Best practices and innovation in government: perspectives, challenges and potential

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1 INTRODUCTION

An earlier version of this paper was prepared as one of several contributions to an Ad-hoc Expert Group meeting convened by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and held in Tunis, Tunisia on 13-14 June 2005. It was prepared to contribute to discussions aimed at identifying ‘approaches and methodologies for the assessment and transfer of best practices in government and public administration’ (UNDESA, 2005).

In order to achieve its objective, the discussions of the committee were structured in terms of the following themes.

- Best practices and innovation in government: perspectives, challenges and potential
- Transferability of best practices/innovations
- Absorbing & implementing a best practice: Issues of local capacity and environmental suitability and sustainability
- Approaches and methodologies to implement best practices

The final version of the paper was improved and enhanced after reflecting on the rich diversity of inputs papers and discussions of the Ad-hoc Expert Group. In particular, an attempt was made to focus on issues not covered in the other papers.

As such, this paper will reflect on the following issues that can make a contribution to a deeper understanding on how innovation can be enhanced in the public sector:-

- Introduce two conceptual models for understanding innovative processes in the public sector,
- Reflect on the concepts of best practices, innovation, and improvement and whether these are helpful,
- Highlight selected aspects of innovation of relevance to the transfer of innovation,
- Highlight the importance of focusing on the organisation and raise some important analytical work done in this regard,
• Conclude by consolidating some of the above issues into preliminary thoughts that can feed into a possible methodology for the transfer of innovation, improvement, and best practice.

2 MODELS FOR UNDERSTANDING INNOVATION

Globally, many of the world nation states are now involved in major efforts aimed at reforming and improving their governments (Kamarck, 2003). As such, ‘innovation is used ever more frequently in the rhetorics and discourses of public service improvement’ as a result of the ‘positive resonances’ associated with innovation (Albury, 2005). Notwithstanding the current emphasis on innovation, it is not an end in itself but a means to an end. Innovation must be judged by its ability to create what Moore (1995) describes as ‘public value’.

In this context, Moore (2005) introduces two very different models to understand innovative processes in the public sector. The first model is based on specific break-through innovations that have a major impact whilst the second model spotlights innovative organisations and continuous improvement. On the basis that these two models exist, he poses the challenge of whether the study of innovation in government is about the processes that produced a break-through innovation and ways to spread that idea through the world or whether it should be on the creation of innovative organisations that have the ability to continuously innovate and learn and where small changes result in significant changes over time.

Notwithstanding the overlap between innovative ideas and their dissemination on one hand and the creation of innovative organisations on the other, Moore argues that these two models focus attention on slightly different things. With breakthrough innovation, the important questions are what constitute an important innovation and the processes that enable it to spread. In the case of innovative organisations the questions are slightly different and focus on issues such as organisational structures, financing, cultures, etc. (Moore, 2005).

Understanding that these two different approaches to innovation exist, any attempts to facilitate the transfer of innovation should include strategies that deal with the actual innovation as well as focusing on crucial organisational issues. These two aspects will be considered in a bit more detail later in this paper. However, in order to explore these issues in more detail, it is useful to briefly unpack the concepts of innovation, improvement, and best practice.

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1 As this was the key purpose of the meeting, the final workshop provides a much more comprehensive and considered view on this issue.
3 UNDERSTANDING INNOVATION, IMPROVEMENT, AND BEST PRACTICE

3.1 Improvement versus Innovation

The public management challenge considered by the Ad-hoc Meetings of Experts was to use all means at our disposal to ‘achieve widespread improvements in governance and service performance, including efficiencies, in order to increase public value’ (Hartley, 2005). As such, the way it which we utilise concepts and ideas should not only satisfy academic rigour but should also consider how the use of terminology can contribute to the achievement of this purpose.

The word innovation is generally regarded as something positive and conveys images of renewal, commitment, improvement, and progress. The academic literature, quite rightly so, has argued for the need to define innovation in a way that helps analysis and policy. Specifically, it is argued that there is a need to separate innovation from general improvement. For example, Hartley argues that ‘innovation and improvement need to be seen as conceptually distinct and not blurred into one concept’ (Hartley, 2005).

Combining improvement and innovation in a two-by-two matrix, Hartley illustrates that it is possible to have innovation without improvement as well as have cases where there is improvement without innovation.

![Figure 1 – Innovation and Improvement](image)

Source: Hartley, 2005

On this basis, the following four scenarios exist:-

- Quadrant 1 occurs in highly stable environments where innovation is not needed because there is a close fit between that environment and the organisational
processes, systems, and stakeholder needs. Alternatively, the organisation may be experiencing inertia and not identify a need to either innovate or improve to meet new needs and changing circumstances.

- Quadrant 2 represents organisations which focus on small incremental changes to improve. It must be noted that small changes can collectively lead to substantial changes over time.
- Quadrant 3 occurs where innovation occurs but does not lead to improvement and may even lead to a deterioration of performance. Several situations are associated with this pattern. Firstly, innovations do not always lead to success. Secondly, innovation leads to more choice but no real improvement for users.
- Quadrant 4 represents the desirable state where an organisation innovates and this results in noticeable improvements in outputs and outcomes (Hartley, 2005).

When undertaking academic studies on innovation, having conceptual clarity is important. However, if innovation essentially involves the application of new ideas (White, 2003), differences between innovation and improvement are less important since the methodologies developed to enable the transfer of innovation can apply equally to a general improvement.

Because of its positive connotations, innovation as a concept can be used to encourage and facilitate improvement and change. As such, innovation is interpreted in a range of ways according to the perspective and approach of those that engage with it (White, 2003). For example, for an international awards programme like the UN Public Service Awards, a more stricter definition would be more appropriate as this will help isolate groundbreaking and disruptive innovations. On the other hand, a public manager aiming to create a learning organisation and who places a high premium on ongoing problem-solving will choose a definition that facilitates continuous improvement through incremental innovation and a groundbreaking initiative will be an added bonus.

Therefore definitions differ depending on the purpose for which it is being used. In addition, definitions may also differ when dealing with the same activity but in two different settings. For example, an innovation award programme in a country where this is well-established, for example, the Innovations in the American Government programme, would opt for a more stricter definition of innovation as opposed to a country in transition where innovation awards programme are just being implemented. In the case of the country implementing an awards programme for the first time, the success of the programme would be better achieved by adopting a less stricter definition. As the award programme develops and grows, the definition can always become clearer and stricter.

Adopting variation in the definition of innovation has an additional advantage. As highlighted earlier, innovation has tremendous emotional value and is dependent on perception. A shifting definition together with suitable incentives can therefore help create an environment where officials strive to raise the bar on what is possible.

The above has some important implications for programmes and activities aimed at creating public value through ‘innovation’. A variable definition highlights the need to move the focus to people and on the conditions that facilitate learning from the
experiences of others. As such, the details and practice of knowledge-sharing and replication support become crucial. These issues will be explored later in this paper.

3.2 Best practices – does it make sense in the public sector

A second issue on terminology relates to the concept of best practice. This paper supports the view arising at the Fourth Meeting of the Committee of Expert on Public Administration of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) held in April of this year.

Several members of the committee argued that the concept of best practice is problematic in relation to public administration and governance. This concept was popular in the 80’s particularly in the private sector where consulting houses favoured the approach that there was some best way of doing things. For a while, this standard once-size-fits all approach was popular but soon lost favour as private sector companies realised that such an approach in fact reduced the competitive advantage of the firm and lead to reductions in innovation capacity. In addition, some practices were difficult to implement because they were not easily transported to environments with different cultures, values, leadership, and legal environment.

The concept of best practice has lost favour particularly in developing countries who have been at the receiving end of formula-based economic prescriptions by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Most innovation in governance and service delivery is implemented within complex social and economic systems. As such, the approach of ‘differential diagnosis’, used by Jeffery Sachs (2004) in relation to economic development solutions can be similarly applied to service delivery improvements and innovations. A systematic approach and the logic of a good medical diagnosis is a good way of identifying problems that require the development of a solution (Sachs, 2005). Adopting the ‘differential diagnosis’ approach means that it is more suitable to talk about good practices (if these have an element of superiority) or as argued during the Experts Committee, to rather talk about successful policy options.

Moving away from the concept of ‘best practices’ has the additional advantage of moving action away from implementing fads and the successes towards an approach where the starting point for action is improvements in problem definition and where good practices, innovations, and improvements are part of a menu of options in address a particular problem or challenge.

4 INNOVATION

The following section will review some key issues and views on innovations.

4.1 What drives innovation

To better understand the possibilities and limits of ‘replication’, it is useful to briefly review why innovations happen. One of the few studies that tried to generate an empirical basis for innovation is the extensively quoted study by Borins (2000). This study reviewed winners of the Innovations in American Government programme and identified the key conditions that led to the innovation. The methodology was based on a
survey where innovators were asked to identify the conditions and challenges led to the innovation.

The conditions identified by innovators fell into five groups. These are:-

1. Initiatives resulting from the political process and system including an election mandate or pressure by politicians;
2. A leadership change that covered both appointments from outside of the organisation as well as choosing someone internally,
3. A crisis, particularly one that has potential negative publicity. The crisis can either be current or something that is anticipated to happen in the future;
4. A variety of internal problems including failing to respond to a changing environment, inability to reach a target population, inability to meet demand for a program, resource constraints, or an inability to coordinate policies; and,
5. New opportunities, created by technology or other causes (Borins, 2000)

A less formal but similar analysis by the CPSI (undocumented) on innovations in South Africa reveal a similar set of conditions with one important addition. Following democratisation in 1994 and the integration of South Africa into the global family, a significant number of innovations arose as a result of adoption and adaptation of successful models from other countries. These innovations were new but not necessarily original, discovered rather than invented (Hannah, 1995).

In many cases, the transfer of models happened in tandem with changes in leadership and shifting political conditions. On reflection, several of the innovations that were imported to South Africa were either those that attempted to address an internal failing or one which resulted from a new opportunity created by new technology or processes.

### 4.2 Typology of Innovation

Governments can and do innovate in a variety of different ways. Developing a suitable typology of innovations is central to efforts to transfer such innovation. For example, it is easier to transfer a new design of a sanitation system (like ventilated pit latrines) as opposed to the transfer of one-stop government centres. The latter has significant legal, institutional, and technological pre-requisites. In addition, geography and spatial issues will also impact on the innovation.

Various writers have attempted different types of typologies. In the work of the CPSI, four types were developed. These are:- innovations in service delivery, innovations in citizen engagement and democracy, innovations in government processes (planning frameworks, budgeting, etc.), and innovative arrangements to reach a certain goal (for example, unique public-private partnerships or public-community partnerships.

Drawing on several of these writers, Hartley identifies seven types of innovation. In practice, a particular change may result from the application of more than one type of innovation. The major types identified were:-

1. Product Innovation – new products, for example, using television to deliver training content to teachers and nurses
2. Service Innovations – new ways in which services are provided to users, for example, the introduction of on-line forms,

3. Process Innovations – new ways in which organisational processes are designed, for example, re-engineering of business processes

4. Position Innovation – new contexts or users, for example, addressing the tax needs of informal enterprises,

5. Strategic Innovation – new goals or purposes of the organisation, for example, community policing

6. Governance Innovation – new forms of citizen engagement, and democratic institutions

7. Rhetorical innovation – new language and new concepts, for example, congestion charging in major cities (Hartley, 2005)

It is self-evident that the type of innovation will impact on the process of transfer of that innovation. This will include how the innovation is documented and the methodology that should be used for sharing the innovation.

4.3 Risk and innovation

Innovation involves change and therefore you cannot talk about innovation without talking about risk. Risk is essentially an uncertainty in outcome. There is a widely held view that in the public sector ‘risk is managed by avoiding it’. This is largely because the public sector does not diversify risks and unlike private firms, they are not able to net out successes and failures. Risks (whether in government or in the private sector) can be minimised in one or a combination of the following ways:- hedged, transferred, averted, or internalised (Bhatta, 2003).

Models and approaches to managing risks associated with innovation in the public sector is relatively undeveloped. This issue requires an exploration all of its own and will not be dealt with further is this paper. Suffice to say that part of the process of assessing the transferability of an innovation requires two risk analysis. Firstly, assessing the risk associated with the original innovation in its setting and how this risk was managed. Secondly, assessing the level of risk associated with the implementation of the innovation in a different context due to differences in organisational cultures and other institutional issues.

4.4 Focus on the trend

There is a fair degree of consensus that the wholesale adoption of particular innovations or improvements is rarely possible. Experience has shown that the adoption of particular innovation is part of a broader trend and trajectory and that innovations tend to be affected by ‘previous patterns’ (Farah, 2005). These trends and trajectories can be universal or may be concentrated in specific regions or amongst countries that share a level of commonality (in terms of political system in place, economic and social policy, etc.).

As such, a key requirement when evaluating an innovation is to do a detailed analysis of the trend or trajectory within which the innovation is located. Once this has been identified, it become easier to determine whether the innovation will be successful and
whether there is a need to consider additional innovations or changes that may be required.

5 PERSPECTIVES ON INNOVATIVE ORGANISATIONS

As highlighted earlier in this paper, effective innovation transfer is greatly assisted when there are measures in place to increase the overall innovation capital of public sector institutions and systems. In this regard, four issues will be explored based on important analytical work conducted by other innovation specialists.

5.1 Patterns of Innovation

Glor (2002) identified patterns of innovation based on three ‘dynamics’: the individuals motivation related to innovation, the culture within the workplace as influenced by its external environment, and the challenge presented by an innovation. Taking the two extreme points for each dynamic and combining these yield eight ‘innovation patterns’. The patterns are as much about innovations as it is about organisations (Glor, 2002).

The extreme points for each dynamic are:-

- The motivation of the individual in relation to the innovation. This can either be extrinsic or intrinsic. Intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual, for example, a commitment to a programme because of a personal identification with the programme. Extrinsic motivation arises from outside of the individual, for example, managerial control or some form of outside reward or incentive. Intrinsic motivation enable greater levels of problem seeking and problem solving as compared to extrinsic motivation.

- Organisational culture. This can either be a bottom-up culture or a top-down culture.

- Challenge. This can be either a minor challenge (for example, posing a low risk to individuals or organisations) or major (high risk to individuals and organisations).

The patterns that form as a result of combining these three dynamics are summarised in the table below. In each case, the original example from Canada that is used by the author is also included for illustration purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>Re-active</td>
<td>Operating budgets for Govt. of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Bottom-up</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Our missing children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Imposed</td>
<td>Literacy New Brunswick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Bottom-up</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>Shipyard Repair Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>Buy-in</td>
<td>Mississauga Capacity Building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Innovation patterns help practitioners to identify those issues that they should pay careful attention to during the implementation process. A systems analysis of the patterns can identify stable and unstable innovations and can therefore predict the long-term chances of success (Glor, 2002).

Each pattern is characterised by a different mix with regard to the ‘creativity of the innovation’. In this instance, creativity is a measure of the number of ideas generated under each pattern as well as the variability of ideas (Glor, 2002). These enable an understanding of key implementation issues associated with each pattern. The following table combines these two issues. The key factors associated with the implementation environment are ease of approval, ease of implementation, support provided to the innovators, as well as central support provided to the innovation.

### TABLE 2 – Implementation Consequences of Innovation Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Creativity of the Innovation</th>
<th>Implementation Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of ideas</td>
<td>Variability of ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-active</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Low-medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposed</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy-in</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-active</td>
<td>Medium-high</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformati onal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High variation from status quo. Low variation between</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On this basis, Glor (2002) concludes that this analysis highlight a dilemma inherent in innovation based on the following observations:-

- While reactive and buy-in innovation produce fewer ideas and less variability between the ideas, innovations are easily approved, implemented and integrated,

- Active and proactive innovation, on the other hand, produce more ideas although of less variability. These innovations are accepted at the local level but enjoy little support at the central level,

- Necessary and imposed innovations received mix support. It receives easy approval but encounters difficulties in implementation. Although the centre supports the actual innovation, at the local level the innovator does not enjoy support.

- Only transformational and continuous innovation engage the individual and creates major challenges to the status quo. Transformational produces many ideas with high variation from the status quo but less variation between the ideas. Culture provides some support to the innovator, accepts change and readily implements it. However, long-term integration is more difficult.

- Only continuous innovation engages the individual, the collective, and its management. It creates an environment where many new ideas are brought forward and the innovations are generally well-received, easily implemented and integrated as they arise from within the culture.

- The first six patterns (i.e. all except transformational and continuous) resulted in low creativity and minor impacts. For the remaining two where high creativity and major impact occur, this happens in one of three ways:- through the use of power from the centre, through on-going cumulative changes that produce a continuous impact, and finally through discontinuous large leaps (Glor, 2002).

The above analysis, presented in abridged form in this paper, highlight the need for a greater sense of innovation self-awareness by organisations wishing to transfer and customise innovations. Organisations who find such an analysis useful are encouraged to review the full analysis.

5.2 Problem types

Yapp (2005) notes the desire to find a new way to deal with a problem is a source of innovation. As such, understanding the nature of the problem that a group, team of organisations is dealing with becomes important. On this basis, he proposes a two-by-two matrix as a basis for thinking about problems. The same two dimensions are used on both axes. These are: whether an organisation knows where it is going and whether the organisation knows how to get there (see Figure 2)
The implication of the above on innovation and improvement can be summarised as follows:

- When an organisation knows where it is going and how to get there, the approach is operational management. In this case, there is a budget and resources and the innovator or team needs to get on with the task and be accountable for outputs. Too often organisations mistakenly believe that they are in this quadrant and try to apply basic operational management without much success.

- In cases where the organisation neither knows where it is going or how to get there, the task is then about concept creation. The focus then becomes one of finding a big new idea. Failure to get to the big idea results from organisations demanding project plans and cost implications too early in the process hampering the need for staff to undergo iterative learning.

- In the case where the organisation does not know where it is going but has some idea on how to get there, the task is about direction-setting. This is fairly common with improvements that can be achieved by new and emerging technologies where the potential benefits are fairly obvious but its integration into current strategy is not always clear.

- Finally, we have the process development task that is suitable in cases where the organisation knows where it is going but do not know how to get there. In this case, there is a need for clarifying the way in which the goals can be achieved and how they can be achieved (Yapp, 2005).

The problem type model highlights two important issues with regard to the transfer of innovation. Firstly, of all four problem types, the last three is dependent on strong leadership to support imagination and concept creation, to clarify direction and to design and develop processes to support improvement and innovation (Yapp, 2005). Secondly,
the introduction of an outside idea can move from one of the last three quadrants to the first. When this point is reached, it becomes important to bed down the new idea or improvement through the application of operational management.

5.3 Barriers to Innovation
The proliferation of innovation awards programme is a useful indicator that innovation is flourishing in the public sector. While innovation is able to flourish, in many cases it has not been able to. White (2003), focusing on the South African experience, identifies a number of reasons for this including:

- Lack of access to resources for development and testing
- Lack of understanding about how to initiate innovation, or what to do with new ideas or project possibilities that present themselves
- Inability to attract funding for long-term implementation,
- Difficulties in finalising arrangements for public private partnerships
- Inability to replicate and mainstream innovations

Albury (2005) identifies another set of barriers including:

- Short-term planning and budget cycles of government. The move by governments to medium-term cycles in addition to annual cycles is a positive move,
- Poor skills in active risk or change management and a culture of risk aversion
- Few rewards or incentives to innovate or adopt innovations
- Notwithstanding the technologies being available, the existence of constraining cultural or organisational arrangements,
- Over-reliance on a small pool of high performers within the organisation as sources of innovation
- Reluctance to close down failing programmes of organisation, i.e. what Hartley (2005) terms exnovation.
- Delivery pressures and administrative burdens.

5.4 Supporting Innovation
White (2003), in analysing the innovation literature with a view to enhancing the operations of the Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI), outlines a number of useful reflections for practitioners seeking to drive innovation. These include:

- Innovation is contextual. As such, the form and shape that it takes is largely dependent on the circumstances that shape it, and the prevailing needs of the time
- Innovation is a means of expression. It arises to varying degrees based on the extent to which certain factors are in place and the combination of these factors
- An environment for innovation can be created. As a result of the patterns of innovation developed by Glor (2002), this will require strategies that address how public servants are motivated, how the internal culture of the organisation is shaped, and how the organisation responds to external challenges,
• Innovation does not need to wait for a challenge or a crisis. Evidence on event-based innovation show that an organisation can induce conditions that provide the stimulus for employees to initiate innovative solutions.

• Creative ideas arise by bringing groups of people together who produce intellectual capital. As such, an organisation serious about innovation should enable and support communities of interest and networks which enable thought development to take place organically.

• Partnerships are successful to successful innovation. Even where an individual has developed a solution, implementing or sustaining an innovation will require the buy-in of the department, access to internal or external funding, and in some instances the attention of policy-makers.

• Innovations need a tolerance for failure in order to prosper and grow. This requires a level of organisational maturity where a failure does not necessarily imply poor performance.

Reflecting on two models for understanding the context within which innovation arises, concludes that innovation occurs even without any specific mechanisms to initiate it. However, specific institutional mechanisms are required to accelerate the speed at which innovation occurs as well as the frequency of occurrences (White, 2003).

6 PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON THE TRANSFER OF IMPROVEMENTS, GOOD PRACTICE & INNOVATION

The final major section tries to bring together some of the issues raised earlier with a view to highlighting some suggestions that could feed into methodologies and tools that are developed to facilitate the transfer of improvements, good practice and innovation. These issues are explored superficially as they are addressed in much greater detail in other papers in this volume.

For ease of reference, the word innovation will be used in this section to mean improvements, good practices as well as innovations. A useful definition of transfers is one proposed by the Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme (BLP), a programme of UN-Habitat. In this instance transfers are defined as ‘a structured learning process based on knowledge derived from real-world experience together with the human expertise capable of transforming that knowledge into social action’ (You and Kitio, 2005).

6.1 Innovation self-awareness

Innovation within the public sector is both complex and challenging (White, 2003). As highlighted by Moore (2005) as well as Glor (2002), major levels of change can be facilitated by ongoing systematic improvements. They further highlight that in order for constant innovation to occur, there is a need for the organisation to evaluate its capacity to innovate and manage change.

What is required are tools and techniques that can build the capacity of public officials to understanding their own realities and to achieve higher self-awareness on innovation possibilities and constraints within their organisation. It may be more valuable to develop
imperfect tools but which assist in improving the abilities of public officials to design solutions that work in their contexts instead of developing detailed tools that attempt to provide a unified model for transferring innovation.

6.2 Focus on the problem

It is widely accepted that the starting point for many innovations is a process of drawing on the experiences of others. The tendency for public service institutions is to find an innovation and look at how it can be transferred. Using the problem types model proposed by Yapp (2005), this may work when the task is operational management, i.e. when the organisation knows where it is going and how to get there. However, for the remaining three problem types, it is more appropriate to start by defining the problem and then to search out approaches taken by others to solve a similar problem. These approaches could include groundbreaking innovations, incremental changes or even going back to basics. Box 1 provides a possible decision flow-chart that can assist in this task.

The above does not imply that organisations remain closed to alternative approaches and only seek these out once the problem has been defined. Continually reviewing alternative approaches provide organisations with new way of looking at problems. In fact, the stimulus for many innovations have come from solutions that were only remotely associated with what the organisation initially required. Reviewing solutions should be an ongoing organisational competence for innovation together strategic planning and futures thinking.

Box 1 - A possible decision flow-chart

What is the service delivery/ governance challenge that I am trying to solve?
What have others done to address a similar challenge?
What was the level of success that was achieved through the implementation of a specific solution?
What did it cost and how long did it take to implement?
What was the pre-requisites for the implementation (particularly legal, administration, and financial on the original context).
Are there alternative solutions that could be proposed by employees of my organisation or the recipients of services?

6.3 Learning and knowledge

As highlighted throughout this paper, learning and knowledge-sharing lies at the heart of attempts to create innovative organisations and in transferring and adapting innovation. However, what is required is a more detailed exploration of the process of knowledge-sharing and learning. Innovation suffers when the knowledge that an organisation has amassed (either from their own practice or collated from elsewhere) is not able to be carried forward (Bhatta, 2003).
Diffusion can fail because of impediments to the flow of information (whether engineered or inadvertent) or because of a mismatch between an idea generated in one context and the goals, capacity, and incentives prevalent in other contexts. (Donahue, 2005)

Traditionally a key way of sharing innovations has been through case studies, study visits and peer-learning. However, these do not pay adequate attention to key pre-requisites that enabled the innovation (legal, economic, social, and institutional issues) as well as providing information on costs and resources required.

A conceptual model for thinking about learning and documentation as it applies to the transferring of good practices and innovation needs to look at information required for different purposes. For example, the information requirements for each the following would differ (as illustrated in Box 2):

- ideation
- action
- reflection and adaptation.

As argued by Galimberti, 2005, ‘the idea behind a specific innovation is more important than the innovation itself’ and as such the key to the successful transfer of new ideas is the ‘establishment of a knowledge network on innovation’ (Galimberti, 2005).

Establishing such a knowledge network will need to look at both the supply and demand sides for knowledge.
Box 2 - Changing learning and information requirements – a brief case study

For a number of reasons including the lack of government contact points in areas that were formally disadvantaged as well as the potential offered by new technology, South Africa identified integrated one-stop centres as having significant value. As part of the process of establishing these centres, the SAC centre initiated by the State of Bahai was identified as an innovative model that offered value.

A brief look at the changing information requirements of this project highlight some conclusions that would be of relevance in other examples.

Three distinct phases of learning were evident in localising and customising the SAC innovation in the South African context. The first was getting a high-level understanding of the project. At this stage a brief half-a-page description of the project on the World Bank site was adequate in enabling the South African project to make connections to its own realities and enable it to make a match in terms of its relevance.

On this basis, the SAC concept was integrated into strategy documents and action plans. Using the high-level idea contained in the brief case study enabled the South African project team to generate enough buy-in into the concept. On this basis, the team began to implement the idea in South Africa. At this stage the project team needed to grapple with a range of institutional, financial, and design issues. The brief case study was no longer useful in guiding the project team and it was felt that a physical visit to the project was required. Conducting the visit to Brazil was therefore the second phase of the learning journey. Having the visit at this stage was important for two reasons. Firstly, the appropriate people who would benefit from the study visit were on board with the implementation, and secondly, the project team could ask very specific questions that address real concerns and difficulties with the South African model.

The project is now entering a third phase where the requirements for information-sharing is ongoing and of a deeper technical nature. Learning strategies would therefore move towards ongoing communication for problem-solving and even technical assistance where people involved in the implementation process in Brazil would work with the South African team.

Cautionary Note: Since all innovations are not alike and the resources spent on learning and developing critical mass must be commiserate to the potential impact of the innovation.

6.4 Using the experiences of others

There are several ways in which an established innovation or good practice could be value to others. There are three uses that are notable, i.e. for learning, for benchmarking, for copying.
The way in which an existing experience is going to be used has an impact on what information is required by the receiving organisation as well as the way in which the receiving organisation interacts with the organisation responsible for the original innovation.

Some comments on the three ways in which experiences can be used by others:

Learning – Learning takes place when the recipient organisation has a good sense of the nature of the problem to which they seek a solution.

Benchmarking – this is more a case of a country or agency looking at what they have in place or are implementing and compare this with other established practices. The benchmarking is mainly at the level of results or outputs and focused on how the innovation has managed to achieved this.

Replication – Based on careful assessment, a decision has been taken to introduce the innovation with minor modifications and customisation. The assessment will include looking at the context, the nature of the innovation and its suitability.

The different uses of an experience is the foundation of two decision matrices:—a risk-context matrix (Figure 3) and a fit-success matrix (Figure 4). The risk-context matrix is more useful at the analytical and learning stage whereas the fit-success matrix is more useful at the implementation stage, particularly when committing time and resources.

In terms of the risk-context matrix, replication require strong context alignment and low risk. As there is never a case of complete context alignment and zero risk, replication will still require customisation and modification.

**Figure 3 – Risk-Context matrix**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Risk</th>
<th>Weak Context Alignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Context Alignment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BENCHMARK

AVOID

COPY

LEARN

Strong Context Alignment
Low Risk

Weak Context Alignment
Low Risk
```

Another way of assessing how to use the experience of others is to plot chances of success with the fit of the innovation to the current organisation and country. Determining fit and assessing success are not easy processes and will require the
application of traditional tools of planning, i.e. cost-benefit analysis, institutional analysis, etc.

Figure 4 – Success-Fit matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Fit</th>
<th>Weak Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High chance of success</td>
<td>Limited chances of success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BENCHMARK</th>
<th>AVOID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COPY</th>
<th>LEARN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High chance of success</td>
<td>Limited chances of success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong fit</td>
<td>Strong Fit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The need to find ways that more effectively create public value in an environment of constant change has become an ongoing project for nation states and public services. Within this context, the global flow of ideas and approaches between countries as well as within countries has assumed greater importance over time.

The ability to transform these ideas into successful action require interventions on two fronts. The first is the development of tools and approaches for the assessment and transfer of innovation. However, this has to be combined by attempts to enhance the innovation capacity of public service institutions. This paper was a small contribution on both fronts.
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