

Open Policy Development (ODP)

Published On: 16 June 2014

Organisation: Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD)

Country: Canada

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services

Type: Organisational Design

Launched in: 2009

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Description

The concept of open policy development began in its earliest iterations in late 2009. An incoming Director-General in the policy planning unit proposed opening up the policy development process and improving information flow. This came in part from external business school training and observations of private sector successes.

After that the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFAID) has been experimenting with an Open Policy Development Model that uses social networking and technology to leverage ideas and expertise from both inside and outside the department to gain insights and develop policy better, faster, and cheaper. The conceptualization was undertaken by the policy staff within the department. Their role within the department is to assess how policy is being developed, and to provide advice on the broad parameters of strategic policy focuses within the department. The framework underwent continuous revisions and prototyping over subsequent months and years as best practices emerged and experience grew.

Why the innovation was developed

There has been acknowledgement that traditional information channels through missions to headquarters and back were losing their relevance and timely advantage in a world of instantaneous information and social, technological, and geopolitical change. Furthermore, where innovations were occurring and where social media tools existed, outside of a few exceptions, they were ad hoc in nature or under-utilised. At the same time, fiscal constraints place a greater emphasis on efficiency and more productive use of assets. Open policy development is a response to these conditions. It aims to make it easier to provide timely and analytically sound policy advice.

Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Enhance public trust, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve user satisfaction, Support economic growth

- To deliver better policy advice to decision makers.
 - To allow policy makers to make policy that is better, faster, and cheaper.
 - To be more strategic, and to get the right information faster. (For example, listening to social media improves understanding of which issues are prominent among a population, allowing for more focused policy.) Our department's efforts on open policy development are a contribution to the government-wide open dialogue agenda. The Department's open policy development model connects officials with trusted partners outside of government, notably in the business and academic communities, in order to collaborate on policy questions.
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Main beneficiaries

Businesses, Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- The Department as OPD requires acknowledging the depth and breadth of capabilities and knowledge outside silos – working with the best and brightest, wherever they are.
 - Canadians at home and abroad, including those seeking to trade and invest, to travel, to work, and to access consular services, and foreign nationals whose lives benefit from a more active engagement with Canadian policy makers.
 - Companies that have benefited from Trade Sector Practice groups that bring private sector issues and expertise into a framework managed by trade commissioners.
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Existing similar practices

Online “communities of practice”

In my own organisation

Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD)

Department opened itself up to business through advisory boards chaired by "executives in residence" brought in from outside of the public service to mentor public servants. To advance knowledge management across the department, online "communities of practice" were established. To be more transparent, accountable and responsive, 10 of our staff have been co-located within industry associations to help navigate our department's global network and increase public participation in Canada's globalisation.

International Stabilization and Peace-building Initiative (ISPI) and International Security and Outreach Program

In my own organisation

DFATD

- The Stabilization and Reconstruction Taskforce helped found and actively participates in the International Stabilization and Peace-building Initiative (ISPI), an informal working-level network of governments and international organisations. Working groups carry out their discussions via the ISPI web portal and email, and by video teleconference on a quarterly basis.
 - Our department's International Security and Outreach Program collaborates with academia and think tanks to further annual research agendas related to security.
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Public Safety Canada's Open Policy Development Series

In public administration of my country
Departments of Canadian government

Public Safety Canada's Open Policy Development Series fosters dialogue on key policy issues facing the department by leveraging the insights of colleagues from multiple disciplines that are outside of traditional policy development processes. This increases diversity, and direct employee engagement fosters horizontal thinking and collaboration at the management level, and promotes open information and knowledge sharing across the organisation.

21st Century Diplomacy

State Department, USA

The complementing of traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments of statecraft that fully leverage the networks, technologies, and demographics of our interconnected world.

<http://www.state.gov/statecraft/overview/index.htm>

Civil Service Renewal Plan 2012

Government Digital Service, Cabinet Office, UK

Open policy making is referenced in the renewal plan, including wider use of cross-department teams, crowd-sourcing, web-based tools and new media.

<http://my.civilservice.gov.uk/policy/>

Results

Service quality

Other:

- Better policy advice to decision makers.
 - It provides tools and support for improvement of the department's policy capacity.
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Other improvements

Contribution to the government-wide open dialogue agenda. (The Department's open policy development model connects officials with trusted partners outside of government, notably in the business and academic communities, in order to collaborate on policy questions.)

Evaluation

An evaluation of costs and benefits at this stage indicates that open policy development helps in keeping the costs down while engendering an on-going policy conversation. For example in 2009 the department brought together all Heads of Mission through a virtual policy jam, teleconferencing and video-streaming which contributed to the department's policy planning. The carbon footprint lessened (flight only) is estimated to be 180 metric tonnes (equivalent to 26 mid-sized cars).

What feedback has been received has largely been positive. Senior management, including the Head of the federal Public Service in Canada, have expressed support for open policy development. Similarly, evidence of engagement and pick-up across the department speaks to the appeal of the framework.

Open policy development recently won a Deputy Minister Award for Engagement and Collaboration and was a 2011 finalist for the Institute of Public Administration of Canada's award for Innovative Management.

Finally, Open Policy Development is included in the department's Report of Plans and Priorities (individual expenditure plans for each department and agency that are prepared annually and designed to reflect the government's citizen-focused agenda by identifying the benefits the department provides to Canadians and the real value derived for each taxpayer dollar spent.)

Development

Design

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Testing

Open policy development was tested and tweaked within the Strategic Policy Bureau, and clarified and altered through discussions with many collaborators within and beyond the department. The concept evolved over time, and as it became more robust and as experience increased it was promoted more and more to an increasingly captive audience.

The department-wide launch was in February 2012, at a very successful event that brought over 400 attendees together to explore ways to innovate and empower all levels of the organisation, while understanding the disruptive power of technology and leveraging its extraordinary potential.

As open policy discussions seek to integrate new voices, there are some concerns about security of information. The Chatham House rule and password protected online communities are used to ensure a free flow of ideas and discussion. Cultural change has been less of a barrier here as pilot projects involve voluntary participants who have “bought in” to the benefits of open policy and tend to be more social media savvy.

Implementation

Tools used:

Focused efforts were made to better use available resources. (We have created a more robust presence on the Government of Canada internal wiki, used videoconferencing to bring foreign missions into meetings at headquarters, brought speakers from academia and the private sector to speak to departmental audiences and sent staff to external events to foster collaborative connections. The policy staffs have dedicated themselves to becoming better networked within the department, the government as a whole, and the policy community.)

Resources used:

- About \$85, 000 CDN. (Fees associated with bringing in speakers, sending staff out to conferences and other events, costs associated with the open policy development event in February, and seed money for various open policy pilots.)
 - Use of staff resources (to organise open policy development events, develop and maintain presence on online portals and internal social media sites).
 - Resources from non-for-profit sector: The Strategic Policy Bureau at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade benefitted from the intellectual resources and time of outside advisors.
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Diffusion

This stage is still in its infancy. As pilot projects come to fruition and more and more presentations are heard by more and more people, the basic foundations for more widespread open policy development are emerging. Few within the department are unaware of the need to change, but some are uncertain about how to go forward.

Challenges and solutions

While attractive to many, transforming open policy development into practice has presented challenges at Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. There are still issues to work on, but all of these are surmountable. Transitioning from early adopters to widespread practice requires addressing a deeper challenge, that of cultural change.

Cultural features such as risk aversion, hierarchies, and silos are all prominent in many large organisations and are also significant barriers to change. This is particularly the case with open policy development and its effort to unchain communications and interactions. High-level leadership and support is crucial to shifting cultural views, but so is explicit empowerment of mid-level managers who can otherwise stifle enterprising employees. The emphasis has to be on taking intelligent risk that envisions failure as an acceptable and educational outcome. Being smart about risk requires experimentation and fast failures. Pilot projects help in this regard. They also build incremental progress that expands pockets of support and makes the open policy toolkit more familiar for staff.

Partnerships

Network across government

Other Public Sector

A network of open policy advocates from across government has been involved at all stages, with the network expanding over time. Individuals came from departments including: Treasury Board Secretariat, National Resources Canada, Canadian International Development Agency, Public Safety Canada, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Experts on open innovation

Academics and Research Bodies

Academics such as Henry Chesbrough at UC Berkeley, Haas School who is a leading expert on open innovation contributed to our project. We also partnered with the The New Media Centre at UC Berkeley and Stanford's Peace Innovation Lab.

Social media and public policy entrepreneurs

Private sector

Individuals in a variety of private sector organisations such as Twitter, OpenIDEO, O'Reilly Media, Wikimedia, Google, YouTube, Mozilla Corporation, Delib, Chaordix as well as public policy entrepreneurs such as David Eaves were involved in our project.

Variety of non-traditional actors

Civil Society

NGOs such as Ushahidi, the Standby Task Force, and Crisis Commons participated in our project.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Start small.
 - Design a clear narrative.
 - Document your progress.
 - Allies are important at all levels, including senior management.
 - Visibility is important to inspire early adopters.
 - Quick wins are important (i.e. the philosophy was sound but the Policy Planning Bureau needed to show the proof).
 - While some of open policy pilot projects may fail, they are designed to encourage a culture of experimentation. Experimentation is about finding out what works and what does not work in order to discover what works best. It entails taking smart risks. Eureka moments are the result of countless experiments that yielded more lessons than results. In order to mitigate the innovation-dampening effects of a risk-averse culture open policy seeks to emphasise the importance of experimentation and learning rather than failing.
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Conditions for success

- High-level leadership and support.
 - Empowerment of mid-level managers who can otherwise stifle enterprising employees. Taking on intelligent risk that envisions failure as an acceptable and educational outcome.
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