Determinants of Implementation: 
The Case of Ireland and Mental Health Policy

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What is the research about?

• **Rationale**
  • Much reference in the Irish policy system to 'implementation deficits', 'implementation gaps' & the 'implementation challenge'

• **Research Question**
  • What is the relative importance of the main determinants of implementation in the Irish policy system?

• **Policy Examined**
  • Mental health policy – *A Vision for Change*
  • Extensive process in designing the policy
  • Highly regarded by all as a good & necessary policy
  • Contains an Implementation section with 5 chapters
  • Approved by Government early 2006
  • Independent Monitoring Group established
  • 6 Monitoring Reports published
What does the literature say?

• 'Top down' factors are important
  • Eg. objectives, structures, plans

• 'Bottom up' factors are important
  • Eg. Involvement, training, incentives

• Other literature, interviews suggest a third factor – 'transformative factors'
  • Eg. Values, behaviours, attitudes, culture (below the surface)

• Factors common to all approaches
  • Eg. Resources, communication, evidence, public support
3 Hypotheses

1. The main determinants in the implementation of policy reflect the need to drive the policy from the top down

2. The main determinants in the implementation of policy are influenced from the bottom up

3. The main determinants in the implementation of policy are transformative factors
### Variables reflecting Theoretical Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Down</th>
<th>Bottom Up</th>
<th>Transformative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Objectives  
- Structures  
- Plans  
- Leadership  
- Skills  
- Political support | - Involvement  
- Incentives  
- Innovation  
- Co-Ordination/Networking  
- Staff training  
- Industrial Relations | - Culture  
- Behaviour change  
- Vested Interests  
- Beliefs / values  
- Tacit assumptions  
- Power imbalances |

**Common** *Resources  
*Communication  
*Context  
*Technology  
*Information  
*Public Support
Methodology

CONTENT ANALYSIS

• 5 Implementation Chapters in AVFC
• 5 Monitoring Reports
• Mental Health Commission Analysis

INTERVIEWS

• 27 Interviews
• 12 with members of Independent Monitoring Group
• 15 with others associated with its implementation
• Politicians, public servants, professionals, front line / local, service users / carers, commentators
Content Analysis – AVFC v IMG
Content Analysis – AVFC

- Mgt
- Fin
- Staff
- Info
- Trans

- Common
- Transformative
- Bottom Up
- Top Down
Content Analysis – IMG Reports

- Common
- Transformative
- Bottom Up
- Top Down
Summary of Content Analysis

• Disappointment with implementation
  – Speed
  – Fidelity

• All 3 hypotheses seen as playing a role

• Quantitatively 'top down' seen as most important

• But inconclusive if contains the 'main determinants and their relative importance'

• Tacit variables may be less apparent in documentation
Interviewees were asked

• What is your view of *A Vision for Change* as a policy?
• What is your view of the Implementation Section?
• What is your view of the actual implementation?
• What has been implemented well, and why?
• What has not been implemented well, and why?
• What needs to happen now to have a 21\textsuperscript{st} century mental health system?
• Can you cite examples of other policies which have been successfully implemented and why?
Interview Findings: The Policy

• All thought the policy was good
  • Comprehensive and inclusive development
  • Good vision

• Some weaknesses
  • Overly idealistic
  • Lack of consensus on 'recovery'
  • Some critics of the 'mechanics' – 'trade-offs'

I can only compare it to childbirth. When you have your first child and the baby arrives safely into the world you think that's great, I've done my job. You have no idea that you have only started and that you have 20 plus more years of hard work to do ...the analogy is perfect because writing AVFC was not easy, but it was easy compared to trying to make it happen
Interview Findings: The Implementation Section

- Mixed views
- Useful to have an implementation focus, but ....
- Unrealistic recommendations
- Ignored cultural change required

*This was a document that was about changing hearts and minds, it wasn't really about structures, but it got caught up in structures, and it got caught up a bit in resources ...the piece that was missing for me was a bit about the change that was going to be required to deliver*

*Culture eats strategy for breakfast*
Interview Findings: Actual Implementation

- Slow
- Piecemeal and haphazard
- Critical role of the HSE
- Importance of structures
- Importance of culture
- Involvement of service users
- Vexed issue of resources

*Cortez, when he arrived in South America, he burned his boats so the conquistadors had no choice but to go forward and make it work*
Interview Findings: Implemented Well

• Beacons of hope
• Service user involvement
• Child and adolescent services

Conclusion = Bottom up elements had been most successful – evidence of local leadership and innovation

The things that have gotten implemented have gotten implemented for one of two reasons: one is because they could be implemented without much in the way of resources; or much in the way of having to have authority over what was happening across the country
Interview Findings: Not Implemented Well

• Long, detailed, passionate list!
• Role of the HSE emphasised
  • Lack of involvement / engagement in development
  • Lack of priority
  • Lost in HSE transformation
  • Lack of leadership
• Lack of accountability
• Inability to implement change
  • Cultural shift
  • Vested interests

You can have all your policies worked out ...but if the power structures remain unnamed and un-talked about and not discussed well then you are not going to get very far because you will have resistance to that and I think you do have resistance to change in power structures ...people will try to hold on to the status quo
Interview Findings: Looking Forward

- Using evidence to inform good practice
- Top Down Factors
  - Eg. Directorate, political priority, accountability, leadership
- Bottom Up Factors
  - Eg. Local buy-in, service user choice
- Transformative Factors
  - Eg. Cultural shift required, address resistance / vested interests
- Other Factors
  - Eg. Resources, use of virtual technology

You just demonstrate it, profile it, put it up there, cost it, show that it's feasible, help people who feel threatened by it to see how they can still be relevant is a different way of doing things ...but it's a long haul
Interview Findings: Policies Implemented Well

• National Cancer Strategy, Road Safety Strategy, National Smoking Ban

• Fundamental features
  • Authoritative, accountable leadership
  • Identifying the main resistors and explicitly addressing these

• Necessary but not sufficient
  • Use of evidence
  • Public support
  • Detailed plans with specifics
  • Resources
  • Service user involvement
## Relative Importance of Variables in the Implementation of AVFC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fundamental / Essential</th>
<th>Necessary but not sufficient</th>
<th>Contextual / Contributory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top Down</strong></td>
<td>Leadership (authoritative &amp; accountable)</td>
<td>Objectives Structures Plan Skills/competencies Political support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bottom Up</strong></td>
<td>Involvement of stakeholders Motivation/incentives Staff selection &amp; training Industrial relations</td>
<td>Creativity/innovation Networking/co-ordination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformative</strong></td>
<td>Addressing Vested Interests / Resistors</td>
<td>Organisational culture change Behavioural &amp; attitudinal change Beliefs &amp; values Addressing power imbalances</td>
<td>Tacit assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common</strong></td>
<td>Resources Communication Data/evidence Public support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Context/environment Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions from Implementation of AVFC

• All variables important ......... At least to some extent

• Top down / bottom up / transformative a somewhat artificial distinction

• Fundamentally important ...
  - Authoritative accountable leadership
  - Addressing vested interests / resistors
Three Generic Lessons

1. The need to acknowledge what is below the surface / cultural change

2. Ideas / creativity at local level are critical, but not enough

3. Recognition of these at national level to drive home implementation