

Chapter 5

Implementation of the Local Development Strategy

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This chapter considers the issues surrounding the successful implementation of a local development strategy. It underscores the importance of assessing, implementation issues and addressing them at the beginning of the process in order to embed implementation considerations in the development of the strategy and avoid some of the obstacles to success.

The chapter demonstrates the importance of establishing a framework for implementation and shares some thoughts on practical assistance for developing a transparent delivery process. The management methods and identification of responsibilities within this process are central to success. Leadership is crucial, as is a process that is inclusive and engaging across the partnership community. Commitment must be secured from organisations and individuals to perform and deliver within the timescales and resources available. Certain tools can then be applied to ensure this happens in the right way. The best use of such tools will depend on the local context, scale of the challenges being addressed in the strategy and the sophistication of partnership arrangements.

Introduction

All local development strategies start with a shared desire to deliver success and positive improvements in an area. In reality, many local strategies fail for a number of reasons, including poor implementation. Implementation is the crucial stage in bridging the space between objectives and outcomes. It is the practical demonstration of how objectives will be met in a timely way. This chapter considers this issue and how the obstacles to implementation can be overcome. A number of practical suggestions are made on how to ensure that implementation is considered and promoted **at the beginning** of the strategy development process and how to develop a learning culture within organisations and local communities.

Production of comprehensive guidance is important in delivering local development strategies and change in organisations and local communities. In theory, implementation should follow as a matter of course, yet it must be remembered that the materials provide a means to an end, **not** an end in themselves. In the end, it is the commitment of motivated people that delivers successful implementation.

Implementation is difficult. Nine out of ten strategies fail because of poor implementation. A local development strategy can look good in theory, but to be successful it must follow through at a practical level and consider the issues of implementation and the interplay of many small but often sensitive and significant local considerations. The local context is vital and obvious, yet many strategies give insufficient weight to the pivotal implementation issues which can become prime drivers, or barriers, to the success of the strategy.

Appraisal is about looking ahead and a local strategy must generate a shared view of what success will look like. This will also frame the appropriate measures to use in tracking progress and ensuring that evaluation is built into the strategy implementation process rather than be seen as something that is done as a bolt on at the end. Proper assessment of implementation issues at the outset can ensure that the strategy implementation process gathers evidence of effectiveness and efficiency as **part of the process** rather than retrospectively. If it is done retrospectively, meeting short-term targets often takes precedence over consistent commitment to the original vision and long-term objectives and thus compromises the ability to deliver sustainable change.

A proper assessment of the proposed strategy sets out the route for development, appraisal, approval and delivery of the strategy. Practical considerations must be prominent to ensure follow through happens successfully. As noted above, this sounds straightforward, yet it can

encounter many risks, some of which are identified at the outset while other additional risks can emerge during implementation. This is especially the case if implementation issues are not considered as part of the overall strategy appraisal and planning process.

Planning is vital and an implementation plan should be an essential element at the strategy design stage. There are nonetheless a number of issues or obstacles that have to be addressed. These include:

- Implementation is difficult.
- The skills required are often not available locally.
- It can be difficult to attract key staff and long-term funding to support staff development and embed skills locally.
- The strength of leadership within the strategy partnership can vary. The most committed are not always the most powerful or influential to success.
- Political changes often alter the balance of power within partnerships and produce changes in policy or direction during the strategy implementation period.
- Being seen to act quickly often takes precedence over long-term commitment, especially if a budget is available for a finite period only and where there is insufficient clarity on how success can be sustained.

Establishing a framework for implementation

Every strategy requires a quality assurance framework within which implementation can be pursued successfully. This framework should set the context for action and have clear and transparent governance arrangements for effective appraisal, approval, delivery and tracking of interventions embodied within the development strategy and delivered through an implementation plan.

The framework should be of practical assistance to all staff, as well as stakeholders, in providing a transparent set of processes for delivery. This focus on delivery will ensure appropriate and effective actions to implement the strategy within agreed timescales and contribute to the organisation, partnership or community's ability to demonstrate the following:

- Achievement of fundamental goals.
- Intervention actions fit with strategy.
- Strategic contributions merit the priority of selected interventions.

- Focus on key drivers of growth and development.
- Value for money.
- Outcomes achieved and impact over time.

The framework should allow all appropriate actions to move swiftly from idea generation and appraisal to approval and implementation. At a management and reporting level, this should also allow the articulation of relationships between the various strands of the strategy, showing how the action interventions designed to deliver the strategy aims and objectives fit with relative contributions to the outcomes sought. Where the organisation or partnership is project- and programme-oriented, the development, implementation and management of the portfolio of actions should be treated as a core element in the strategy process. In this way, strategy management, budgetary control with risk assessment and project development decisions can be made clear. It will also demonstrate the important processes in governance arrangements and in skills and capacity development within a local community.

The framework should accommodate quantitative and qualitative performance measures or metrics. Where the local development strategy has a number of related themes and objectives to be delivered through a range of projects and partners, the organisation of information and its presentation can play an important role in communicating achievements and progress. Use of tools such as a version of the project logic chain, decision trees or balanced score card can be helpful. Such tools help to set out the relationships involved in the process of designing a strategy, including the role of implementation, and assist in preparation for evaluation and feedback of learning. By following a framework approach, a series of key questions can be addressed to allow an organisation or partnership to generate the detail relevant to its local development context. The benefits will include clarity on the following:

- Articulation of the relationships between strategy, operational plans, action activities and the delivery of measurable outputs, outcomes and impacts.
- The elements and key mechanisms for transmitting strategic intent into a productive portfolio of action projects, programmes and supporting activities that focus on the drivers of development and change.
- Integration of interventions to identify individual and joint contributions towards strategic objectives such that local actions can be linked to wider policy aims.

- Structuring of information, data and commentary, to improve accountability and provide an audit trail to show value for money.
- Budget control and resource allocation decision processes in line with accountability requirements for the expenditure of public funds.
- Business unit and partner management and prioritisation in line with the strategy such that projects, programmes and actions are driven by strategic objectives.
- Managing the project's life cycle to ensure focus on appraisal (at the start) and learning (at the end) to produce a clear rationale for doing more or doing less of certain activities within the context of the strategy.
- Driving change in organisations, partnerships and communities with regular reporting and performance updates to provide feedback on strategy implementation and achievements.
- Regular reviews and communications on a monthly or quarterly basis.
- Adjustments to reflect learning on performance delivery, requirements for further guidance and training, information and communications technology (ICT), management information, property and other support infrastructure.
- Ability to adjust emphasis as stakeholder or economic context factors change.
- Gathering of learning and building organisational and community memory.

Management methodology and responsibilities

The methodology for delivering the projects and programmes within the strategy should also be clear. Systems will be required for smooth management and delivery of an implementation plan within the terms of the overall strategy and the different aspects of appraisal (links between actions and outcomes, benefits and costs, responsibilities of actors – economic, financial, environmental, reputational, risk appraisal, etc).

Where the strategy is implemented in a top-down manner, agreed governance arrangements will be required to ensure that issues around the scale, novelty and risk should be clarified in the management process, identifying the extent of delegated authorities and localised decision making to make commitments on behalf of the organisation, partnership or community. Where the strategy is more bottom-up and local actors are also at the sharp end of the delivery process, the implementation will be less

formal and more integrated and in such a context it is especially important to ensure that responsibilities are clear. In addition, it will also be important to harness energy and enthusiasm to develop capacity and capabilities at a local level for sustainable change to take hold.

In large organisations and partnerships, relevant processes for identifying “senior responsible owners” will be required, with approvals linked to future reporting arrangements that ensure the tracking of achievements over time, sharing of learning and ability to adjust operations as required. This will ensure that key decision makers and the leadership of the organisation are directly accountable for the implementation.

There is a need to avoid any concerns emerging around the planning and budgetary process. Projects being implemented should be devised and driven by truly strategic objectives rather than presented in a way that is seen to fit with the flexibility and scope built in to the strategy. The balance between doing the right things for the right reasons and just doing what fits and spends the budget is a very real issue in practice. The key question to ask is “are we doing the right things or are we doing things right?”

Safeguards will be required to be put in place to counter the risk of just doing things right. It is essential that things are done right but this should be related to the lead consideration of doing the right things. A key issue relates to the need for leadership. Leadership is required at a number of levels to ensure effective implementation. In devising the strategy development process and signing up for its implementation, the development executive and community representatives have the lead responsibility to take this forward within the organisational partnership as well as across partner and community organisations.

Implementation does not happen automatically; it requires drive and demonstration from leaders to motivate and mobilise appropriate behaviours throughout the organisations and community. Within lead executive organisations, senior management must present a clear commitment to deliver the strategy and put in place the methodology to achieve this in a consensual and inclusive manner. Links from the strategy to the operating plan and existing local plans are important in this regard.

Following preparation of the strategy, an “operating plan” process should ensure that projects and programmes are generated in line with the strategic priorities. Such a planning process should cover the short, medium and long term. The strategy and its effective delivery will emerge over time and it can take several years for an impact to occur.

There is a pragmatic requirement to produce indicators of progress in advance of impact measurement. The operating plan will cover the medium

term (say three years) and annual plans will manage short-term activities. This relationship goes beyond the implementation framework issues mentioned earlier, to cover the spectrum of issues from inputs to impacts as discussed in Chapter 3 of this handbook.

Chapter 3 discussed some of the issues surrounding the logical model (from inputs, to outputs, to outcomes, to impacts) and the difficulty of attributing specific effects to a specific intervention. The logical and realist approaches described in Chapter 3 share the need to work with the actors involved in the implementation of the local strategy interventions in order to identify causes and effects and the various learning loops that occur within the project team and the local community.

It is essential to set out how the local development strategy will progress and how this will be evaluated to show impacts in the long term. In the short term, inputs and activities are likely to be the easiest to estimate and these will form the focus of appraisal and monitoring arrangements and statements can be made on the economy of actions. However, many appraisals fail because they do not go beyond such considerations to cover medium-term outputs and the efficiency of delivery.

Further, consideration at the prior assessment stage of evaluation of effectiveness and long-term impacts is often missing due to the difficulties in doing this, and often the lack of skills to do it locally. Good prior assessment requires that all these stages are covered and that learning is seen as part of the community development process and longer term skills capacity building which is in itself often an objective of the strategy.

At the outset, it is important to summarise the main elements of the strategy to be pursued using this methodology and state how the lead organisations and local actors will actually make a difference if it is implemented successfully.

This means being clear to all staff, stakeholders and partnership actors about the following questions:

- What is our focus – what improvements are we trying to affect?
- How will we deliver this – priority issues and initiatives?
- What are the appropriate measures of progress – what are the benchmarks and comparators?
- Where do we stand currently in terms of the key challenges being addressed in the strategy – a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis that shows the extent of the gaps to be filled?

- What are the operating principles in terms of how we will engage with customers and partners?
- What is our role in terms of the appropriate types of interventions and investments that will deliver the desired change?
- What are the guiding principles of operation expected from all staff and demonstrated by senior staff commitment?
- Do we have the processes in place to facilitate strategy implementation, including budgetary and resource allocations, ICT, staff skills development and training, approval processes for decision making including local delegated authority levels?
- What are the relative factors affecting flexibility of approach across a territory to take account of factors such as geography, industry and other issues, such as the social and political context?
- How we will track delivery and report progress regularly?

An integrated strategic operation is a key element of successful implementation in a co-ordinated and effective manner (Table 5.1).

Implementing the strategy can be aided with the assistance of specific tools within the methodology that illustrate the linkages between strategic vision and desired achievements. This can be especially helpful for internal operational staff in organisations and also for bringing clarity to partnership working. It also allows the ongoing review of a portfolio of interventions to check appropriateness and manage implementation. Where necessary, interventions can be altered and the portfolio mix for implementation adjusted. The approach can be applied at varying levels of detail from the very local development strategy implemented in its own context to a strategy that links into the regional and national multi-partner strategies. The approach allows for the expansion of the range and portfolio of projects if strategic focus alters, for example in line with stakeholder policy changes and in response to local changes and shocks to the economy.

As a disciplined tool, the approach allows executive staff and volunteers to operate consistently and summarise core implementation activity. Recording of this information in a systematic and searchable way, through a bespoke database and knowledge management system or standard ICT solution, will improve the key data, information and knowledge for the effective management of strategy implementation. Such an approach allows the partners flexibility to respond to changes and challenges, yet maintain the focus to achieve the desired impacts. It also allows formative and summative forms of evaluation evidence to be gathered in a complementary way. The strategic operations approach shown in Table 5.1 can evolve over

Table 5.1. **Integrated strategic operations**

Strategy development and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on objectives • Leadership and commitment • Partners and communication • Identifying success factors • Tracking and reporting responsibilities
Operational alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear roles and responsibilities to deliver • Complementary objectives for interconnected roles • Review of resource availability • Drive for outcomes shown by key performance indicators (KPIs)
Resource assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing resources with partners • Identifying key skills and gaps • Budgetary profiles and forward planning • Allocation agreements based on priorities and outcomes • Driven by returns not distributions
Intervention programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appraisal criteria to determine actions • Formal guidance and governance materials signed • Monitoring methods for future decisions • Flexibility for effectiveness not expenditure targets
Feedback learning loops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes for generating new ideas and pipeline projects • Reviews form a baseline and at milestones • Self evaluation and benchmarking • Recognising capabilities and capacity development • Triple tracking: project, people, product
Strategy review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognisable outcomes and formalizing achievements • Progress defined by frameworks approach • Learning of lessons recorded and shared • Strategy refresh and adjustment of resources • Decisions based on impact

Source: Scottish Enterprise

time and assist communities and organisations (especially large formal implementation agencies) **beyond** the defined period of the strategy. This can be important as many impacts emerge beyond the strategy implementation period and require some longitudinal tracking to reveal the legacy effects. However the real challenge is to apply this approach without unnecessary bureaucracy and complexity.

Roles and responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities will vary according to the operational arrangements and the specific context of the strategy. In a small scale localised context, individuals often take on a number of roles in contrast to larger, regionally integrated development processes where more complex management systems may be put in place. In all cases, there should be transparent processes to facilitate the fast and efficient implementation of the strategy. Such processes and operating arrangements should also recognise the responsibilities attached to each role. In more complex cases, an agreed management and approvals process will be required. Liaison mechanisms should be established within the lead organisation (for example between the strategy directorate or corporate support and operations) to ensure focus and assist in the interpretation of strategic intent and contribution to delivering against agreed objectives. In smaller initiatives, and especially community-focused development, the learning gained from performing specific strategy implementation roles should be recognised as **part of the social capital** that is generated. The entire process can also act as a means of addressing development issues around a range of considerations including:

- Appraisal processes.
- Option assessment and prioritisation.
- Measurement approaches to gauge progress.
- Appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Reporting arrangements to community groups, senior management, board, ministers over time.

This applies to all levels of initiative although greater complexity will be expected for more integrated, high-cost and high-risk initiatives. For large, top-down development initiatives, a formal knowledge management system can be helpful for monitoring implementation at regular intervals and answering the basic questions, *e.g.* are we making progress as planned, on time and within budget? Self evaluation and peer reviews are especially important in bottom-up strategies where the capture of learning and knowledge is vital for long-term sustainable success.

The organisation or partnership should agree on individual board members as “champions” for strategic themes and key areas of intervention. For large initiatives, individual directors should then be identified to take direct responsibility for particular strategic objectives. In such cases, at the next level of management, senior responsible owners (SROs) should be

identified for programmes or major projects. The SROs will work with functional heads and staff to draw together resources required to implement each area of the strategy successfully.

At each level, there should be a clear understanding of individual roles and requirements to report on actions and achievements. There should be clear guidance on the timetable and milestones for this, set within the approvals process. This again reinforces SMART principles (be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound as defined by the UK Treasury) and in all cases it will be important to agree a baseline from which to measure activity and progress. This process should be a means of ensuring that management arrangements are in place and there is a route for tracking of achievements against the strategy. It is clear that in most cases the local development context will not require such extensive resource levels and management support. There are many good examples of local development strategies that have been implemented very effectively and efficiently without elaborate structures detailing precise roles, responsibilities and arrangements for decision making. However, every initiative will require clarity on the responsibilities of actors and the regular lines of reporting. Appropriate structures can be agreed between participants and reassurance gained by addressing a few basic questions including:

- Is there a clear connection between the strategic and operational planning processes (“Plans are not important, planning *is*.” – General Eisenhower)?
- Do we have stakeholder and partner alignment within the agreed timetable and resources available?
- Do we have the budget and other resources available and can we get approvals for partner contributions in place on time or do we need to reprioritise?
- Are project documents and project plans clear for delivery of the strategy?
- Can we access and assess basic data and performance information for trends and insights?
- Are we able to measure contribution, understand connections between initiatives and identify any unintended consequences and impacts?

Local management arrangements should be in place to cover these points within the overall development framework approach. For larger initiatives, organisational management within each functional directorate and all operational staff should be clear on the extent of acceptable activity and the limits to delegated authorities to avoid issues of resource constraint

or over-committing the organisation. Governance and controls are an essential element to shape behaviours and ensure alignment of individual actions. This will strengthen the links between strategy, operations and actions from the top and also from the bottom-up as individuals accept the responsibility in a way that stretches the organisation, community or partnership and the possibilities of the strategy itself. This should create a form of dynamic energy that finds a balance suitable for the strategic context and the key delivery priorities. In this way, a development culture emerges whereby individuals and organisations work together, accepting the wider appreciation of a shared responsibility for delivering the strategy that stretches from local operations to senior executive champions in organisations.

Obstacles to success

There is no simple model of organisation that will deliver success. It is the interaction of the combined resources, including skilled people, processes and technology, within an appropriate system that will create the dynamic necessary for successful implementation. At a small-scale local level, close relationships can produce a very effective model for implementation. Challenges often emerge in attempting to scale up such a model. As complexity increases with ambition and risk, bureaucracy expands and organisational structures can become difficult and costly to control. In such a context, agreeing the strategy and priority areas for intervention, identifying performance measurements and financial control systems, then aligning staff to utilise these systems is just the beginning. Some of the issues that arise and create obstacles to success include:

- Culture within the organisation.
- Confidence and skills of staff.
- Support to staff.
- Expertise available internally.
- Governance arrangements and bureaucracy.
- Guidance materials and their suitability.
- Politics internally.
- Personnel available.
- Capacity of the organisation.
- Resources available.
- Others.

Overcoming the obstacles

The combination, nature and extent of the obstacles will vary between organisations. However there are likely to be elements of some or all of the above in every context. In anticipation of such obstacles it is important to pre-empt events by promoting the following:

- A positive “can do” culture within the organisation.
- Generate confidence in the ability to deliver and the talent available within existing staff, partnerships and the wider community.
- Publicise the support available to staff in terms of leadership backing, training and development, ICT, rewards and incentives.
- Highlight specific skills and experts available internally and how to access their knowledge and experience.
- Emphasise non-bureaucratic systems that will help staff to do the job, rather than impede their delivery actions, and allow scope for extending the boundaries for innovative ideas that will deliver high-impact results quickly.
- Availability of quality, straightforward guidance written in a language that is friendly to the user rather than over-technical or patronising. Also ensure different types of materials are available in different formats to suit individuals with different levels of skills and experience as well as different learning styles.
- Leadership behaviours should be consistent and robust in dealing with internal tensions in a way that reinforces loyalty to the aims and objectives of the strategy.
- Staff development plans and prospects of accessing other additional resources as appropriate to ensure that the required personnel are available when needed.
- Confidence that the organisation has the capacity to deliver before setting out.
- Confidence that the resources will be made available and statements of support and commitment from partners, stakeholders, customers and commentators.
- Open channels of communication to pick up feedback and emerging issues within the culture of the organisation and a promise to act and report on the actions taken in response to any issues raised.

Box 5.1. Hawick and Eyemouth, Scotland

Hawick and Eyemouth are two small towns in Scotland which set up local strategic initiatives aligned with area and regional strategies. This rural area has a combined catchment population of around 20 000 people. The initiatives looked to co-ordinate inter-agency resources, build community confidence and capacity, help to deliver community economic development and small-scale infrastructure projects.

The five themes of the local strategy followed the five themes of the regional strategy. The communities created theme groups and theme leaders involving volunteers from within the settlements and a small committee provided direction and co-ordination of suggested project initiatives. An executive staff offered guidance and technical assistance although operations were devolved to a series of local project-related groups. The initiatives were positively evaluated in 2004.

The evaluation stated that in the absence of the partnerships, the implementation of the regional strategy and other publicly funded projects would be severely undermined. Some areas for improvement included the need to improve awareness of partnership activities, share success stories, identify succession strategies for themes not ready to **go it alone**, reduce bureaucracy and clarify the roles and activities of partnership. Other learning included the issue that some theme activities appeared to conflict with one another, especially where the disbursement of budget and changes in personnel were influencing factors. Further lessons were identified on issues surrounding reporting arrangements across different agencies and funders, clarity on monitoring to ensure that outputs are linked to the appropriate principal project and the need for a baseline measure of community capacity or confidence.

Source: Scottish Enterprise (2004), “Area Regeneration in Hawick and Eyemouth”.

All too often, local development strategies are prepared in isolation from, or in competition with, the strategies of neighbouring localities, regions and the national context. Many also fail to focus on the key drivers of growth and development. Such local strategies that are implemented in competition with neighbours are likely to result in diseconomies and inhibit long-term growth and development. Co-operation rather than competition is the way to capture synergies, generate scale benefits and deliver sustainable improvements. Individual local strategies have often been promoted as successful, yet evaluation at a later date reveals the difficulties in achieving sustainable success if the strategy has not been linked to other strategic initiatives in the surrounding localities and region. Where a local strategy has been implemented in isolation, it will be important to address a number of actions including the following:

- Promote and communicate the local strategy – tell the community and others about the strategy and its implementation.

- Identify and engage with neighbouring area representatives and related policy initiatives – open a dialogue to explain the local context for the strategy and further development possibilities.
- Share the lessons learned from the local strategy development and implementation process – what worked well, what had the most influence on the key drivers of change, how was it resourced, how will the evaluated link back to the prior assessment.
- Discuss possible links and collaboration opportunities – how can synergies be created with other strategies locally, regionally and nationally and what will this mean for individual local strategies.
- Forecast the future benefits post implementation and further benefits that could be created from possible collaboration, transfer or scaling up, or ending of the local strategy by linking with wider initiatives.

Such considerations highlight the difficult choices that will face local development strategies and the importance of linking into other initiatives. There are examples where this has been achieved successfully (Box 5.1 and Box 5.2).

Though it is never possible to cover all eventualities, there are several core elements and principles of an implementation plan that can be put in place to guide activities, overcome likely barriers and draw upon the learning mentioned above.

Core principles and elements of an implementation plan

An implementation plan is an essential, integral part of the overall strategy process. It will ensure that everyone is aware of the responsibilities in delivering the strategy through a series of activities within a defined time period. The implementation plan will also drive the monitoring of strategy delivery and the future evaluation of the strategy process and its achievements.

The key principles of an implementation plan include the need to:

- Establish a process that allows for development as part of the strategy rather than as a bolt-on plan. Chapter 4 examined the issues around providing a process for interaction and the process benefits are a central part of the gains from implementation. An interactive process facilitates such gains which in turn generate the momentum for successful delivery.

Box 5.2. City of Smolyn local economic development strategy 2004-07, Smolyn, Bulgaria

Smolyn is located in southern Bulgaria and had a population of 47 500 in 2001. The area faced several challenges including a declining and aging population and high levels of unemployment. The municipality comprised 8 local councils and 86 towns and villages. The city formed part of the Cities of Change Program in the central and eastern Europe region, supported by the World Bank and the Bertelsmann Foundation.

The local strategy implementation plan developed a set of projects relevant to the strategy objectives, outputs and outcomes. Some were brought forward as ideas, some as feasibility studies and others as part of ongoing activities. Projects were then assessed against available budgets and then against selection criteria for inclusion in a Multiyear Investment Plan using a series of templates to produce a project score and ranking for priority of implementation. The recommendation for decision makers was informed by six points:

- Proposal of the criteria based mostly on the city strategy.
- Methodology of project's evaluation and selection.
- Proposal from content of project application forms.
- Step-by-step description of the process.
- Procedure of a workflow with a calendar of responsibilities.
- Review of the project application and proposed ranking of projects to be included in the plan for next year.

Projects were then moved forward to the Multiyear Investment Program Commission for decision with monitoring and review details including measures for post-implementation evaluation.

Source: City of Smolyn (2004), "Local Economic Development Strategy 2004-07", Smolyn Municipal Government.

- Ensure clear articulation of what needs to be done, by whom and by when in order to deliver the strategy vision, objectives, priorities and individual activities. Chapter 4 also identified how this can sharpen recognition of the importance of interventions and their sequencing.
- Define leadership and supporting roles for delivery elements of the strategy and service elements such as consultation, communications and public promotion. This can consolidate and unify commitment.
- The plan's structure should follow the SMART approach.
- Responsibilities should be agreed and all participants should share the determination to deliver the strategy with the resources available.

- An inclusive approach should be pursued to involve staff, stakeholders, community, customers, other organisations, press and opinion formers as well as ensuring representation from industry, academia and government.
- Use baselines, benchmarks and milestones (as discussed in Chapter 3) to provide a roadmap for action and progress.
- Identify the key risks to implementation and use tools such as a risk register to set out the risk appetite; also, decide on the priority risk response areas and options for mitigation, especially for the mission-critical areas of the strategy.
- Publish the implementation plan as part of the strategy to reinforce ownership and promote transparency.
- Allow space to accommodate input from others and ability to respond to shocks or unforeseen influences, including changes in the operational or political context.

A number of these principles are highlighted in the example below of how to define an implementation plan (Box 5.3).

Implementation planning and management

All organisations require a capacity or readiness for change. Where this is lacking, it will have a negative impact on the strategy implementation process. The position should be assessed and resources aligned to address capability and capacity issues. This has implications for management and staff roles and the assessment should underpin change management and training initiatives introduced before and during the strategy implementation process.

Good practice guidance materials and ongoing training and staff development are essential intrinsic components of successful implementation. As is promotion of a “can do” attitude, renewed visions of success along the way, backed with evidence showing updated examples of what worked and profiles of successful implementation. Enlightened organisations may take an integrated approach to such matters and involve staff in the gathering and dissemination of materials that act to inspire confidence and encourage consistent appraisal behaviours over the life of the strategy process.

Box 5.3. Defining an implementation plan, an example from the United Kingdom

Define structure – an implementation plan can take a number of forms. The product may depend to a significant extent on what other stakeholders need or want. The more specific a plan can be, the better. As a minimum an implementation plan should be clear about who is responsible for delivering what, by when.

Define the outputs/recommendations and the tasks required for implementation – clarifying what is required and breaking this down into specific actions. For example any single conclusion from a project may lead to a range of outcomes, a number of specified outputs, and many clear activities and deliverables. The aim should be to define specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed (SMART) tasks.

Define the milestones – be clear about the critical outputs and outcomes and the key milestones to achieving them.

Define the sequence – some tasks and outputs may be inter-dependent. It is important to map out the inter-dependencies and ensure that tasks and events are properly sequenced.

Clarify and agree responsibilities – the process of designing and agreeing an implementation plan can form a key component of the overall objective of securing stakeholder buy-in. Ultimately the responsibilities for delivering tasks should be clear and agreed by all key stakeholders.

Identify potential risks to delivery – there are likely to be risks to the delivery of the strategy. By conducting a risk-mapping exercise, to identify the likelihood and impact of potential risks, plans can be put in place to mitigate any high-probability, high-impact risks.

Be clear about the monitoring and evaluation arrangements – part of the implementation planning process should consider what success might look like. A plan might specify success criteria and key issues and mechanisms for monitoring and measuring progress; alternatively a plan could be clear about the need for the lead department to design a monitoring and evaluation framework within a specified timetable.

Document agreements – the process of putting together an implementation plan, and securing agreement from key stakeholders, will be critical in ensuring that conclusions are put into practice. The outcome of this process should be written up and shared with stakeholders as a document through which further progress can be monitored and chased.

Source: UK Prime Minister’s Office, Strategy Unit, “Strategy Survival Guide”.

Sources of implementation management guidance exist and the best is tailored to the needs of the organisation. Some countries have a set process that is used for major projects, strategic investment and procurement decisions.

The implementation plan for the strategy (and individual project plans) should identify clearly:

- A succinct statement of project or programme objectives for the intervention.
- How they will be delivered.
- The main risks to successful delivery and how they will be managed, including options for mitigating actions.
- Resources planned and required in terms of finance, personnel, equipment and partnerships.
- Who the project manager and senior responsible owner for delivering the project or programme, in whole and in its constituent parts, are.
- A timetable for delivery with key milestone dates for outputs and review dates.
- Mechanisms for tracking performance and incorporating learning and good practice. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

Implementation management for larger local development strategies should address a number of specific practical considerations as follows:

- Clear, rationale and SMART objectives setting out the timeframe for implementation and how to recognise when to exit successfully.
- Clear lines of reporting and decision making agreed.
- Stakeholders and partners identified with agreed terms of engagement, including board representation where appropriate, and means of conflict resolution.
- Project management framework in place covering:
 - Formal project plans including phases of delivery.
 - Use of a recognised project management tool such as PRINCE (**PR**ojects **IN** a **C**ontrolled **E**nvironment).
 - Project documentation and application procedures in place.
 - Baselines, benchmarks and milestones identified for measuring progress.
 - Expenditure and costs set out in the plan.
 - Data tracking and KPIs in place and capable of capturing required management information.

- Risk register that is reviewed and updated regularly with responsibility for ownership and management of risks allocated to individuals.
- Financial reporting arrangements linked into contractual commitments and organisational reporting cycles.
- Forecasts and targets set to link inputs to outputs with regular review dates and consideration for quality of outputs against an agreed specification.
- Procedures for tracking partner contributions, performance and dispute resolution.
- Compliance issues such as state aid considerations.

PRINCE is a process-based approach for project management developed by the UK Office of Government Commerce and is now recognised as an international standard. It sets out the principles of good project management that can be summarised as:

- A project will have a definite start and end within a finite process.
- Management is necessary for a project to be successful.
- All parties must be committed to success, recognising their respective roles and responsibilities.

Implementation reviews can ensure that effective delivery is happening, that appropriate governance and control processes are in place to report on performance and analyse variances. They can also check that planned targets and benefits are on track and risks are managed. Such reviews can be useful where a strategy embodies many projects or programmes being delivered over a period of years with several reviews being possible over the period of implementation. A review could be carried out by a group of peers from within the local community or organisations(s) or by an external review team. A report would then be prepared identifying named individuals with responsibility for following up on specific actions identified. In cases of complex or controversial initiatives, external facilitators are recommended for independence and objectivity. The implementation review process should focus on how to develop better projects with better delivery, within the context of the strategy. In practice this should mean less reliance on tight procedures and thus more emphasis on roles and responsibilities with individuals being empowered to apply judgement and experience.

Clear processes and good project and programme management are central to the delivery of strategy objectives and staff require the necessary skills and understanding to design and deliver projects and programmes successfully. The local context for each strategy (including scale of

ambition, risk, complexity, range of interventions, etc.) will set the tone for the appropriate balance between governance and guidance. Principles of clarity, consistency and connection are relevant here. These principles applied to the implementation mix of projects and programmes will lead to a **route map** for the implementation process itself. By generating this process internally, the community or organisation can have a head start towards successful implementation and overcoming the obstacles to success mentioned earlier.

The route map can be reinforced by facilitation, animation, guidance and training. Indeed this is often essential where there is a lack of suitable skilled people in a locality. A training and development programme for actors in the community and support staff can be built around the principles of successful and sustainable strategy implementation. The style of training and mode of delivery can include contact and engagement to develop trust and a shared sense of purpose; presentations, practical workshops and role playing; written materials and online guidance, including self-assessment materials. The guidance should be consistent with, and appropriate to, the local context and local governance levels (including clear levels of delegated authority). In some cases, such as the example from Scotland in Box 5.1, volunteers from the local community can act as theme champions for an area of the local strategy and a local committee can be empowered to take operational responsibility. Public agencies providing resources should put in place appropriate support executives and management advice to facilitate the development process. Links can also be built in to access other information and guidance sources as well as **developing networks** between local actors and between areas and agencies.

A series of “how to” guides, workbooks, templates and checklists can be useful and made readily accessible on the Internet. These can be used to develop the stories of success and experiences to be shared with others in an open learning environment. Discussion can evolve and develop to form communities of practice. Communities of practice can become powerful vehicles for cultural change and maintenance of good appraisal in delivery of the development strategy. They are also a means of identifying **mentors and experts** to consult on specific topics. Experienced practitioners can be engaged to assist or mentor colleagues and such experience is invaluable in reconciling potential challenges such as linking resource allocation and strategy aims. Trainers, professional bodies and chambers of commerce can play an important role in devising appropriate materials and training programmes. Such programmes require targeting at the needs of individuals rather than attempt to train everyone in everything.

The detail of implementation must sit within an overall logical, clear and confident framework for implementation. There are examples where the

strategy and its implementation have been devised after learning from what did not work in previous approaches. The World Bank has been prominent in sharing learning and successful approaches, especially with transition economies. One example of such learning comes from the Municipality of Lezha in Albania. Albania has a strategy for local economic development in various municipalities under the consistent framework of the Developing Enterprise Locally through Techniques and Alliances (DELTA) programme, supported by the World Bank, SOROS and FLAG. The goal of the programme is to develop strategic action plans that will have an impact on the restructuring of local economic development policies at the municipal level, especially those relating to the development of the private sector.

The development and implementation of the strategy for Lezha recognised that Albania was now open to international and national competition for attracting business and creating jobs. The mayor and his team in Lezha realised that the local development strategy required a clearer direction, focus and management of available resources. Previous efforts to attract economic activity into the area had been disparate, uncoordinated, unfocused and largely unsuccessful. Local initiatives had been competing and not linked to regional and national strategies. At the same time inadequate investment in basic infrastructure, poor physical environment, lack of supporting services and poor governance and financial incentives all compounded the inability to implement a successful local development strategy.

This did however lead to a refocusing effort around small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as the driver of wealth creation, employment and sustainable growth in the long term. To devise and implement a local strategy based on this realisation required a new approach, new working practices and functioning partnerships, new involvement with the community, leadership and reliable local governance and a sense of civic pride. The resultant strategic planning process was part of the new approach and took 16 months. The planning process produced a new foundation for action by establishing:

- A professional assessment of the local economic base and the factors affecting local development.
- Agreement to actively review these factors.
- An understanding of the opportunities for growth and obstacles to local development.
- SWOT analysis to co-ordinate sustainable actions.
- Review of human and natural resources available.

- Recognition of the importance of local history, heritage, competitive advantages and needs of the community.
- Acceptance that local leadership is essential in accepting responsibility for implementation in the medium term.
- Acknowledgement that development must balance economic, community and quality of life issues.
- Implementation must be pursued in a holistic integrated process.
- The locality must protect and support businesses that already exist as well as attract new enterprises.
- Only a systemic approach can ensure consensus of the community and generate a common vision for co-ordinated effort.

The strategy was published in 2006 (“Strategic Plan for Economic Development”, Municipality of Lezha, May 2006). It was recognised that the timeframe for implementation is longer than the political mandate and therefore guarantees will be required for project funding, consistent governance and continuous engagement. This was put in place alongside monitoring arrangements to produce quarterly and annual implementation reviews. A commission has been set up to allow revision of the implementation plan as required and local groups can be appointed to assist with assessing emerging issues.

This is an example of an implementation approach that has followed on from the commitments made during a detailed and inclusive strategy development process. It also grew out of learning from previous mistakes.

Conclusions

There will always be obstacles to success and this chapter discussed ways of identifying and overcoming barriers to successful implementation. This requires vigilance and it is important to link local strategy implementation to other strategic initiatives locally, regionally and nationally. Availability of skills locally to deliver an implementation plan and an integrated series of operational projects is always an issue and it is important to see the strategy implementation process as part of the local learning and capacity building effort.

Such an approach will build cumulative learning and allow lessons to be shared at a practical and strategic level to secure sustainable change. For this to happen, it is important to focus delivery efforts on the key drivers of growth and change. Several case study examples have been presented from around the world to illustrate aspects of the implementation process and to

highlight learning that can be applied in a practical way to other local development strategies.

Implementation issues are central to the entire strategy development and delivery process. As such, strategy development must ensure that the details of implementation are considered seriously in advance of action. This is best done in a structured, co-operative manner using the approach, principles and tools described in this chapter. Central to this is the preparation of an implementation strategy and practical framework that sets out clear roles and responsibilities rooted within the agreed aims and objectives of the local development strategy.

Implementation of the Strategy – Summary of Do’s and Don’ts

Do’s

- Communicate clearly and devise a clear implementation plan that links local actions to the strategic goals.
- Have strong commitment and leadership, such that senior management “walk the talk”.
- Have clear measures that demonstrate progress towards achievement of strategic objectives through an operating plan as well as delivering robust projects and programmes.
- Have review milestones and progress measures defined within the implementation and management plan.
- Report progress, encouraging and rewarding good behaviour, and impose sanctions for inappropriate behaviour to ensure accountability at all levels in the organisation or partnership.
- Conduct regular checks to ensure a focus on things that drive economic development and change.
- Recycle learning and establish communities of practice to encourage a culture that buys in to the strategy
- Ensure that partner’s actions are aligned, as the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; demonstrate how local actions contribute to the delivery of wider strategic objectives.
- Demonstrate how implementation delivers change through people, process and projects.

Don’ts

- Don’t think that everyone is a strategist and/or try to turn everyone into a strategist.
- Don’t stifle innovation and flexibility.
- Don’t undervalue experience against theory.
- Don’t make processes overcomplicated.
- Don’t have frequent changes of performance metrics (measurements).
- Don’t raise expectations of short-term impact, yet don’t avoid the issues of measuring contribution.
- Don’t underestimate the importance of skills development and training.
- Don’t allow a gap to grow between strategic and public relations messages on the one hand and staff, customer and stakeholder understanding and commitment on the other: There must be a shared vision and co-ordinated action to gain momentum for achieving the desired change.

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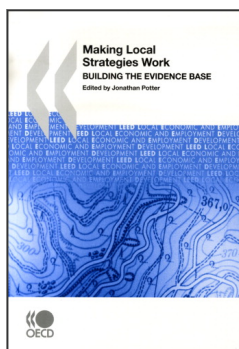
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