement

Sample: “highly involved” researchers (n=18)

Methods and analysis: Semi-structured interviews, double-coded

Otten et. al, in review
Ways researchers report they engage with policymakers

- Direct and indirect interaction
- Targeted dissemination
- Professional membership groups
- “Blue ribbon” groups and panels
- Partnerships
Factors that drive researchers to engage with policymakers

1. They come to us.
   – “Policymakers look for experts in topics but not experts in policy.”

2. Strategic about informing the debate.
   – “We think of our research in terms of moving public debate. You’ve got to think this way to make a difference in this world.

3. Driven by collaboration.
   – “…have really started with collaboration with people in the policy realm and sort of having them say, this is what we need. We need some evidence, we need some support.”
Facilitators and incentives to communicating and engaging with policymakers

1. **Strategic research funders**
   - “[A foundation] pushed me to do it [learn how to communicate with policymakers]. [The foundation] provided consultants and support.”

2. **Valued by academia**

3. **Making a difference**
   - “I was tired of doing research and not having it go anywhere or lead to anything.”

4. **Training and mentorship**
   - “But how I learned it was after I was in the office and different people came in and presented ...the people who came in and could sell it, and to me, they had a good evidence base for it and it was timely. And you could see impact, you could see why it needed to be done, why it was important...”

Otten et. al, in review
Barriers to communicating and engaging with policymakers

1. **Not valued at institution/in academia**
   - “...you were taking away from the time you should've been developing a really nationally recognized research career, getting grants or developing a teaching program. So not only is it not [counted?], but I think it can only be a negative within most of traditional university tenure track.”

2. **Lack of training or “know-how”**

3. **Perceived lack of payoff**
   - “People don’t realize the value in getting involved...I would like to see people realize the value of getting involved.”

4. **Time constraints**
   - “The reality is that there are too many other pressures. They are not going to have the time to do this.”

Otten et. al, in review
Researchers had mixed perspectives on what should the link look like

• Not every researcher should be doing this.
• Every researcher should be able to articulate how their work is relevant to society and/or be able to put it into a broader health context.
• We bring the science. Others unpack the information.

Otten et. al, in review
Suggestions for improving the link

- Adding training and skills
- Using intermediaries
- Cultivating relationships
Next steps

- Next paper: “Habits” of the highly involved researchers

- More systematic thinking
  - Better understanding of the “when”, “why”, “how”, and “what” researchers need to know to better engage

- NCCOR Get Research Used

Otten et. al, in review
Strengthening the Nutrition Continuum is more than generating evidence.

- It’s understanding the processes and the pathways of how research-based knowledge shapes thinking and influences action.
- And, the ultimate goal of improving health through better nutrition.