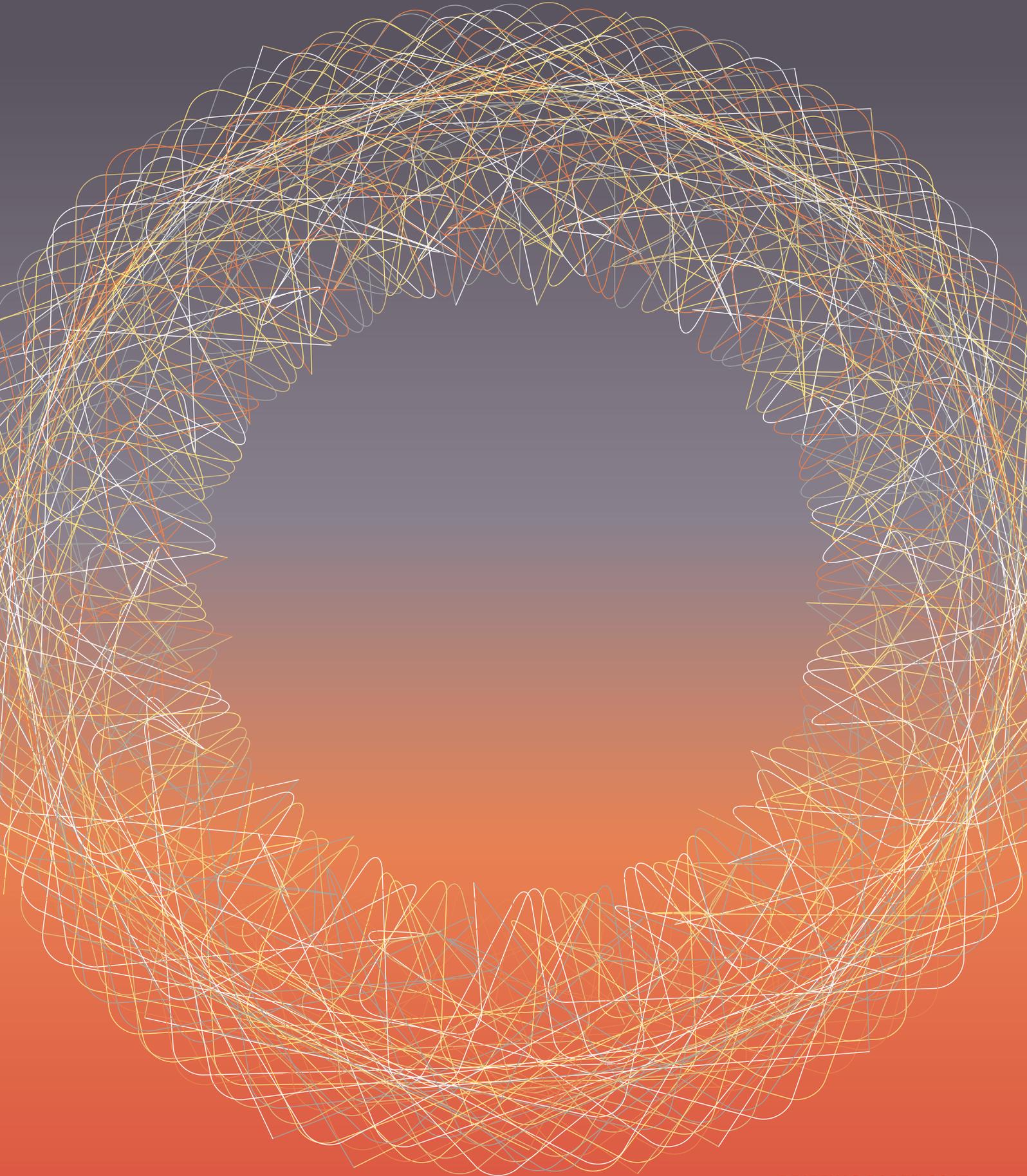




Implementing Whole of Government Approaches



Introduction

This briefing paper contains the key learning and messages from the Centre for Effective Services (CES) Primer on **Implementing whole of government approaches**. The Primer examines how other countries and jurisdictions engage in whole of government work. Whole of government work is also called ‘cross-government’ work.

This briefing paper includes the following information on a whole of government approach:

- What it is
- Its benefits
- When and how you should put it in place
- What policy makers should consider and
- A series of questions to help develop a whole of government approach.

What is a whole of government approach?

A whole of government approach is one where government departments and agencies use joined up structures and processes to eliminate silos and achieve seamless government. These approaches usually involve connecting up policies and putting arrangements in place to manage organisational, financial or service boundaries. A whole of government project may be used for policy development, programme management or service delivery; it may be broad and comprehensive or specific and targeted.

Policy developments in Ireland

Recent policy developments across Ireland show a growing awareness of the importance of a collaborative, whole of government approach.

The *Civil Service Renewal Plan 2014* and the *Public Service Reform Plan 2014–2016* prioritise many features fundamental to whole of government working. They do this by placing high priority on service users, leadership, capability, mobility at senior levels and cultural change.

Policy developments in Northern Ireland

The *Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2011–2015* recognises that making a real difference demands effective cross-departmental working and collaboration.

The Programme commits to promoting cross-departmental working in areas that could most benefit from it.

Key messages about whole of government approaches

When should a whole of government approach be used?

A whole of government approach can be used to respond in the short, medium or long term to meet a range of policy challenges. These may include the following:

- **Social groups:**
to respond to the needs of particular social groups, for example people with disabilities or young people.
- **Particular policy:**
to address a particular policy issue or sector, for example transport or education.
- **Geographical area:**
to target a particular geographical area, for example a neighbourhood or county.
- **Different stakeholders:**
to develop ways of providing services that involve different stakeholders, for example, providing a one-stop shop or an eGovernment portal.
- **'Wicked' problems:**
to consider solutions for problems that are far-reaching, complex and hard to tackle, like poverty educational disadvantage, homelessness, climate change or obesity.
- **Crisis management:**
to support crisis management in situations like natural disasters and major health pandemics.
- **Global or external issues:**
to promote a strategic response to global or external issues, including national security and terrorism.

Whole of government may not always be the most appropriate approach. Policy makers should first decide if a whole of government is the right 'fit' for a particular policy challenge.

Key messages about whole of government approaches

What is needed to implement a whole of government approach?

Whole of government work requires significant time, especially to plan and measure the success of the work. Whole of government relies on collaboration so individuals and departments need to put their own agendas aside. The following need to be considered before adopting a whole of government approach.

Changes in structure

Whole of government approaches build on existing structures rather than creating new agencies or departments. Whole of government approaches usually need to adopt new forms of governance, management structures and operational structures to connect these structures.

Changes in organisational culture

It may be challenging to put aside particular agendas, to share power and influence, to cede control and authority to a wider group and objective. A system of incentives and rewards that recognises whole of government successes and reconciles competing political and community agendas can help to address this challenge.

Collaboration and co-operation

Whole of government works best in an organisational culture with high levels of collaboration and co-operation. Examples of collaborative work practice include agreeing on approaches to:

- budgeting and accountability
- information and data sharing and
- recognition and incentives.

Shared views

For whole of government to be successful, organisations need to have shared views about the underlying causes of a problem and visions for the solution.

Measuring the impact

Whole of government working tends to tackle complex, multifaceted issues. It can be complicated to select exactly what the outcomes should be and to develop innovative ways of measuring success. There is a need for new ways of evaluating this kind of work that suit its unique features.

Committed leadership

Committed political and administrative leadership is needed, which should have the authority to reshape systems, structures and programmes and set clear goals and expectations.

Boundary management

When implementing policy, managing boundaries between different departments and agencies can be challenging.

Examples of boundaries include those between:

- government departments
- policy makers and organisations implementing policy
- national and local levels
- policy makers and frontline personnel and
- administrative and professional personnel.

Essential skills

Essential skills in whole of government work include: managing multiple accountabilities and budgets, building relationships, complex problem solving, influencing skills, the ability to work collaboratively and the ability to work across boundaries.

Key messages about whole of government approaches

What are the benefits of a whole of government approach?

Whole of government aims to have the most impact by using all the tools, knowledge and resources at the disposal of the State. Information on the impact of whole of government approaches is limited but shows that it may have the following benefits:

Whole of government can result in better outcomes

Whole of government work can enable government departments and agencies to achieve outcomes together that they cannot achieve by working in isolation. It helps to optimise those outcomes by combining the different government resources to achieve a high-level national goal.

Whole of government addresses complex policy challenges

Whole of government uses knowledge and expertise within and outside government more effectively by engaging a variety of stakeholders.

Whole of government has a strong focus on prevention and early intervention

Issues are identified and tackled as they emerge and before they become embedded in services and become costly. Research shows that the costs of unresolved childhood problems are borne by a range of government departments and agencies. A whole of government approach at an early stage can result in long term savings across a number of government departments.

Whole of government focuses on greater efficiencies in services

Whole of government approaches may result in more integrated delivery of services. This involves greater sharing of resources and data between departments and agencies. Whole of government has been used to plan and implement e-government initiatives and 'one stop shops', to provide better services for citizens.

International examples of whole of government

A review of international examples informed the CES Primer on *Implementing Whole of Government Approaches*. The Primer reviews data available on whole of government initiatives in Britain, Scotland, Canada, Australia, Finland and the island of Ireland.

CASE STUDY

Scotland's Whole System Approach to Youth Justice

Youth Justice in Scotland is underpinned by the policy framework *Getting it Right for Every Child*. This policy framework commits to putting the child or young person and their family at the centre.

The Whole System Approach to Youth Justice in Scotland is about identifying at the earliest opportunity when young people are in trouble. The approach was first piloted in Aberdeen in 2010 and 2011. A number of whole of government structures were put in place to drive the initiative, these included a National Youth Justice Strategic Group and a National Youth Justice Advisory Group. Integrated structures were also put in place at county level.

The approach involves the following: multi-agency early and effective intervention and support; multi-agency screening for diversion from prosecution; community alternatives to secure care and custody; effective risk management measures, where risk is managed through children's hearing system rather than Court; Court support; changing behaviours of those in secure care and custody; and support for re-integration and transition. Agencies and practitioners work together, share information and make joint decisions based on the best response to support the young person and their family.

Following the pilot project, the Scottish government noted that referrals to the Children's Reporter on offending grounds in the city were reduced by 40% on the previous year. The initiative has since been rolled out across Scotland.

How Implementation Science can support whole of government working

Whole of government policy is complex due to the range of issues and stakeholders involved. As a result, implementation of whole of government policy can be challenging, and may often fall short of intentions.

Implementation Science is a rapidly developing field of knowledge about how to successfully implement evidence informed services, policies and other interventions. It spans many sectors including the health and social sciences, education, agriculture and IT.

The science (or study) of implementation is providing a better understanding of the factors that may contribute to effective implementation. These factors are also referred to as the ‘**enablers**’ or ‘**core components**’ of high quality implementation. The enablers for effective implementation of whole of government policy include: securing stakeholder consultation and buy-in; leadership; resources; implementation structures and teams; implementation planning; staff capacity; supportive culture; communication; monitoring and evaluation, and learning from experience.

Research in Implementation Science has also concluded that implementation happens in stages. The stages include: **exploring and preparing, planning and resourcing, operationalising**, and finally, **full implementation into routine practice**. The literature indicates that completing full implementation typically takes 2 to 4 years.

For more information about implementation and implementation science, see *An Introductory Guide to Implementation*, available from www.effectiveservices.org.

Ten areas policy makers need to explore when planning a whole of government approach

A formal plan to achieve outcomes

- What is the objective of using a whole of government approach?
- Is there a formal cross-agency plan in place for how this will be achieved in the short, medium and long term?

Leadership

- Is this work a clear strategic priority?
- Is there the necessary level of political and administrative leadership on board to help drive the change?

Resources

- Where will resources be drawn from?
- How will they be accounted for?
- Have staff the skills to work outside their usual boundaries?

Implementation structures and teams

- Is there a cross-agency team in place to guide implementation?
- Are areas of accountability clearly delineated?

Managing stakeholder consultation and buy in

- Who are the stakeholders critical for success?
- Are all key stakeholders engaged?

Staff capacity

- How will we support those involved to work across the boundaries in whole of government work?
- Is joint training being made available?

A supportive culture

- Is the right organisational structure in place to support a culture of collaboration?

Communication

- Is there a shared vision in place for this work, which is communicated to all stakeholders?

Managing monitoring and evaluation

- Is there a robust system in place to gather data and to evaluate the work being done?
- Is this system practical in a whole of government context?

Learning from experience

- Is there a formal system in place to capture and share the experience of whole of government work?

Conclusion

Whole of government is a relatively new approach in Ireland and Northern Ireland and initial data on its outcomes is limited. However, in countries such as Australia, Canada, and Scotland governments have made a commitment to continuing whole of government approaches in the long term. It is widely agreed that the benefits will be felt across Government departments and society, although not necessarily immediately.

Whole of government approaches are likely to become more common over the coming years and are now a feature of the policy landscape both north and south. There are significant practical challenges in implementing whole of government approaches including the need for organisational change within public services and the development of new skillsets. For whole of government to be effective, there is a need for new structures, new networking arrangements and for collaboration to be recognised and incentivised. International experience of whole of government work indicates that these challenges can be overcome.

International experience along with learning from Implementation Science provides policy makers with both theoretical and practical perspectives to help address these challenges and to plan and implement whole of government approaches.

This paper accompanies a CES *Primer on Implementing Whole of Government Approaches*. CES is also developing resources for policy makers that draw on international experience of using whole of government approaches.

To download the Primer and other resources on whole of government, visit www.effectiveservices.org

The Centre for Effective Services connects research, policy and practice to improve outcomes for communities, children and young people across the island of Ireland. Part of a new generation of intermediary organisations, CES is a not-for-profit that helps communities, children and young people thrive.

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