

Guidance on the adoption and spread of innovation and improvement



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Natasha Swinscoe
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Introduction

It is estimated that across the UK, a third of healthcare improvement projects never spread beyond their particular unit, a further third are embedded across their organisation but never spread further than that, and only the final third are spread across their own and other similar organisations.

Successfully spreading improvements and ensuring changes are sustained requires overcoming numerous challenges, such as:

1. Creating an awareness of why the change is needed
2. Ensuring those involved have a desire to support and participate in the change
3. Knowledge of how to bring about change
4. The skills and resources to bring about the change
5. Ensuring processes to sustain the change

The guidance below sets out suggestions to be considered for the successful adoption and spread of innovation and improvement projects.

If you would like further guidance on this subject, please contact Health Innovation West of England at healthinnowest.contactus@nhs.net

1. Create an awareness of why the change is needed

Ensure the proposed project addresses a health and care priority and there is evidence to demonstrate a need for wider adoption and spread.

Collect evidence to articulate this need and proposed change with a short compelling explanation, i.e. the 'why, what and how?'

- Does the proposed change support, lead or align with local strategic initiatives?
- Does the proposed change reflect the successful engagement of key stakeholders, including patients and members of the public?
- Does the proposed change address inclusion and diversity and consider the impact on equalities communities (as defined by the Public Sector Equality Duty)
- Does the evidence for the proposed change demonstrate tangible improvements to the health and care of local communities? Does it suggest a value to the taxpayer?

2. Ensure those involved have a desire to support and participate in the change

- Have you identified at least one department or organisation who you believe will be willing to be the first adopter of the innovation or improvement?
- Have you identified senior level sponsorship in the adopting department or organisation?
- Is there a senior stakeholder who has the influence to help overcome local challenges and barriers (including other leaders and staff)?

3. Secure the knowledge of how to bring about change

- Do you have a robust and clear project plan?
- Is there a clearly described focus on the behaviours and/or systems that need to change to achieve successful implementation and future sustainability of the innovation or improvement?
- Does the plan set out the actions required to implement the innovation or improvement within realistic timeframes – including a contingency where appropriate?
- Has baseline data been collected, and do you know the measures you will use throughout the project to measure the change? It helps the team to have regular data, it is inspiring when things are going well, and it helps identify that you might need to change (using PDSA – see below) if the data is less favourable.
- Has the screening process been carried out to assess what impact the innovation or improvement may have on people from equalities groups and if a full Equalities Impact Assessment is needed?
- Have appropriate public and patient contributors been identified to provide ideas and critique from a non-professional perspective and to support implementation and longer-term sustainability of the innovation or improvement?
- Have all key stakeholders been identified and is there a compelling story to engage them in supporting the project?
- Do all relevant stakeholders agree with the project aim and the plan?
- Does the plan include a clear, coherent, and realistic approach for communicating with all key stakeholders on progress?
- Do you have a robust and clear evaluation strategy on how you will measure the impact of the project from the outset?
- Does the evaluation plan capture appropriate data to demonstrate that the innovation or improvement has been achieved?
- Does the plan include an understanding of the assumptions and external factors that will affect successful implementation and future sustainability of the innovation or improvement (eg availability of resources, competing priorities)?
- Does the plan reflect 'measures of impact on equalities communities' in accordance with an existing Equalities Impact Assessment?
- Does the plan identify risks and issues (including potential barriers) and the agreed mitigating actions?
- Will there be opportunities to test and strengthen implementation – for example, a plan to use a specific improvement methodology such as Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA)?

4. Identify the skills and resources to bring about change

- Do you have the ability to implement desired behaviour or system change?
- Is there sufficient resource available and allocated to support implementation and local adoption of the innovation or improvement?
- Has an appropriate local clinical, academic or management champion, with sufficient gravitas and influencing skills, been identified to lead the implementation and local adoption (and maybe local adaption where required) of the innovation or improvement?
- Are there plans for any relevant staff training/education to support the implementation and adoption, where appropriate?
- Have relevant organisational resources (including engaged, empowered, and capable team members) been secured to ensure implementation and adoption can be achieved – with adequate contingency?
- Is funding available to pay for dissemination and rolling out the innovation or improvement?
- Could others adapt the innovation or improvement to help support its sustainability?

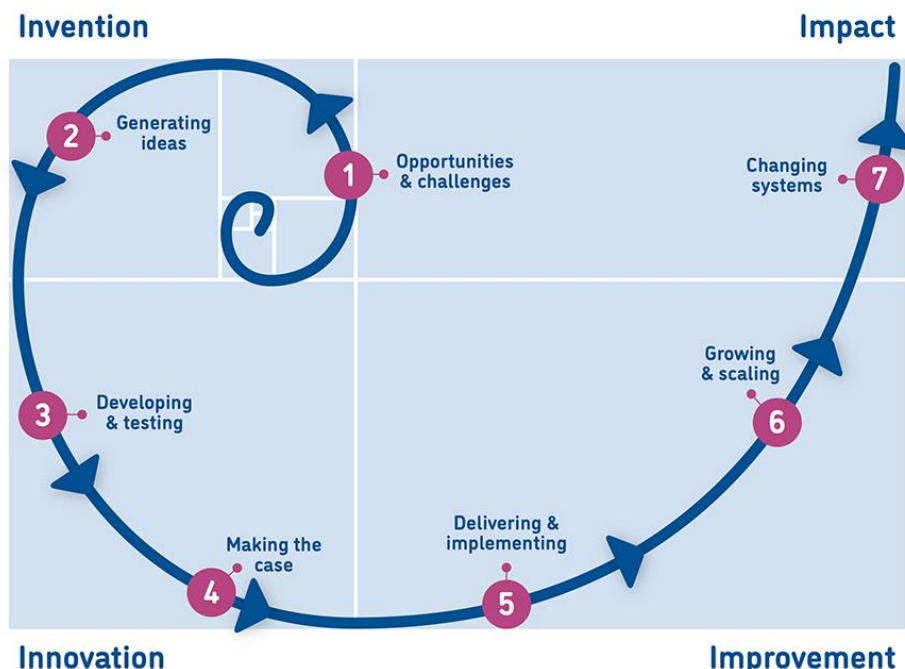
5. Ensure the processes to sustain the change

- Is there strong and effective leadership in place to spread the innovation or improvement? For example, has a relevant expert with sufficient gravitas and influencing skills been identified to lead the spread?
- If funding is required for the relevant expert, has this been sourced and confirmed?
- Have any other necessary resources (people, funding, etc) from outside the adoption organisation been identified and secured?
- Is there a plan to capture new learning from the spread process?

NB Experience shows that the adoption of new and innovative ways of working are best seen as part of the service improvement rather than a process of, 'rolling out,' a proven approach.

The innovation journey goes from identifying opportunities for an innovation, coming up with ideas, prototyping and testing, right through to implementing your innovation in real-world settings and scaling to achieve system-wide impact. The West of England Academy has compiled free resources to support each of the four phases of the innovation journey: invention, innovation, improvement and impact. This is not a linear journey – some projects may jump back and forth between phases.

Our Academy covers the entire innovation journey, from ideation to implementation. [Explore the various stages of the innovation process](#) and learn how to develop creative ideas, prototype and test solutions, and gather evidence to drive meaningful change.



Adapted from Nesta 2016

Resources to support innovation and improvement projects

The West of England Academy provides a range of free resources to help you gain knowledge and develop essential skills for innovative thinking and working. We promote the use of quality improvement methodologies to support delivery of better patient care. This [case study video](#) demonstrates how QI can be used to improve patient care.

Creative Problem-Solving Toolkit

This toolkit is accompanied by a selection of eight tools with explanatory videos and guidance notes. They are designed to give a framework for the creative problem-solving process.

- [Clarify the challenge](#)
- [Generate and select ideas](#)
- [Plan for implementation](#)

Quality Improvement Toolkit

Access our free [library of Quality Improvement resources](#) including our step-by-step [QI workbook](#). These will help you carry out and sustain changes that enhance patient safety and improvements in your area of work/innovation.

Watch our [‘on demand’ QI webinars](#) and access accompanying resources to support your QI journey.

Evidence and Evaluation Resources

Evaluation can help to consider what works, what does not and how things can be improved. Evaluation can range from being quite simple service evaluations to complex evaluative research projects and each service will require a different approach. Our videos, resources and case studies provide more information.

References

- [NHS Confederation: Scaling innovation within healthcare systems: practical considerations \(2023\)](#)
- [Scale up the best to achieve Long-Term plan goals \(Paul Burstow, 27 February 2019\)](#)
- [The Spread and Sustainability of Quality Improvement in Healthcare – Quality Improvement Hub](#)
- [PReCePT Programme Lessons Learnt – West of England Academic Health Science Network](#)
- [Adoption and Spread of Innovation in the NHS – The Kings Fund \(Ben Collins, 16 January 2018\)](#)
- [The spread challenge: How to support the successful uptake of innovations and improvements in healthcare – The Health Foundation \(Tim Horton, John Illingworth and Will Warburton, September 2018\)](#)
- [Papoutsi, Chrysanthi, Trisha Greenhalgh, and Sonja Marjanovic. *Approaches to Spread, Scale-Up, and Sustainability. of Elements of Improving Quality and Safety in Healthcare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.](#)

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