Policy-level Tradeoffs Analysis Playbook

This playbook is accompanied by a Policy Analysis Tool that can be downloaded separately.

Recommendation:
1.4.1. Evaluate existing and potential policies for the
likelihood of unsustainable tradeoffs and adjust as needed.

If you are interested in potentially being part of an action cohort of other agencies and fields implementing this recommendation, please contact cohort@wellbeingblueprint.org.

If you have implemented this Playbook, including making modifications that might be useful to others, please let us know so we can learn together cohort@wellbeingblueprint.org.

Problems This Playbook Addresses

1. Policies fail to achieve their intended impact through a combination of when:
   a. short-term outcomes aren't achieved;
   b. short-term outcomes are achieved but don't persist;
   c. implementation is "slow-walked" by stakeholders;
   d. durable outcomes are inequitable when data is disaggregated by race and gender.

2. Insufficient resources for staff mean that system leaders have to prioritize certain pieces of work over other pieces, without having a complete understanding of impacts.

3. Policies imposed by external entities may be well-intended, but result in harmful impacts. It can be difficult for system leaders to articulate the situation to policymakers in ways they will understand.

Solutions This Playbook Provides

- A structured process to identify different impacts of policy on different stakeholder groups, and to make adjustments that will reduce harmful impacts prior to enacting policy.
  - Increases buy-in from stakeholders
  - Includes stakeholder voices to make policies more responsive in the first place
  - Assesses policies to make them more equitable

- A deliberate, but timely, process that can help reduce bias and assumptions in decision making that often occur when trying to project others' perspectives.

What Are Tradeoffs?

Tradeoffs are the immediate and long-term costs of a decision or (in)action. While they can't fully or always be anticipated, more can be identified than we are used to considering. Sometimes the benefit from the decision or change is worth the tradeoff; sometimes it isn't.

When the tradeoffs of change are too significant, the durability of the change is jeopardized, even if a person is motivated to make and sustain the change.

Indeed, systems regularly confuse motivation with tradeoffs, and they motivate people to make changes that come at an unsustainable price instead of adjusting policies upstream to prevent common tradeoffs, or allowing for exceptions to policies in certain circumstances. See Wellbeing Blueprint Recommendation 1.4.3.

While tradeoffs are very individual — it may feel worth it to one person and not to another — there are tradeoffs common to groups that can be anticipated and mitigated when known.

For example, a policy requiring people who are unhoused to take the first housing available will result in tradeoffs. For many, this may be sustainable because it doesn't require giving up a lot of existing assets. However, for others, this may mean leaving all loved ones, the community center where they help out, and/or disrupting routines that create a sense of predictability — an untenable situation that could be mitigated by policy shifts.

- Gets at the root of why an enacted policy is or isn't working.
  - Helps stakeholders identify reasons that they may not be able to articulate;
  - Provides a container for having a conversation around how to make the policy more effective;
  - Helps stakeholders feel heard.

- While this is not 100% predictive, it creates an environment that opens up opportunities to identify potential pitfalls. With this information, you may want to adjust the policy and use the tool again, or pull the policy completely.

- Provides an articulation for pushing back on external policies that are embedded within a larger framework, and context that takes the emphasis off of the individual leaders and staff (e.g., it's not because staff don't want to do more work, or don't want to be transparent, etc.).

Sectors and Fields This Is Relevant For

Public agencies, nonprofits and communities that are in a position to create and enforce policy that will impact people — including, but not limited to, human services, juvenile justice, criminal justice, public health, housing, homelessness and education.

Key Considerations

It is essential that leadership is invested in and mandates use of the Policy Analysis Tool with regular evaluation for compliance. Compliance is more than simply completing the tool. It is digestion of the information that the tool surfaces to adjust policy. It is critical that decisions are tracked centrally in order to identify patterns and assess how use of the tool has effectively shifted policy. Without this level of investment, the tool will not have the deep impact necessary to support the shift in our systems.

How to Do This

Part 1: Pilot and build momentum and understanding

1. **Bring together staff from across the agency so that everyone understands the direction the organization is taking.** Start with the problem to be solved, not the Policy Analysis Tool. Explain this will require different thinking and priorities. Talk about why you're excited about this new way of working. Facilitate conversation with staff on how this connects with their pain points. Ideally, this is introduced in-person, or during a video call, where you will have an opportunity to answer questions and discuss.

2. **Identify early adopters for a 4-6 month pilot and momentum building phase.** Based on staff responses, you will begin to notice which staff are interested and might be good early adopters. Introduce the Policy Analysis Tool as a pilot with the early adopters for 4-6 months. This group should include staff from multiple levels in the organization (managers, front line, etc.). In an institution that has strong advisory or community boards, the pilot should include members of those bodies. It's important that both staff and advisory/community board members who are part of the pilot have influence with their peers and are eager to lead on this. The group should watch a 2-hour virtual training video through the Wellbeing Blueprint.

3. **Task early adopters with testing the Policy Analysis Tool and process, and recommending refinements to the process and tool.** Task the team to review three key policies currently enacted that you have identified. Set clear time parameters and expectations. Bring together multiple stakeholders with different perspectives. Include the Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance or data departments to help set up tracking.

4. **Refine the Policy Analysis Tool and process.** Once the early adopters have tested the tool and process, and suggested refinements, make the adjustments and prepare to launch agency-wide.

5. **Create opportunities for early adopters to share learnings from the Policy Analysis Tool and process.** Peers influence peers. If peers are able to convey their excitement and how this tool has helped them, it will increase the uptake of the tool for launch. This should include answers to questions like:
   a. How was the tool and process helpful for identifying gaps and adjusting policy?
   b. What voices or perspectives did this tool and process identify that would otherwise be missed?
   c. What was challenging about using the tool? How did you address it?

6. **Use the Policy Analysis Tool and process on the anticipated policy of using the tool and process itself.** As part of modeling and embedding this tool and process within the organization, the Policy Analysis Tool and process should be used with the policy of using this agency-wide as well. Information from using the Policy Analysis Tool on this policy will also help inform the launch of the tool and process throughout the agency.

Part 2: Launch

1. **Set a policy, with clear agency-wide expectations, for when and how the Policy Analysis Tool and process will be used. Include how outcomes will be tracked and reported back to the field.** Remember to incorporate what you learned from using the tool and process on this policy. For example, this may be a group of staff tasked with assessing all new policies, or it may be tasking multiple groups that have been trained. It will depend on the number of policies to be assessed, your organizational structures and other factors.

2. **Establish a protocol for adjusting implemented policies and/or removing those policies.** This tool and process is not 100% predictive. While using the Policy Analysis Tool increases the likelihood that tradeoffs will be surfaced in advance, it does not guarantee it. Set a timeline for when to revisit policies after implementation so that you can change course as needed (e.g. Examine policies using the Policy Analysis Tool and process 6 months after implementation).

3. **Introduce the Policy Analysis Tool to the staff broadly, tying it, again, back to the problems it will solve.** If appropriate, staff may watch the 2-hour virtual training video from the Wellbeing Blueprint, and early adopters may be tasked to be coaches for staff who are using the tool and process.

1. **Set up a feedback loop process.** Continue to highlight how this tool and process is useful and adjust when it is not. A feedback loop could include adding reflection time to an existing agenda, surveying staff and more. Set up a timeline and process for this.

2. **Designate central authority for tracking changes and tradeoffs mitigated.** Track information such as:
   a. Policies adopted as is (did not need modification after review with the Tool)
   b. Existing policies that have been modified with the tool and process
      1. Changes in outcomes due to changing an existing policy
   c. Data that can be disaggregated by race and gender

   While correlation isn't causation, this will still provide context for understanding what is happening. Integrate this process into your Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement processes.

3. **Establish a Quality Assurance (QA) process for the Policy Analysis Tool and process.** For the Policy Analysis tool and process to work, it must be used deliberately and with intention. If it simply becomes a piece of paper to be filled out, the Tool and process will not have its intended impact. The QA process should include:
   a. ability to bring together stakeholders for a meaningful conversation.
   b. successful identification of how a policy will force tradeoffs in the needs and experiences we all need for wellbeing — connectedness and belonging, purpose and influence, safety and predictability, access to resources.
   c. successful identification of how the policy may differentially impact some groups over others in these areas.
   d. meaningful mitigation of tradeoffs

   Establish a timeline for the QA process. For example, review copies of the tool and data annually to assess whether it is being used correctly.

Additional Considerations

- **The discussion and what it surfaces, and the structure for new ways of considering information are vital parts of the process.** It is the most important part of the Policy Analysis Tool. Not only does use of this tool and process improve policy-making, but it can also increase buy-in from stakeholders.
  > **CAUTION:** Do not fill out the tool assuming the perspectives of other groups. Our assumptions for other people are frequently wrong or incomplete. Groups who know that you have made assumptions about their viewpoints, particularly when they're wrong, may feel resentful.

Use what is learned from the tool with funders and external policymakers. This process surfaces tradeoffs of policies, including those that are imposed on a system by external entities. The information may be used to articulate tradeoffs to funders and external policymakers. To give funders and policymakers context for this approach, explain how you came to use the Policy Analysis Tool and process, and the pilot process itself.

Resources Required

- **Staff time and some funds may be needed to include hard-to-reach stakeholders in the process.** These are modest in comparison to the time and resources that may be needed to address tradeoffs later down the road.

Who Else Is Using This?

- St. Louis County Family Court, Detention Services

Next Steps

If a policy moves forward, with or without adjustments, implement recommendation 1.4.3: *Even if a policy does not appear to create unsustainable tradeoffs generally, include concrete mechanisms in policies for exemptions/alternatives for the subset of cases where tradeoffs may be unsustainable.*