



15 Days

A practical guide to leading accelerated, high-impact collaboration in the Irish Civil Service.



This report draws on the experience of a whole-of-government project led by a small team of civil servants in Ireland. All views expressed are the authors' own.

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02 Foreword from the Centre for Effective Services

'Fifteen Days' is one of the resources to be produced as part of the Goal Programme for Public Service Reform. The Programme began in 2015 and involves CES partnering with government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland, to support them to deliver on their ambitious public service reform agendas. The Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project is one of nine projects in the Goal Programme to introduce and test new approaches in addressing some of the most pressing social policy challenges faced by public services in Ireland today.

A growing body of international and national data on the mental health of our young people is of huge concern to us all. Rates of youth suicide and self-harm in Ireland are among the highest in Europe. This report tells the story of how a cross government, collaborative approach was used to put a spotlight on the issue of youth mental health. The Pathfinder approach was based on a collective vision and commitment to tackling this issue, involving all relevant departments and stakeholders, and encouraging leadership at all levels. The views and perspectives of those engaging with, and delivering youth mental health services were central to the approach.

One of our observations from our work in CES is the need for joining up departments, agencies and services to improve outcomes for people using services. In an effort to deepen our understanding of 'whole of government approaches' we reviewed examples of joined up and cross government working in other jurisdictions around the world and explored some of the experiences and thinking on skills, organisational culture, capacity and structures which policy makers must attend to if a 'whole of government' approach is to have any chance of succeeding. These are some of the challenges and opportunities explored by the Pathfinder team.



“The idea of a pathfinder has two purposes. Firstly, it involves carving a new route, or way, through unexplored territory. The second purpose is to provide guidance for those who may have to make a similar journey.”

The idea of a pathfinder has two purposes. Firstly, it involves carving a new route, or way, through unexplored territory. The second purpose is to provide guidance for those who may have to make a similar journey. We commend the team for their courage in stepping into new ground, and their willingness to share their experience so openly at such an early stage of the journey. Implementation of the recommendations made by the team will ultimately test whether the approaches used will help to improve mental health outcomes for young people.

The report is an honest account of the real challenges presented by collaboration, easy on paper but much harder to execute in the busy, messy world of policy making. While the focus of the work is youth mental health, the approach and tools will be of interest and relevance to a wide range of policy challenges which require a collaborative approach.

We welcomed the opportunity to be part of the Pathfinder project team, to support colleagues in the public service in planning how services can work together to improve mental health outcomes for young people in Ireland. Our role involved providing access to both national and international expertise, knowledge of how the issue has been approached in other jurisdictions, practical tools and support in using and analysing data.

One of the commitments of the Goal programme is to share learning from the experience of new approaches in public services across government in Ireland and Northern Ireland. We thank the authors for capturing this experience in a way that is insightful, engaging and offers practical guidance for colleagues and other government departments charged with collaborating on problems of similar scale and complexity.

Nuala Doherty
Director, CES

04 Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the pathfinder team and core team who drove the project; the stakeholders who contributed to it; and the senior leaders who gave the permission; direction and encouragement required to make it a success.

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on Youth Mental Health,
Challenge Panels and
Interviewees.

We are very grateful to all those who reviewed and commented on this report. But the views, opinions, errors and omissions are those of the authors alone.



06 About the authors

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Peter Thomas is an expert adviser to governments and public service organisations on delivery, capability, performance and reform. He also works with boards, management and teams to help them develop their strategy, business model and capability. He is an expert designer and facilitator of group collaboration and engaging workshops. He is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Government, where he led the Institute's research on civil service reform, publishing numerous reports. Prior to joining the Institute, he was Director of Strategy and Change at the Ministry of Justice. Previously, he developed and ran the Capability Review Programme in the Cabinet Office and was Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. Earlier in his career he ran public sector research programmes at the Audit Commission and was a senior leader in local government.



Andrew Templeman runs his own consultancy, focusing on innovative forms of engagement that build capability, drive delivery and reinforce change in and across central and local government. He is a highly experienced facilitator and programme designer. Recent clients include the Irish Government, DFID, the Cabinet Office, HMRC/HMT, Suffolk CC, Westminster CC, the Health Foundation, Crown Commercial Service and the Department of Health. He has worked with LB Haringey and LB Barking and Dagenham to help establish internal units with 'Delivery Unit' culture, routines, tools and techniques. He is director of the highly successful programme of Cabinet Office Policy Schools (COPS) and the different departmental versions of the programme that have flowed from this. Other projects include work with Border Force assessing their transformation plan, the Big Lottery Fund, Institute for Government, the Wellbeing 'What Works' programme, LB Lambeth, Suffolk CC, the Office of the Rail Regulator and Serco. Previously, he was a senior civil servant in the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. Outside the Civil Service he has been a director of Serco Consulting and a senior manager in the Audit Commission and local government.



08 Summary

Some of the toughest challenges facing governments seem intractable. They go beyond the capacity of any one organisation to understand and respond to, and there is often disagreement about the causes of the problems and the best way to tackle them.

The challenge of improving the mental well-being of young people in Ireland is one such complex issue. The Government picked this topic to be one of three high-profile pathfinder projects at the heart of its ambitious Civil Service Renewal Plan.

A small team in the Department of Health was charged with finding new ways to work together on this issue. Convinced that there was a better model than establishing a two-year committee, they decided to use an accelerated, collaborative problem-solving model and a diverse team of frontline staff and policy-makers.

This report is the story of how the 12 pathfinder group members used their 15 days of working together to get to the heart of a problem. It shows how the group came up with a small number of actions that could have a disproportionately positive impact on the underlying problem, and it is the story of how they engaged key Secretaries General to act on their findings and recommendations.

The report and supporting toolkit published on the CES website provide a 'how to' case study and guide for senior officials in governments who are trying to work across boundaries to develop and implement policies on 'wicked issues'.

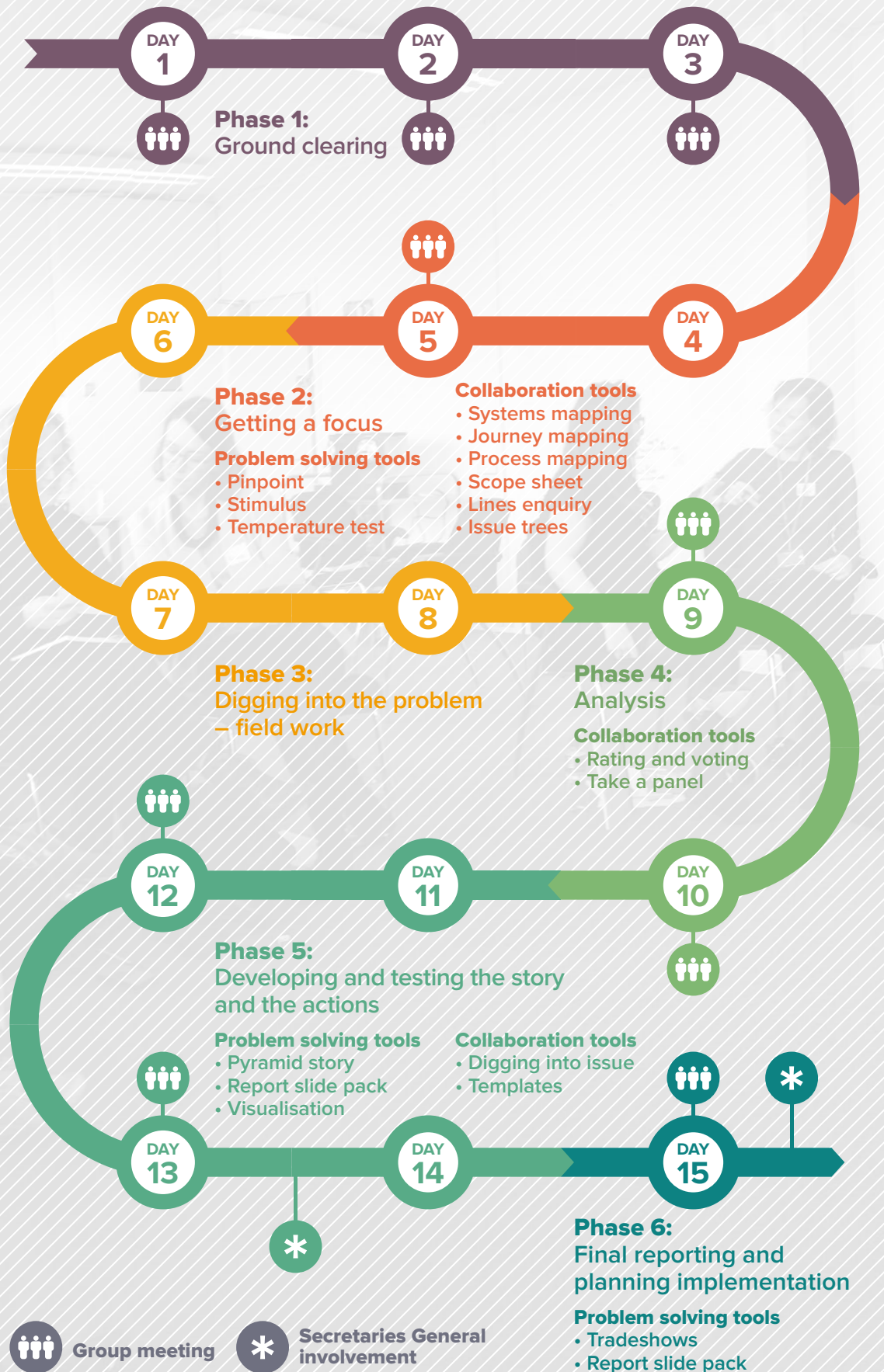
A NEW MODEL OF WORKING: ACCELERATED, COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

The design and methods used drew on models of collaborative problem-solving that were first adapted for use in government in Britain. In particular, the 'Priority Review' model developed by the British Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) in the 2000s formed the foundation for the design of phases two to five, augmented by other team-based capability-building models.

The Pathfinder group was composed of nominees from each of the participating organisations. Each member of the team made the same commitment: to work on the pathfinder project one day a week for six months.

A distinctive element of this Pathfinder project was the emphasis put on collaboration, group working and expert facilitation. The project introduced new problem-solving and collaboration tools to the group and aimed to equip them to build these tools into their personal practice, learning and doing in parallel.

EXHIBIT 1. THE PATHFINDER PROCESS: SIX PHASES AND SEVENTEEN TOOLS



Source: Peter Thomas

STEP 1:
GROUND-CLEARING
MONTHS 1 AND 2, DAYS 1, 2 AND 3

This was a slow-going gathering exercise – reviewing policies, data, evidence and research reports to build a picture of what was happening across a complex interconnected system. At the end of the process the story which this work revealed was a complex one, with one clear message: simply getting government to work together better would not be sufficient; solutions would require a system-wide view.

STEP 2:
GETTING A FOCUS
MONTH 3, DAYS 4 AND 5

This phase was about building a collective view of the problem we were trying to solve, and getting under the broad sentiments so often used to describe the challenge: ‘under-resourced’, ‘systemic’, etc. It involved an initial burst of two whole-group days: kicking off the project, sharing tools and approaches, and bringing some stimulus in from the frontline. This phase involved a mix of working in small teams of three around a spine of intensive one-day workshops with the whole pathfinder group.

One of the key success factors for an accelerated problem-solving review is establishing the right scope. To help them do this the pathfinder group took a fresh look at service user/client experiences, mapping both service user/client journeys and the system, and heard from people in the system.

STEP 3:
DIGGING INTO THE PROBLEM, FIELDWORK
MONTH 4, DAYS 6, 7 AND 8

With only three whole days for fieldwork we had to use our time wisely, where we were likely to get insights into the most significant problems and ideas about potential solutions. Our fieldwork was designed to collect, test and challenge the types of data and intelligence you can’t get by sitting in an office in government. Policy may be national, but delivery is always local.

Fieldwork was energising and stimulating for the group:

“Brilliant and scary – face to face works best... Informative, inspiring. Brought it to life... Most enjoyable and informative aspect... Insightful and balanced perspectives obtained. Impact of these perspectives very profound.”

STEP 4:
ANALYSIS AND OUTLINE SOLUTIONS
MONTH 5, DAYS 9 AND 10

This was the crucial pivot point in the project. We had to move from gathering evidence and insights to analysing, processing and challenging our findings – and find a structure that could unite our three sets of findings into a single story. This phase was critical to process the thinking of individual team members and build a shared view of what we had learned and what it could mean for the system. We then brainstormed ideas about the areas for action that would have the impact we sought.

“This utterly underlines what we want from pathfinders... There is no question of stopping... The work is endorsed. I’d urge you to take on board our informal comments and decide where you want to go next.”

**STEP 5:
DEVELOPING AND TESTING THE STORY
AND THE ACTIONS**

MONTH 6, DAYS 11, 12 AND 13

Before concluding the process, it was essential to seek as much external challenge as possible. We used structured approaches to test and challenge the logic of the story and the quality of the key evidence and analyses that underpin it. This is a very different discipline from the standard drafting and crafting of prose in civil services. As the thinking developed, the group tested emerging findings with panels of frontline staff, stakeholders and decision-makers who joined the workshops acting as ‘critical friends’. Six areas for action emerged from this phase – a shortlist of actions that could have a disproportionately positive impact on outcomes for young people.

**STEP 6:
FINAL REPORTING AND PLANNING
IMPLEMENTATION**

MONTHS 7 AND 8, DAYS 14 AND 15

There is a well-established style and format for presenting proposals to senior leaders in most civil services. This format tends to be static, passive, unengaging and too often unproductive. Our group resolved to run these sessions as they ran the rest of the project – actively, innovatively and in an engaging way. It felt risky and unusual to make Secretaries General stand up, move around the room, vote with sticky dots, and sit in a semi-circle for discussions.

However, the Secretaries General liked the approach and the content, and agreed to take the areas for action forward:

“I’m really impressed, absolutely fantastic work. You’ve asked hard questions very differently. The session was intriguing and interesting and you had the courage to do this.”

“This utterly underlines what we want from pathfinders... There is no question of stopping... The work is endorsed. I’d urge you to take on board our informal comments and decide where you want to go next.”

The momentum created by the project was kept up by the demand for another session with Secretaries General before taking proposals to the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB).

FACTORS CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT

The six most strongly positive success factors were:

1. **Mandate from seniors.**¹ *“Direct line to top – totally different quality of conversation... Encouraging and energising... Good to get the feedback and know where to adjust.”*
2. **Openness to team think.** *“New and different perspectives... Team members bringing their own perspective based on analysis – letting go of ‘my organisation thinks.’”*
3. **Fieldwork.**
4. **Whole-group days.** *“So much fun, so productive! New tools and techniques... Team forming. Would not have achieved result without this.”*
5. **Internal support (core team).** *“We were listened to... team kept the momentum going.”*
6. **External support.** *“Really fantastic. Brought out so much from the group... Needed this expertise to guide the process – essential... New techniques, inspired confidence.”*

Three success factors received more mixed views:

1. **Clarity of expectations.** While positive about the shared vision and the clarity of process and outcomes, time pressure from their day to day work was a problem.
2. **Pace.** Key to keeping focus and momentum, but some points in the process needed more time: preparing the presentation, more days to do some of the key analytical steps, more time to focus and set up fieldwork.
3. **Group composition.** Views were positive about the mix, energy and commitment of group members, but more input from some parts of the system would have helped.

BUILDING CAPABILITY THROUGH PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

The nervous but positive energy that the group felt at the beginning turned into excitement, pride, hope and enrichment by the end of the last workshop – but also relief that it was over (almost) and exhaustion from the pace and stretch of the project.

The reflections of the team members on what they would now do differently in their day to day work are a tribute to the power of learning by doing. They are the principles of accelerated, collaborative problem-solving.

¹ All comments in italics are verbatim quotes from the group's feedback.

EXHIBIT 2. WHAT WILL GROUP MEMBERS DO DIFFERENTLY?

Think before I leap

“Spend more time on scoping, but don’t try to get to perfection before acting... Do a bit more planning.”

Use the power of teams

“Work through teams. Accept it takes time for right dynamic to form... Introduce interactive methods when working in groups.”

Get out more

“Get out more – fieldwork every month... Will consult and seek different system perspectives more... Enhanced understanding of the viewpoint of other departments should allow better framing when seeking cooperation.”

Take some risks

“Not to be afraid of discussing things no matter how wacky it may be... Set wide objectives and a date.”

Use the processes and tools

“I really loved the freshness of the process and methodology...All the facilitation skills, problem-solving approaches, pinpoint, the presentation style in the pack – visually very impressive... Use pinpoint and issue trees... initially sceptical – now championing... I will take away new facilitation skills and tools to structure group working.”

Listen and empathise

“Bit more sympathetic and aware of the challenges that others face. Less of a silo approach to complex cases... Listen to everyone. Changing one element will have impacts for other people. Let go of silo mentality more.”

Ask questions, be upfront

“Ask for clarification more upfront.. Ask silly questions!! Maybe nobody has asked them... Communicate concerns earlier... The need to communicate intentions and listen to a) what is happening and b) ask more questions to increase understanding.”

14 1. Introduction

THE CHALLENGE OF COMPLEX POLICY ISSUES

Some of the toughest challenges facing governments seem intractable: social exclusion; childhood obesity; mental well-being; poverty; drug and alcohol abuse; young people not in education, training or employment; cybercrime; re-offending; supporting people with multiple long-term conditions; climate change; and terrorism.

These issues come in an awkward package for governments to grasp. They go beyond the capacity of any one organisation to understand and respond to, and there is often disagreement about the causes of the problems and the best ways to tackle them. Even the most effective governments of economically successful countries have failed to address these complex policy issues to their satisfaction.

What we are now learning is that political and civil service leaders who want to tackle complex policy issues have to abandon some of the conventional routines of government and policy.² These routines often encourage the hurried creation of solutions by civil servants in splendid isolation from the wider world – solutions which are then launched with great fanfare, but quietly fail to have the impact intended.

Our leaders need to think differently. Instead of seeking the 100-page strategic answer that eliminates a problem, they should be prepared to recognise that actions occur in an ongoing process, and further actions will always be needed.³ This demands a more collaborative approach than is 'business as usual' in most governments. Civil servants need to learn to become enablers and expert process designers rather than trying to monopolise analytical policy-making input behind closed doors. This requires a new mindset in the Civil Service where policy iteration and improvement are seen positively as a core part of the policy process, not as indications of failure.

The recent report by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) on whole-of-government approaches concluded that despite the fact that *"...a significant body of international experience, learning and initiatives about implementing whole-of-government policy has emerged over recent decades... [there is] a dearth of reflective, 'how we actually did' material."*⁴ This report, 15 Days, is a practitioner reflection and guide to doing collaborative working in the real and messy world of government policy implementation.

² Rutter, Marshall and Sims (2012)

³ Knapp (2008)

⁴ Colgan, Kennedy and Doherty (2014)

A FOCUS ON 'NEW MODELS' IN IRELAND

The Irish Civil Service is in the middle of a major process of change and improvement. Following the publication of the *Civil Service Renewal Plan* in November 2014, change has been fast and far-reaching. The early success of actions focused on improving management structures and processes is now buttressed by a growing focus on the bigger, strategic ambitions of the plan that detail how the core functions of the Civil Service – like policy – can also change and improve.

One such example is Action 5: Improve the delivery of shared whole-of-government projects, the goal of which is: *“to strengthen the prioritisation, management and accountability of cross-cutting projects that involve multiple Departments, Offices and Agencies and ensure that policies that are not the priority or responsibility of a single body are effectively managed, supported and resourced.”*

Delivering on this ambition required a major rethink around what happens now and what ‘better’ might look like, using pathfinder projects to trial different ways of achieving it.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IN IRELAND

Youth mental health was selected as a pathfinder project for two main reasons: first, to make progress on the urgent policy challenges in improving youth mental health outcomes in Ireland; and second, to produce a new template for how to engage and work productively across a complex network of actors operating in a complex, interdependent system.

The newly established Policy, Strategy and Integration Unit in the Department of Health was tasked with leading and convening the work. It decided to use an accelerated, collaborative problem-solving model that would employ a diverse team of frontline staff and policy-makers.

They were given just 15 days of working together over a few months to come up with a small number of actions that could have a disproportionately positive impact on the underlying problem.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report is the story of how 12 pathfinder team members worked together over 15 days to get to the heart of a complex problem and engage Secretaries General to act on their findings and recommendations.

It is a practical ‘how to’ case study that tells the story of how we carried out the project. It is a candid reflection on the process rather than an evaluation of the output or outcome. It is a guide for senior officials in governments who are trying to work differently to tackle ‘wicked issues’.

Additional information on the substance of the work and analytical findings can be provided by the Policy, Strategy and Integration Unit in the Department of Health.

16 2. The approach

The Youth Mental Health Pathfinder project started out with a broad brief: to find a new model of whole-of-government working that could make a difference to youth mental health in Ireland. However, the group had no set direction or prescription for how to achieve its objectives. This gave the team licence to explore the issues, define a process that might deliver, establish the scope, and refine and revise the scope as the project progressed.

SELECTING THE TEAM

Working through top managers a team was created, drawing on nominees from each of the participating organisations: Department of Health, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Centre for Effective Services (CES).

The team that was identified was diverse: several members of the team held challenging roles on the frontline; many had worked overseas; a couple were entirely new to the Civil Service and to policy-making; others had worked within the mental health sector in a range of roles and services.

All were embedded in strongly hierarchical systems. Each member of the team made the same 20% commitment: to work on the Pathfinder project one day a week for six months. A core team of four additional staff was also established to support the project. They committed significantly more time – closer to 60% of any given working week – for the duration of the project. In reality, the six-month timeline (“it will all be over soon”) is the only thing that made these arrangements feasible.

DESIGNING THE PROCESS

Once the decision had been made to adopt an accelerated problem-solving approach it was critical to commission external support to help design and facilitate the main phases of the project. CES, Peter Thomas Ltd and Andrew Templeman Ltd provided this support.

The design and methods used drew on models of collaborative problem-solving that were first adapted for use in government in Britain. In particular, the Priority Review model developed by the British PMDU in the 2000s formed the foundation for the design of phases two to five, and was augmented by other team-based capability-building models.⁵

A priority review uses structured problem-solving tools for rigour and focus – and is obsessive about building in collaboration, productive group working, and engagement with the frontline and senior decision-makers throughout the review.

When applied effectively in Britain, these methods had enabled lasting change, due largely to the focus on building capability that could outlast immediate reform programmes. This was decisive. Research by the Institute for Government into successful reforms found that reforms which successfully transformed the Civil Service did so because they introduced new attitudes, routines and ways of working that became embedded in the personal practice of civil servants.⁶

In the same way, this pathfinder project was designed to introduce new routines to the group – especially the core team – and to equip them to use these routines and build them into their personal practice.

The core tools used throughout the pathfinder project are drawn largely from the playbook of the British PMDU in the 2000s. These tools have their origins in various disciplines of management science, advisory company practice, product design and innovation methodologies.

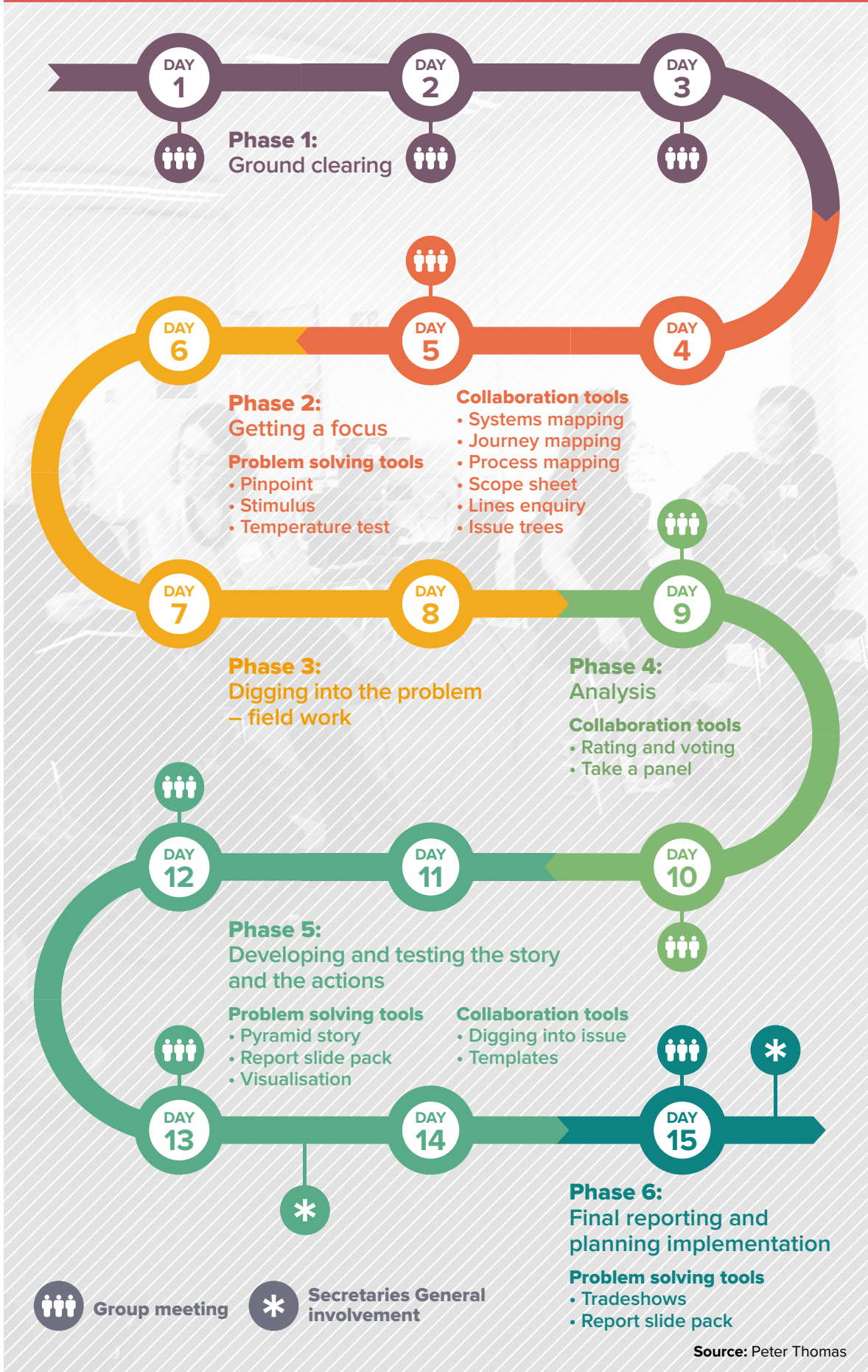
MANAGING THE DAY-TO-DAY

The project was shaped to include a mix of regular work in three smaller teams around a spine of intensive one-day workshops with the whole pathfinder group roughly once a fortnight. This approach was designed to deal with the reality that all pathfinder group members have demanding day jobs – one of the big barriers to effective collaborative working.

Exhibit 1 below provides an overview of the Pathfinder process and timeline, including the 17 tools that were used throughout the phases of work. More information on these tools is available in the online toolkit to accompany this report, available from the CES website.

⁶ Panchamia and Thomas (2014)

EXHIBIT 1. THE PATHFINDER PROCESS: SIX PHASES AND SEVENTEEN TOOLS



The 15 days group members gave were spread over six distinct steps (Exhibit 1):

STEP 1: A traditional analytical period reviewing current policy and evidence.

STEP 2: An initial burst of two group days in two weeks – kicking off the project, getting a focus, sharing key tools and approaches, and bringing some stimulus in from the frontline. The smaller teams met up a couple of times during this phase.

STEP 3: A period of five weeks where the small teams were carrying out their fieldwork – there were no whole-group days during this time.

STEP 4: A period of analysis over four weeks to bring the findings together and develop outline solutions – organised around two whole-group days in December.

STEP 5: A final, increasingly intense sequence of whole-group days over eight weeks, further processing findings, developing initial solutions, testing these with stakeholders and decision-makers, building a strong narrative case for change.

STEP 6: Producing and presenting the final report, iterating and improving solutions. This flowed into continued engagement with system leaders to deepen buy-in and progress key decisions even after the formal end of the project.

The external advisors designed and facilitated the whole-group workshop days. This included coaching the core team on using the pinpoint method⁷ and other tools so that they were able to better support their small teams.

A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO WORK TOGETHER DIFFERENTLY

A distinctive feature of this pathfinder project was the emphasis put on collaboration, group working and facilitation methods.

The workshop design, methods and facilitation had a huge impact on the engagement, productivity and quality of the group's work.

⁷ The pinpoint facilitation technique was developed by Neuland in Germany, and is supported in the UK by Pinpoint Facilitation. It is a carefully designed method that ensures productive collaboration: idea generation, processing, and prioritising. It eliminates many of the pitfalls of conventional group working.

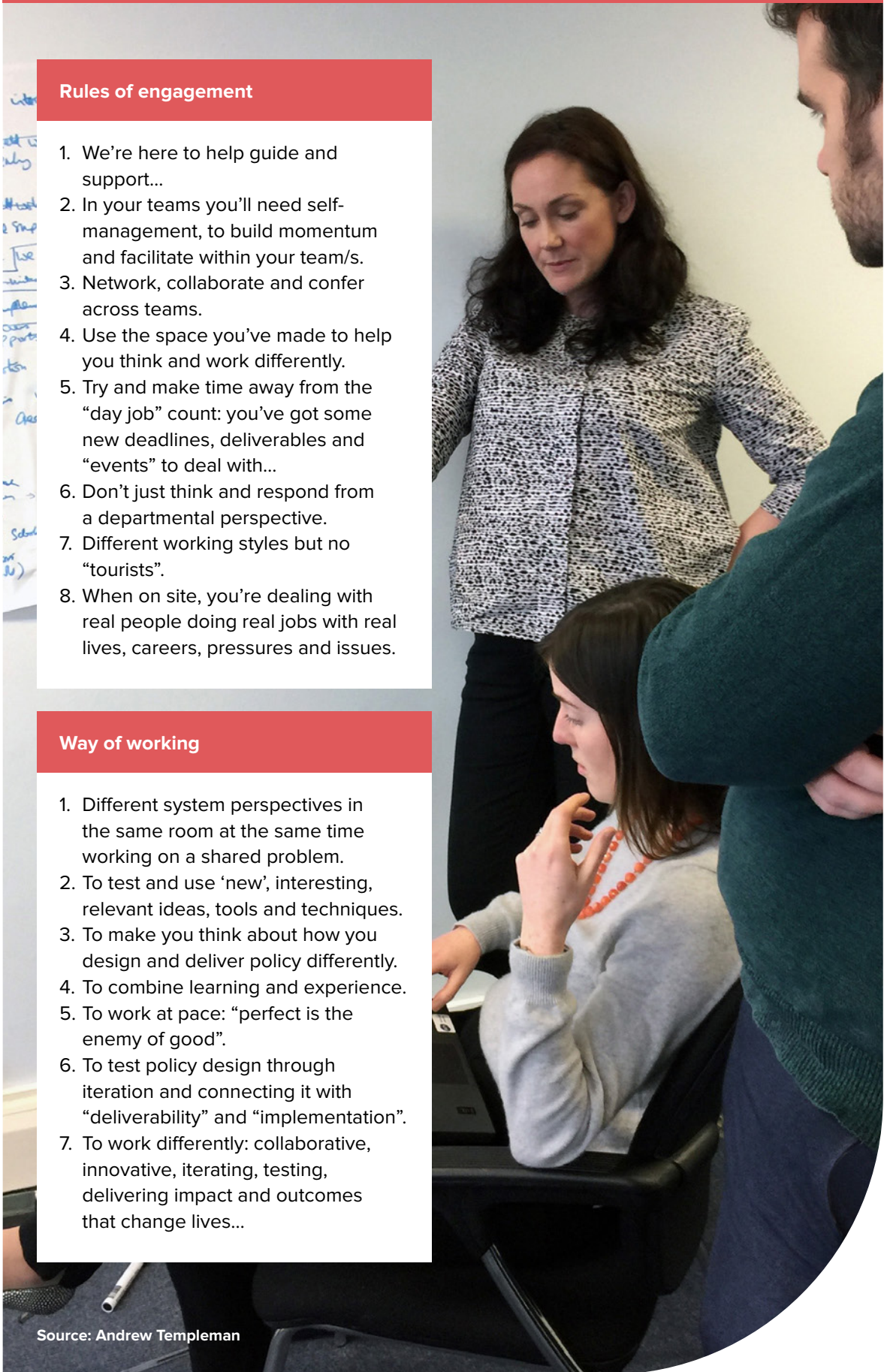
EXHIBIT 4.**THE MAGIC BULLET: A DELIBERATE INVESTMENT IN WORKING TOGETHER DIFFERENTLY****Rules of engagement**

1. We're here to help guide and support...
2. In your teams you'll need self-management, to build momentum and facilitate within your team/s.
3. Network, collaborate and confer across teams.
4. Use the space you've made to help you think and work differently.
5. Try and make time away from the "day job" count: you've got some new deadlines, deliverables and "events" to deal with...
6. Don't just think and respond from a departmental perspective.
7. Different working styles but no "tourists".
8. When on site, you're dealing with real people doing real jobs with real lives, careers, pressures and issues.

Way of working

1. Different system perspectives in the same room at the same time working on a shared problem.
2. To test and use 'new', interesting, relevant ideas, tools and techniques.
3. To make you think about how you design and deliver policy differently.
4. To combine learning and experience.
5. To work at pace: "perfect is the enemy of good".
6. To test policy design through iteration and connecting it with "deliverability" and "implementation".
7. To work differently: collaborative, innovative, iterating, testing, delivering impact and outcomes that change lives...

Source: Andrew Templeman



REPORTING AND MAINTAINING THE RIGHT CONNECTIONS

The Pathfinder had two clear connection points in the system where it needed to account for delivery of the project: the Civil Service Management Board, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, and the Connecting for Life Steering Group, chaired by the Department of Health. Midway through the Pathfinder project's work, the National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health was also established; it was chaired by the Minister for Mental Health. As a result, a number of national structures and processes were connected to the process. Establishing the right connection to these forums was important and gave an impetus to regular, transparent reporting and communication. For the most part this could be managed through a clear governance structure – at all times the Pathfinder maintained a clear focus on formal reporting directly to project sponsors – however, small changes in the personnel or timelines involved could have presented challenges in an already complex landscape.

TOP TIPS

Do

- Think carefully about how to bring the right skill and experience mix.
- Create atypical reporting lines – cross-boundary work requires cross-boundary leadership.
- Communicate transparently, clearly and regularly.
- Pin down the governance model so you know who has 'clearing' authority and who does not.
- Work hard to ensure the team gets recognition within their own right.

Don't

- Worry if taking the time to identify and select the right people slows the process initially.
- Recruit by seniority.
- Tolerate arms-length engagement with the process; key that staff recognise they are part of a team that depends on them.
- Make exceptions for your 'home' organisation – critical to treat all participating organisations (and organisational structures/processes) equally.
- Panic if the process is uncertain.

22 3. The outcome

This report catalogues the ‘how’ of the Youth Mental Health Pathfinder project, which succeeded in identifying two new models for whole-of-government working.

Those acquainted with the project are strong advocates for its value, but why should those who are engaging with the project for the first time want to read about this approach in greater depth? The answer to that question hinges on your view about whether the pathfinder project: (1) achieved something; and (2) achieved more than it might have otherwise if it had adopted traditional tools and methods.

Like all major projects and ‘wicked issues’, the real success of the pathfinder project will only be known in a number of years, when the actions recommended by the group have been implemented. However, at this point of transition from ambition to action, already there are a couple of important indicators of achievement:

- At the point of initiating the pathfinder project, more than 150 policy commitments existed across Government on youth mental health. At the point of concluding the project, the pathfinder team had identified six areas for action across this set which, if prioritised, could have a disproportionately positive impact on the experiences of children and young people.
 - At the point of initiating the pathfinder project, the ambition was ‘fuzzy’. At the point of concluding the project, the pathfinder team had identified the core question at the heart of making progress on youth mental health: How do we make the right range of supports visible and accessible to every young person at the earliest point?
 - At the point of initiating the pathfinder project, the three lead Departments often acted in consultation with each other, but less often acted through deep collaboration. At the point of concluding the project, the pathfinder team had transformed relationships at a working level between all three Departments.
 - At the point of initiating the pathfinder project, the majority of engagement with the sector happened formally and through either consultation events or stakeholder meetings. At the point of concluding the project, approximately 40 people and 24 organisations had participated in problem-solving with the team.
 - At the point of initiating the pathfinder project, the Civil Service Management Board was interested in exploring whether a new model for joined up working was possible. At the point of concluding the project, this group of the most senior leaders was highly engaged in the proposals of the group and the method of achieving them – committing to progress the work into a productive implementation phase.
- For those within administrative systems it will be clear that these are not small achievements. However, the project was always clear-sighted around the fact that for those on the receiving end of administrative systems – those needing services – the picture may not be so compelling. At the point of initiating the pathfinder project, Ireland had high rates of youth suicide⁸, and national data showed rates of self-harm were highest among young people.⁹ At the point of concluding the pathfinder project, this was unchanged. Changing it will require a relentless focus on implementation and, as learned during the pathfinder process, iteration.

⁸ Eurostat (2016)

⁹ National Suicide Research Foundation (2016)

24 4. The process

These next sections deconstruct the process, outlining key steps, activities, tools and outputs. Critically, each step concludes with a short review of lessons learned – capturing candid reflections on what to repeat and avoid for those who plan to take a similar approach in future.

Step 1: Ground-clearing

Days 1, 2 and 3

One of the first challenges for the Pathfinder group before they could dive into finding solutions was to figure out where things stood. This early stage of the process had less structure and shape than later phases.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

TABLE 2. GETTING A FOCUS: ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Activities	Outputs
1. An analysis of the scope of policy commitments relating to youth mental health	Draft Analytical Report
2. An analysis of the public funding for youth mental health from central government	A preliminary estimate of total spending
3. An analysis of accountability lines for different youth mental health services	Draft Report
4. An emerging picture of the qualitative and quantitative evidence around the experiences of young people accessing services in Ireland	Draft Report

Source: Authors of this report

TEAM PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

Although the ambition for the group was high, the brief was broad and so these early months were spent scoping and focusing on the issues. By the end of this first step the team had reviewed all of the relevant policies and strategies; had developed a clearer picture of who was responsible for what components of the system; and had begun to unpick how much funding was funnelling into the sector from central government and where it was coming from. This ground-clearing phase was slow-going. Developing a picture of what was happening across a complex interconnected system was one thing; interpreting and drawing insight from that picture proved quite another.

The story this work revealed was a complex one, but with one clear message: simply getting government departments to work together better would not be sufficient; we needed a system lens and system-wide solutions.

With this groundwork completed, the group was able to step back for the first time and begin to form a collective view around two questions: What does 'better' look like? And what is getting in the way of achieving it?

TOP TIPS

Do

- Put a timeframe on this phase – ok to let things grow organically but not forever.
- Set broad parameters – the types of information needed; the types of questions to be thinking about.
- Start the team working in small groups – this 'dull but important' leg work would be hard going alone.

Don't

- Rush to define workstreams – let these emerge.
- Panic if it's not that clear what it's all adding up to.
- Waste time drafting or revising outputs in this phase – capture the information but focus team energy on generating insight.



28 Step 2: Getting a focus

Days 4 and 5

One of the key success factors for an accelerated problem-solving review is establishing the right scope. Without an explicit and appropriate scope for the project, you will be unable to make progress – either because the scope is so wide that you are only scratching the surface with generalities, or because it is so narrow that you are likely to miss critical issues.

Even with the ground-clearing work the group had carried out, their different professional perspectives, and their experience on the issue of youth mental health, they were conscious that they had only started to look at the issues. With all ‘wicked issues’, the scope and complexity of the issue is potentially overwhelming and there can be a tendency not to resolve this early in a project. However, this step is critical to success in the final stages.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

TABLE 2. GETTING A FOCUS: ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Activities	Outputs	Tool
1. Stimulus from frontline to challenge thinking	Insights into different perspectives	Stimulus
2. Initial mapping of the system, process and client journeys	Different perspectives on the system and customer experiences	System mapping Journey mapping Process mapping
3. Establishing the scope of the review – the problem we are trying to solve	Problem statement	Rating and voting
4. Complete a scope sheet to clarify the scope	Problem scope	Scope sheet
5. Generating ideas about key drivers, issues	Longlist of issues for the issue tree	Pinpoint
6. Creating issue trees to structure our thinking	Issue tree and key hypotheses	Issue trees
7. Thinking about what success would look like	Success criteria for the project	Take a panel

Source: Authors of this report

TEAM PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

A. Getting different perspectives

In order for the Pathfinder group to take a fresh look at long-standing challenges, they had to look differently at the problem and understand the perspectives of other people in the system. They did this by looking at client/service user experiences, mapping client/service user journeys, mapping the system, and hearing from people in different parts of the system.

At three of the whole-group days we used small ‘challenge panels’ of frontline workers to share their experiences and perspectives. The panels were pre-briefed and asked to avoid giving a polite picture of how everything is supposed to work, and instead to give a real picture of how things actually work in practice, without holding back. The panels’ perspectives stimulated and challenged how we saw the problem, and where we thought solutions might lie.

System and journey mapping was done in three steps: first we held an initial briefing on the concept of mapping; then each team convened and tried to work up some form of mapping; and finally, the whole group came together, reviewing each map in turn. However imperfect the teams felt their maps were, they proved their value by fuelling productive discussions and exposing blockages in the system and key transitions that were frustrating service users.

Ultimately, the hybrid system/service user map produced by one group was combined with an anonymised case shared by one of our frontline ‘stimulus’ providers to show how the various transitions, breaks in communication and feedback, and lack of clarity of responsibilities across the system can lead in some cases to a very poor response to one young person’s distress.

B. Getting the scope right

We discussed the criteria we were going to use to determine what a good scope would look like for this project. The criteria included:

- It is framed positively and specifically: ‘How do we...?’
- It is not so narrow that you could miss key issues.
- It would engage ministers, frontline staff, clients and carers.
- It is a representative issue; your findings will be transferable and scalable.
- It encompasses the pipeline (prevention) as well as the pool (acute).

Each of the three teams worked by themselves to develop a scope for the project that met the criteria. Once we had reviewed and rated the elements we liked best from each of the proposed scopes, we started the tricky discussion that had to turn them into a single scope that met the criteria. We agreed on: How do we make the right range of support visible and accessible for every child at the earliest point?

This discussion requires preparedness to listen to each other and to allow time for different members of the group to propose or try to reframe a scope that might fit. In this case, that took about 15 minutes; but if it needs to take an hour, then you must just stick with it. You cannot move on to the next steps until there is a framing of a scope that is ‘good enough’ and meets most of the criteria. It is the guiding star for the project.

C. Building an early view on the key issues, drivers, levers and barriers

With the problem scope in mind, the team identified what they thought would be the most productive issues to look at during the review. This was a necessary first step before trying to construct a logic tree or problem structure.

We used the pinpoint facilitation method to ensure that the whole group contributed their own ideas and owned the processing and clustering of those ideas.

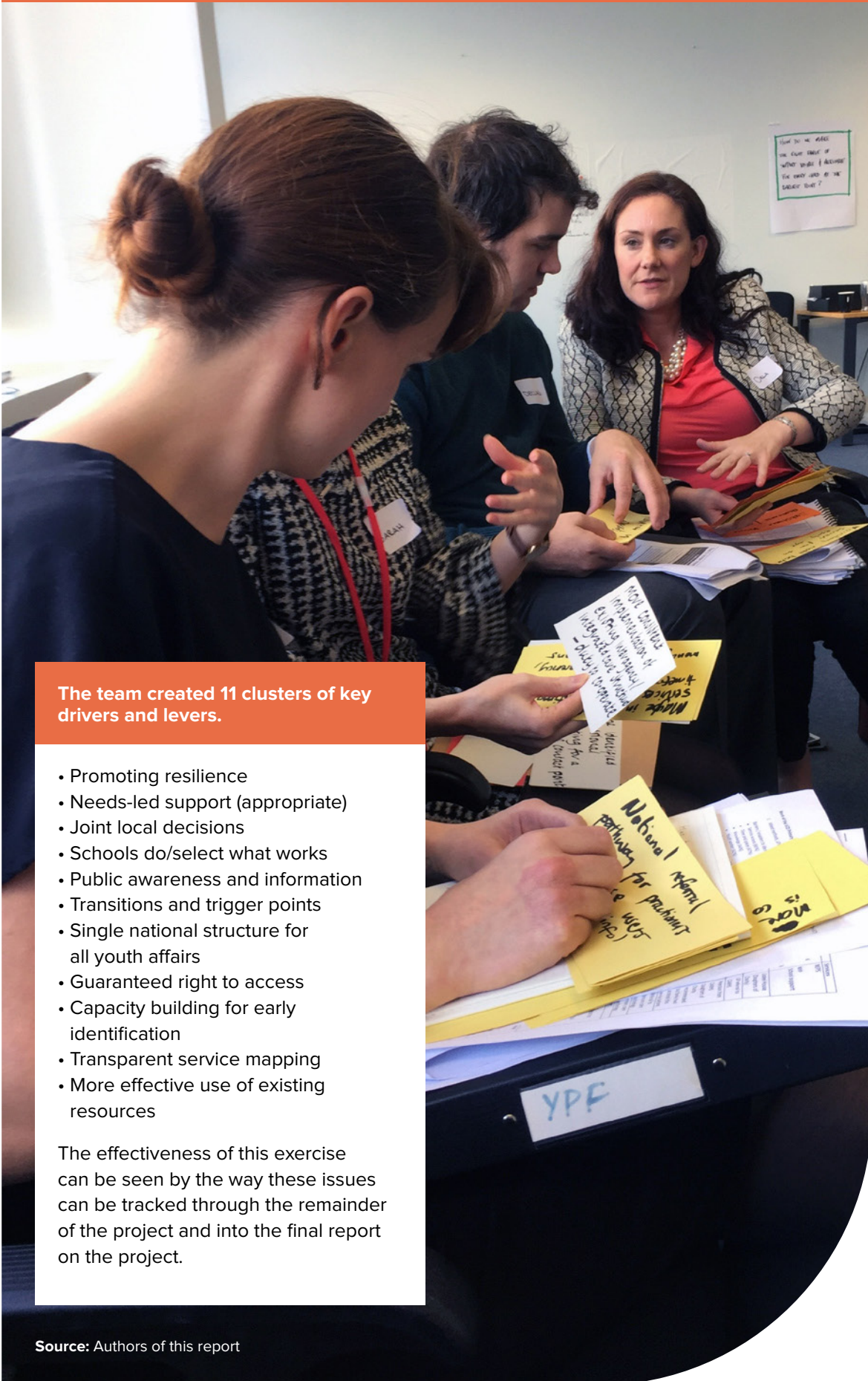
D. Using issue trees to structure the problem and focus further research

Issue trees help you structure and focus your thinking, and shape the analysis and fieldwork that will deliver the most value. Issue trees are the link between a problem statement/scope sheet and a list of manageable questions that can be explored through fieldwork and research. There are two variants:

1. Data driven – asking ‘Why?’ This starts with the problem and decomposes it to arrive at a solution.
2. Hypothesis driven – asking ‘How?’ Starts with a potential solution and develops a rationale to validate or disprove it.

For our project we used the ‘how’ variant. Each team worked up an issue tree in advance of their next whole day together. This was perhaps the hardest tool for some to use.

EXHIBIT 5. IDENTIFYING THE KEY ISSUES: DRIVERS, LEVERS, BARRIERS

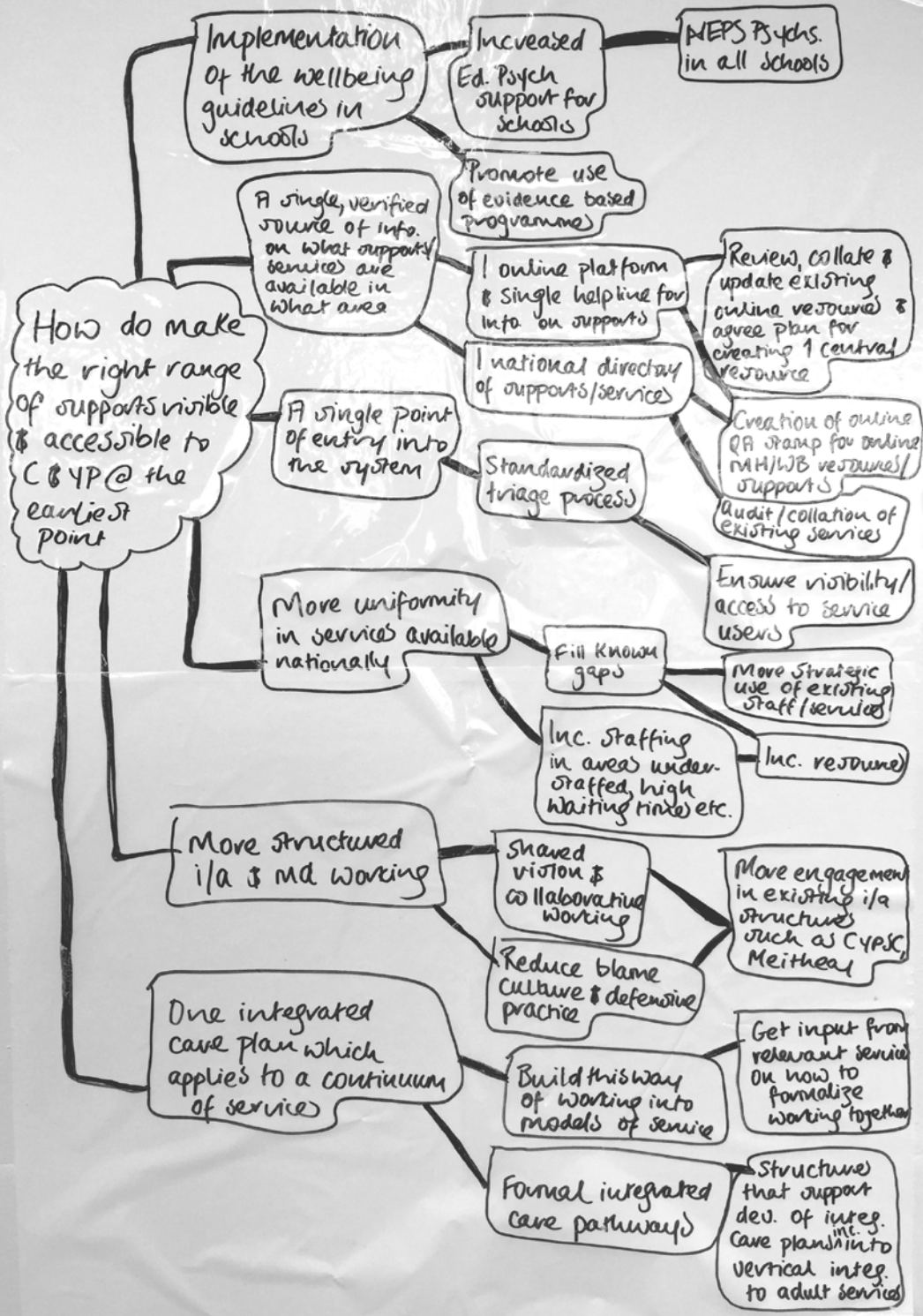


The team created 11 clusters of key drivers and levers.

- Promoting resilience
- Needs-led support (appropriate)
- Joint local decisions
- Schools do/select what works
- Public awareness and information
- Transitions and trigger points
- Single national structure for all youth affairs
- Guaranteed right to access
- Capacity building for early identification
- Transparent service mapping
- More effective use of existing resources

The effectiveness of this exercise can be seen by the way these issues can be tracked through the remainder of the project and into the final report on the project.

Source: Authors of this report



Source: Pathfinder group

The issue trees and system maps were discussed and compared in turn at the second whole-group workshop. Despite the mixed feelings about these tools, they were the catalyst for a highly productive discussion. Many of the seeds of the ideas that ended up as the six areas for action were sown in this extended and informal group discussion. The issue trees and system maps enabled the group to process and reflect in a fruitful and thoughtful way.

E. Standing back to think about what success would look like

Having immersed ourselves in scoping the problem, and in thinking about key drivers and structuring the issues, we deliberately paused to stand back from that and ask ourselves the question: What would the system be like in 18 months' time if we were successful? Some of our answers were:

Children and families at risk are identified early, resulting in better outcomes.

Children and families know what they can do to help themselves. They know where to go if they need help from someone.

Clients felt supported throughout the continuum – no hot potatoes or falling through the cracks. They didn't feel helpless or at the mercy of an individual professional.

[There is] no wrong door – system working together. [There is a] clear pathway of care.

Every family/carer is equipped with the ability and confidence to notice potential wobbles in child's mental well-being.

This provided a clear ambition that we used to test the group's work in later phases, as their thinking developed.

TOP TIPS

Do

- Spend time up front coaching the team on using the trickier tools, starting with a simple example before tackling more complex issues.
- Listen carefully to each other and look for common ground that connects the different perspectives within the team.
- Make time for discussion and reflection – this is the value that comes from using the tools.
- Accept that some people will find these tools hard, and it is fine to rely on other team members whose thinking styles mean they find this approach easier.
- Apply the discipline of answering the question: What would success look like?

Don't

- Short-circuit the discussion of scope – it's your foundation.
- Worry if you couldn't get the scope right at first – pause, discuss why it seems hard, and reconvene later to allow time for people to think.
- Expect everyone to find this easy.

34 Step 3: Digging into the problem, fieldwork

Days 6, 7 and 8

This stage of the project required tough choices about which elements of our issue we most needed to investigate, so that we could focus more deeply on a small number of key lines of enquiry.

We had to make that call on the basis of what we thought would provide insights into the most significant problems and was most likely to generate ideas about potential solutions. We then had to work out a productive but practical mix of further research and fieldwork that would shed light on those elements. With only three whole days for fieldwork, we had to use our time wisely.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

TABLE 3. DIGGING INTO THE PROBLEM: ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Activities	Outputs	Tool
1. Identifying key lines of enquiry and planning the fieldwork to examine them	Lines of enquiry and plan of the fieldwork and research needed to examine them	Lines of enquiry
2. Setting up and carrying out interviews, focus groups, workshops, secondary analysis	Choice of interviews, field visits, interview and topic guides	Productive fieldwork
3. Setting up field visits – creating case studies	Evidence, examples, case studies, stories	Productive fieldwork
4. Analysing evidence	Refined hypotheses, emerging conclusions and solutions	Productive fieldwork Pinpoint

Source: Authors of this report

TEAM PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

A. Generating lines of enquiry to help us focus and plan our fieldwork and analysis

The clarity of our project scope and the quality of the initial issue trees were the crucial foundation for this stage. But it is inevitably an uncomfortable moment.

The term 'lines of enquiry' was confusing for some. It is a higher-level focus than specific questions we might frame for particular interviews. The idea is to concentrate fieldwork on the most important questions that you have identified in your issue tree. Then you ask to what extent do we already have data and evidence that can answer these questions – and highlight where we lack evidence or need greater insights. Then you focus your fieldwork on the most valuable lines of enquiry.

Different teams found creating key lines of enquiry easier than others. Some felt forced to prioritise on the basis of imperfect knowledge in a way that felt arbitrary and rushed. Some felt uncomfortable that they were narrowing things down before they had a chance to explore issues more thoroughly, but it is essential to remember the 80:20 rule at this point. Those who found the idea of issue trees harder to grasp also found this stage difficult.

B. Planning and carrying out fieldwork

Practicalities of time, diaries and availability are crucial in a time-limited project. So, once you make an initial call on how to explore your lines of enquiry it is important to get briskly on with setting up fieldwork sites, some key interviews, and focus groups. You can refine the questions you want to raise in specific interviews and focus groups nearer the time.

Because the core team members were embedded in the smaller working teams, they were able to ensure that lines of enquiry didn't duplicate activity. They helped to plan some joint fieldwork that could support lines of enquiry from more than one team.

Our three key messages to the teams to bear in mind during fieldwork were:

1. You want to know more about how services are delivered and what things look like and feel like for patients, young people, their families, their support networks, and the people and organisations working with them.
2. You want a sense from them of what is working, what is not and why. You want to capture case studies, effective practice and interventions, great quotes, new and better ways of working, inspirational stories, key insights, unforeseen consequences, and all the local flavour and texture that hard data can't give you.
3. You want to know more about what helps make real change and improvement happen locally, in a faster, more effective and more efficient way.



Key lines of enquiry:

1. Structures and systems (integrated)
2. Triage/single point of entry
3. Streamlining and QA of programmes
4. Collaborative working
5. Self-help – build capacity
6. Bottlenecks – understanding
7. Bottom-up/feedback on experience
8. Client journey empowerment

The team reflected that this was too many lines of enquiry and they needed to make some further choices.

Source: Pathfinder group

Some simple disciplines and structures were introduced to ensure the successful conduct and capture of evidence during fieldwork. The three teams covered a lot of ground in their fieldwork with a range of local and national services, community and voluntary organisations, schools, and leisure organisations.

Part of the fieldwork involved looking deeper at specific cases. This was done through a mix of desk research, field visits and interviews. These cases were picked as examples that appeared to be successful efforts to deal with some of the core issues and problems we had identified in our problem structure and lines of enquiry. Case studies that we developed through our fieldwork included the Midlands Triple P Positive Parenting Programme, the Training of Scout Leaders, the Dublin Preparing for Life Programme, and the 'FRIENDS for Life' Programme.

Some simple disciplines and structures are crucial to the successful conduct and capture of evidence during fieldwork:

- Do headline write-ups of visits for the record and share with other team members and your other teams when you get back to base.
- Make time to process and reflect on what you are seeing as you go – for example, note down the top five things that strike you immediately after each interview, or schedule a one-hour debrief each day.
- Keep interview notes for every session. Type up as bullet points, as they are more accessible and shareable.
- Capture key quotes, insights and illustrations in your notes.
- Always produce 'product' from workshops – photographs save time and effort.
- Make sure your team is sharing the load on evidence capture for visits and interviews.
- Make time to test against the key lines of enquiry and the issue tree.

TOP TIPS

Do

- Have a strong sense of purpose and clear lines of enquiry to guide your choice of fieldwork sites, and what you do on them.
- Respect the people and organisations you are meeting – listen and try to clarify and understand what they are saying.
- Be flexible with your lines of enquiry – they are a prompt, not blinkers. If something new or interesting comes up, follow it up.
- Make time for simple working routines that ensure you are reflecting on your findings and adjusting your lines of enquiry as you go.
- Record key points as you go in a form that is intelligible to other colleagues who were not on a visit, in an interview or in a workshop.
- Ask open questions – leave space for people to say what is on their mind.

Don't

- Just talk to senior people – chat to frontline staff and customers or clients where appropriate, walk around the site and observe what is going on.
- Panic if the issue seems to be becoming more complicated rather than clearer.
- Be judgmental or critical – you are trying to understand and clarify, not resolve.

38 Step 4: Analysis, bringing it all together

Days 9 and 10

This is the crucial pivot point in the project. Over the previous five weeks each group member had spent three days in their smaller teams exploring their lines of enquiry through fieldwork. But now we had to move away from gathering evidence and insights and towards analysing, processing and challenging our findings. We then had to start assembling them into a single coherent story and recommendation.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

TABLE 4. BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Activities	Outputs	Tool
1. Each group prepare a visual 'tradeshow' that summarises their fieldwork and the insights and conclusions that are emerging	Whole group knows about the fieldwork each smaller group has done	N/A
2. Explore, review and discuss the emerging findings of each group	Group makes connections, identifies patterns and contradictions	Tradeshow Pinpoint
3. Start to create a single story of our findings	Skeleton of the story of our findings	Pyramid story
4. Produce a first cut of the most promising areas for taking action that would have an impact on the problem we've identified	Outline of potential areas for action	Pinpoint Rating and voting

Source: Authors of this report

TEAM PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

A. Creating a single story about our findings

There was no certainty that the findings would come together in a way that made sense. There was also a danger that some group members would become detached or disengaged if they did not feel ownership of the overall picture.

To start us off, each team had prepared a visual ‘tradeshow’ – like an informal conference poster exhibit – of what they did and what they found. We toured around each group in turn, clarifying, discussing and adding ideas to their boards. We spent two hours hearing and discussing each groups’ field work and findings.

Next, we used a loosely facilitated plenary discussion to reframe our story into four ‘buckets’:

1. We have an army of people involved but no one is directing it.
2. We need to reach into homes, families and communities and we know how.
3. We can make services smarter by managing them as a system.
4. Schools can be a hub for the cultural transformation that is needed.

It could have taken us the rest of the workshop to try to come up with the right overarching story. The story evolved further as we worked on it in the following weeks – but this version was sufficient for the group to be happy enough to move on to the next steps and feel ownership of the whole story.

Then we returned to our smaller teams in order to reshape our findings under the four new headings of our overall story. After about 30 minutes we shared progress in a plenary session to test whether the new story structure worked well enough – and it did.

B. Developing an outline of areas for action

The final challenge in this phase was to capture ideas about the types of actions that would address our key findings and have the impact we sought on our key issue. We used the pinpoint method to generate, process, cluster and prioritise ideas.

Reflections on this critical point in the pathfinder project

Trying to create and agree on an overall structure or story that pulls our findings together is difficult. How well it goes reflects the strength (or otherwise) of the foundations created earlier in the project – both of the content and way of working. This project was able to make this step quickly for four reasons:

- **A common foundation.** Each group's lines of enquiry started life connected to the same 'problem statement' and each team was conscious of the high-level problem structure.
- **Understanding each other's perspectives.** The previous task of sharing ideas and listening to each other's perspectives had provided stimulus for everyone, so their ideas were evolving.
- **Analytical capability.** It is no coincidence that the member of the team who had previous experience of using the 'structured storytelling' tool allied with a strong analytical skill set was able to reflect on the discussion and propose a single story that, after fairly short discussion, we decided was good enough for us to move on and test.
- **Respect, trust and open-minded listening.** By now, the group had a good level of mutual respect, and was good at listening to and responding to each other's perspectives. The structure proposed was not one person's opinion – instead it was their intelligent synthesis of the different ideas people in the group had put forward. People accepted it because it reflected their own ideas and those of the rest of the group.

TOP TIPS

Do

- Allow time for people to clarify and understand what each other have found.
- If there is a valuable discussion emerging around a point, stick with it. It will help people process the findings and generate ideas for common themes and solutions.
- Be flexible about timing. You need to get to a good enough point to move on after each step. If you cannot, stop. Reflect on why you are stuck and reconvene on a later date.
- Try to have a mix of skills and capabilities in the team: strong analytical and logical thinking; good connectors with wide networks; facilitators and brokers; perspectives from different parts of the system, different ways of seeing the world; open listeners interested in and respectful of others' views.
- Have one or two key people assigned to 'stand back' from the content and think about what it is adding up to.

Don't

- Worry if the pivot discussion trying to pick out the common threads and structure for the whole story is difficult. Take a break for coffee to allow people to regroup if you get stuck.
- Try to 'pre-cook' the structure and impose it on people. The whole group needs to understand and accept it. Instead, emphasise the need for open listening and brokering of ideas.



42 Step 5: Developing the story and the actions

Days 11, 12, 13 and 14

By this stage in the project the pathfinder group only had a few days to work up a substantive report that they would present to a panel of senior stakeholders in order to test the story and the outlined areas for action. The team did this through a report-style narrative slide pack – with a strong emphasis on visualising data to articulate a clear ‘story’ of the work.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

TABLE 5. DEVELOPING AND TESTING THE STORY AND AREAS FOR ACTION: ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Activities	Outputs	Tool
1. Pulling the story and actions together	Draft ‘story pack’	Report slide pack Pyramid storytelling Visualisation
2. Testing the story and outlined actions with senior stakeholders	Feedback on story and outlined areas for action, what needs to be better explained or justified	Temperature test Report slide pack Templates
3. Refining the story, more intensive work to develop the areas for action	Revised ‘story pack’, with more granular articulation of proposed areas for action	Digging into an issue
4. Planning how to land the report	Design for session with Secretaries General	N/A

Source: Authors of this report

TEAM PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

A. Structured storytelling and a compelling slide pack

Highly structured slide packs to tell the story of collaborative reviews like the Pathfinder can be hugely impactful. This is because at each step in drawing the final analysis together, structured approaches rigorously test the logic of the story. It is a way of working which challenges the quality of the key evidence and analyses that underpin it. It is a very different discipline from the standard drafting and crafting of prose in civil services.

Applying this approach to the pathfinder story was helped greatly by the fact that one of the core team members had previously used this approach and could help develop the pathfinder outputs into visuals, colour, quotes and detailed analysis that could create an impactful and compelling story.

Each small team was allocated part of the story and the area for action that most resonated with their work up to that point. The core team played a crucial role in preparing, editing, challenging and quality checking the emerging material. When we reached the day of the presentation, many group members were worried that they did not have enough time to work through the material. Despite these concerns, they managed to have everything ready.

However good the story pack, it can all be lost in the failure to make the best use of the time you have with your audience. The group always made time to think about what they wanted from the session with stakeholders, and how best to design the session to deliver that.

The team presented the pack to a challenge panel drawn from across the system. They then used the temperature test to get the reactions of the panel to two questions:

- Is the story and argument clear and compelling?
- Are the outlined areas for action in the right zone?

Following the session where we made our presentation to the stakeholder challenge panel, the group felt encouraged while at the same time remaining self-critical about what we could have done better. We then mapped out the next steps. One important task was for the core team to check back through earlier work, including

ground-clearing and fieldwork, to check that we had carried through any critical inputs, and to also confirm that our best evidence and examples had been fully incorporated into the slide packs.

TOP TIPS

Do

- Think about how you will communicate the story in addition to finalising what the story is.
- Be creative with new formats and approaches.
- Be open and transparent. It is critical to create opportunities to test and challenge thinking through ‘critical friends’ at a couple of key points.
- Take time to get the ‘look and feel’ right – remember, style supports substance.
- Pre-brief critical friends; make sure they understand that robust challenge and feedback is more helpful and important than politeness or tiptoeing around difficult issues.
- Use PowerPoint to make the story visual in report and presentation format.
- Get started and give it a go – it will take iteration to develop a strong, structured, logical story.

Don't

- Rely on usual suspects – critical friends should bring diverse, fresh perspectives.
- Rely on internal review – external voices are important to eliminate group think.
- Be nervous about sharing ideas before policy or recommendations ‘fully worked through’ or signed off – purpose is to prep for and test the thinking before sign-off stage.
- Apologise if the story is imperfect or if it is a working draft.
- Start with a draft and condense. Instead start with the straplins and build the story up.

44 Step 6: Final reporting to decision-makers and planning implementation

Day 15

The core team continued to edit and revise the story pack, pulling together additional comments and content from the whole group. Three open sessions were run for anyone in the group who was available to thrash out each of the areas for action. The clarity of our argument from the conclusion to the areas for actions was improved.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

TABLE 6. FINAL REPORTING TO DECISION-MAKERS: ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Activities	Outputs	Tool
1. Final test of the story	Agreement that it is fit for purpose	Temperature test
2. Iterate areas for action	Stronger, clearer areas for action	Digging into an issue
3. Plan how to engage the Secretaries General	Session plan	N/A
4. Present final report to Secretaries General	Agreement to act on findings	N/A

Source: Authors of this report



TEAM PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE

A. Finalising the story and improving the areas for action

When we reassembled as a whole group we started off by running through the latest version of the full slide pack. The group then prioritised which areas for action they thought we should spend the rest of the day working on. In smaller groups we revised and iterated the areas for action.

Towards the end of the day we spent 30 minutes planning how to run the session with the Secretaries General the following week and who would do further work to revise the pack – mainly the areas for action we had been working on. We agreed it was essential to circulate the story pack in advance, so as to allow the Secretaries General time to read it beforehand. This left just two working days to finish the pack and proofread it. The core team took responsibility for this final push.



B. Presenting our final findings to project sponsors

There is a well-established style and format for presenting proposals to senior leaders in most civil services. This format tends to be static, passive, unengaging and too often unproductive. Our group agreed that we should have the courage to run these sessions as we had run the rest of the project – actively, innovatively and engagingly. We resolved to make the Secretaries General stand up, move around the room, vote with sticky dots and sit on chairs in a semi-circle for discussions without a table, even though this felt risky and unusual.

Towards the end of the session with our sponsor Secretaries General, we asked them to rate:

- The overall story on a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 was 'spot on'.
- Rate each area for action as to whether it was:
 - In the right direction
 - Had the potential to make a difference to the key issues
 - Worth investing more effort in to develop further.



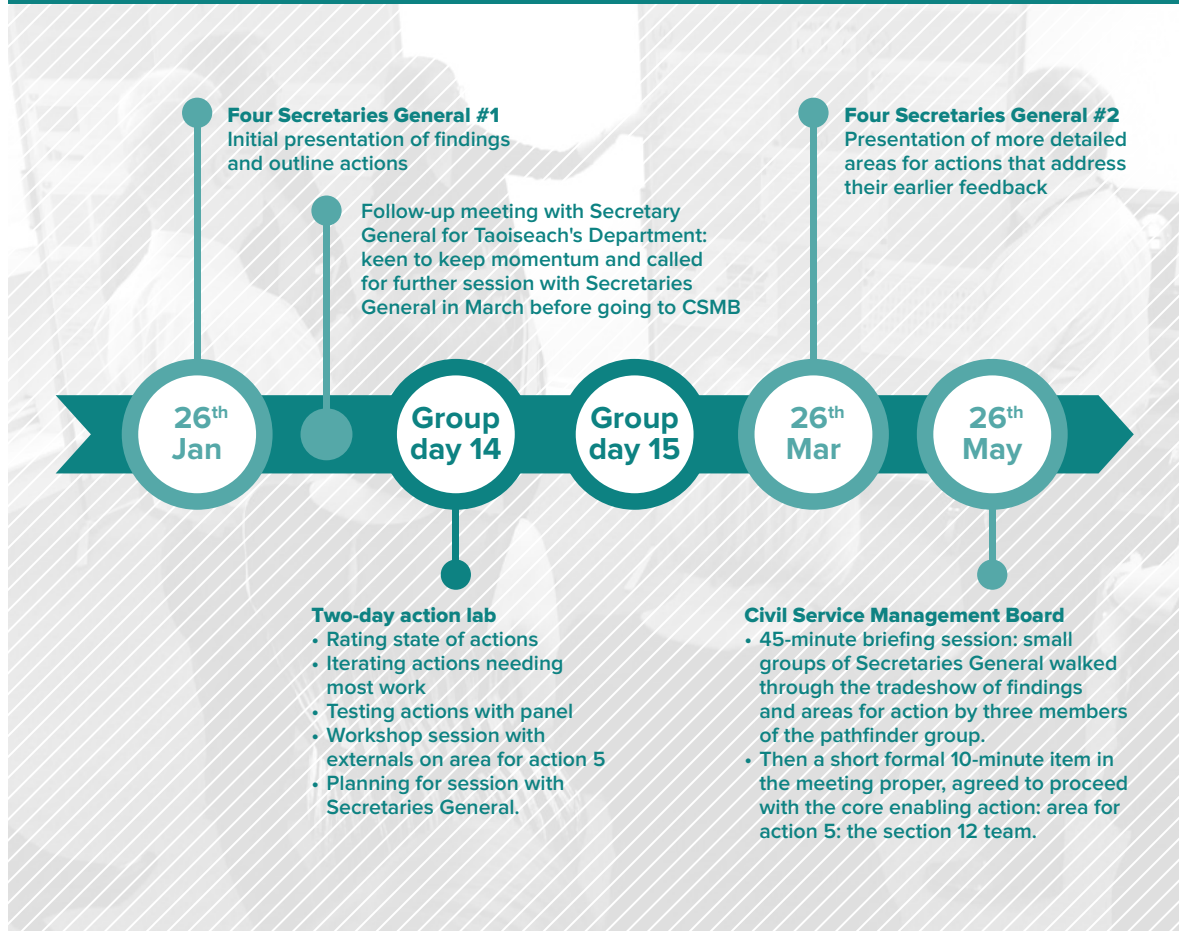
We then explored why they rated the actions how they did to make sure we understood why they liked what they did and what their reservations were about some of the actions. The sponsors gave strong support to the story and the headline conclusions, questioning some of the analysis and interpretation as well as looking for further work on how to implement some of the actions. The panel also gave some feedback on the pathfinder group's innovative way of working:

"I'm really impressed, absolutely fantastic work. You've asked hard questions very differently. The session was intriguing and interesting and you had the courage to do this."

"We need to remember that no country has cracked this ... this is very positive given the time you've had. This utterly underlines what we want from pathfinders."

"There is no question of stopping. The work is endorsed. I'd urge you to take on board our informal comments and decide where you want to go next."

Once the Secretaries General had left, the group reflected on what had gone well and what needed to happen next. The pathfinder group had now reached the end of the programmed project, but they were clear that more work was needed and they wanted to ensure that the project did not fizzle out.



C. Wrapping up and supporting a successful transition to implementation

The momentum created by the project was maintained by the demand for a further session with project sponsors before bringing our proposals to the Civil Service Management Board.

We ran an intensive two-day 'action lab'. The aim was to iterate the actions that most needed further work and test them with panels of stakeholders, frontline staff and key players across government.

The continued use of highly engaging approaches to present our findings paid dividends when the findings were taken to the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB). We used a 45-minute pre-briefing before the formal CSMB meeting to walk members of the board, in small groups hosted by a member of the pathfinder group, around the visual tradeshow of the findings and proposals, getting their reactions as they went around.

This novel approach to the briefing electrified the Secretaries General, who were intrigued by how the outputs had been achieved in just 15 days of collaborative cross-boundary teamwork.

"It's amazing what you have done with a small team in 15 days."

"You've built up some real energy – normally we only manage this in a crisis."

"Very impressive, innovative and exciting... We don't normally do things like this."

"I'm really taken by what you have achieved with a normal team drawn from across government... We really need to capture the process and capture the learning."

In its formal meeting, the CSMB agreed to proceed with implementation – this was a critical milestone moment.

TOP TIPS

Do

- Insist that the team lead session and speak/showcase output and logic/rationale for themselves.
- Give senior sponsors enough time to engage with substance in advance (three days minimum) - do this even if final report not perfect.
- Engage senior sponsors regularly – not just informal, irregular meetings (e.g. the pathfinder project built in three key milestones to check in with sponsors).
- Pre-brief senior sponsors ahead of each engagement so that they understand where the group is at, what they are nervous about and what they need from the senior sponsors.
- Create a format that allows both individual and collective reflection from senior sponsors – dividing them into smaller groups at key points is particularly effective.

Don't

- Fill the room with line managers or senior people who have just come to listen – the session should be focused on team directly accounting for their work to key decision-makers.
- Insist on instant decision-making – gather feedback, perspectives and direction but allow space for ideas to percolate after the session (i.e. be careful not to close down routes too quickly and balance this against meaningful direction).
- Rely on best or most senior presenters; ensure shared ownership of session and story telling where everyone plays a part.
- Squeeze your time if you can avoid it – 90 minutes to two hours ideal for a collaborative review session.

The recommendations from the report were presented to the Minister for Mental Health and the Youth Mental Health Taskforce. Engagement and feedback was very positive.

The project team concluded its work reassured by some positive signals that the product of just 15 days of working together as a team had laid strong foundations for positive change.

At the time of this report's publication, the key actions have commitment, energy and momentum. But this is only the start. The team leading implementation is not yet assembled – but it is essential that it works in the same innovative and collaborative way as the pathfinder process. We will carry out a short stocktake in the future to see whether this very promising start has turned into actions that will have the impact that energised us throughout the project.

50 5. Reflections, lessons and conclusions

Throughout the project we made time to reflect on progress, to discuss what was working and what was not. At the end of Day 13 we used some by now familiar tools to help us evaluate the project from a number of different angles.

The energy of the group, and the productivity of the methods, is reflected in how much ground we covered in just 90 minutes. Some strong patterns emerged about the factors that were critical to the success of the project, and there were some clear messages about what should be done differently or better next time.

CRITICAL FACTORS IN THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT

The six most strongly positive success factors were:

Mandate from seniors.¹⁰ *“Direct line to top – totally different quality of conversation... Oddly intimidating! Great to have buy-in from the top. Encouraging and energising. Good feedback and good preparation. Good to get the feedback and know where to adjust.”*

Openness to team think. *“Cross-sectoral approach – new and different perspectives... Team members bringing their own perspective based on analysis – letting go of ‘my organisation thinks!’”*

Fieldwork. *“Brilliant and scary – face to face works best... Informative, inspiring. Brought it to life... Most enjoyable and informative aspect... Insightful and balanced perspectives obtained. Impact of these perspectives very profound. The only negative was feeling squeezed on time to choose and set up sites.”*

¹⁰ All comments in italics are verbatim quotes from the group's feedback.

Whole group days. *“So much fun, so productive! Always looking forward to them. Hard work but useful... Wonderful! Great energy, commitment, bounce. Invaluable, five stars. Excellent guidance and support through new tools and techniques... Team forming and clarifying. Would not have achieved result without this.”*

Internal support (core team). *“Having support within core team helped massively... Excellent... Great expertise to have... Excellent – felt we were listened to. Hard working group. Did excellent work translating our thoughts onto paper... Core team kept the momentum going. Strong leadership.”*

External support. *“Really fantastic. Brought out so much from the group and made the group better than we have ever believed we could be... Needed this expertise to guide process – essential... New techniques, inspired confidence – knew what they were doing... Very slick way of working – neutral facilitating... Systemic approach – kept us on track.”*

There were three success factors that received more mixed views:

Clarity of expectations. Whilst very positive about the shared vision, and clarity of process and expected outcomes, the issue of time and expectations of making rapid response when under pressure in the their day to day work surfaced again.

Pace. There were some specific well-founded observations on points in the process that needed more time; for example, preparing the presentation; a few days more to do some of the key analytical steps; more time to focus and set up fieldwork.

Group composition. Whilst comments were positive about the mix, energy and commitment of group members, the group questioned whether the project might have taken a different path if there had been stronger input from some parts of the system.

HOW USEFUL DID THE GROUP FIND THE TOOLS AND METHODS USED IN THE PROJECT?

The tools received high ratings – they were seen as central to the success of the project.

EXHIBIT 9. THE RATINGS OF THE MAIN TOOLS AND METHODS USED IN THE PROJECT

All tools and methods were rated as helpful overall.

- The eight most highly rated were:
- Structured story telling – report format
 - Group collaboration methods
 - External support for the process
 - Facilitated whole-group days
 - Support from core team
 - Fieldwork
 - Frontline perspectives at group days
 - Senior stakeholders at group days

- The two tools with the most mixed ratings were:
- Issue trees/problem structuring
 - Key questions and lines of enquiry

These tools, particularly issue trees, can be hard to grasp. We did not allow enough time to practice and understand these before leaving groups to work out how to apply them by themselves.

This whole early phase of generating the key elements of the problem, and then structuring them, was too rushed and needs redesigning.

Rating the tools, frameworks and methods we used

Thinking about the different tools, methods, frameworks, ways of working and activities we used or introduced during the pathfinder please rate each one according to how helpful or valuable you found it by ticking against the scale of:

- [1] not helpful
- [2] somewhat helpful
- [3] helpful
- [4] very helpful.

	1	2	3	4
Tool/method/way of working	NH	SH	H	VH
1. problem scope			●●●●	●●●●
2. system mapping/customer journey mapping	●		●●●●	●●●●
3. issue trees/problem structuring	●	●●	●●●●	●●●●
4. key questions and lines of enquiry to focus fieldwork		●●	●●●●	●●●●
5. frontline perspectives at our working days	●		●●	●●●●
6. senior stakeholders at our working days		●●	●●	●●●●
7. cases studies (eg: london challenge)		●●●●	●●●●	●●
8. facilitated whole group days			●●	●●●●
9. working in smaller groups		●●●●	●	●●●●
10. structured story telling/report slide pack structures				●●●●
11. fieldwork - interviews; site visits; focus groups etc			●●	●●●●
12. group collaboration methods: pinpoint, temp test, templates etc			●	●●●●
13. initial pathfinder group analysis, research and ground clearing		●	●●●●	●●●●
14. external support for process (peter and andrew)			●	●●●●
15. support from core team (Rhona, Orla, Roision, Sarah)			●●	●●●●

Source: Pathfinder group

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

The nervous but positive energy that the group felt during the first workshop turned into feelings of excitement, pride, hope and enrichment by the end of the process – but also relief that it was over (almost) and exhaustion from the pace and stretch of the project.

The reflections of the team members below are a tribute to the power of learning by doing. They are the principles of accelerated, collaborative problem-solving.

EXHIBIT 10. WHAT WILL GROUP MEMBERS DO DIFFERENTLY?

Think before I leap

“Spend more time on scoping, but don’t try to get to perfection before acting... Do a bit more planning.”

Use the power of teams

“Work through teams. Accept it takes time for right dynamic to form... Introduce interactive methods when working in groups.”

Get out more

“Get out more – fieldwork every month... Will consult and seek different system perspectives more... Enhanced understanding of the viewpoint of other departments should allow better framing when seeking cooperation.”

Take some risks

“Not to be afraid of discussing things no matter how wacky it may be... Set wide objectives and a date.”

Use the processes and tools

“I really loved the freshness of the process and methodology...All the facilitation skills, problem-solving approaches, pinpoint, the presentation style in the pack – visually very impressive... Use pinpoint and issue trees... initially sceptical – now championing... I will take away new facilitation skills and tools to structure group working.”

Listen and empathise

“Bit more sympathetic and aware of the challenges that others face. Less of a silo approach to complex cases... Listen to everyone. Changing one element will have impacts for other people. Let go of silo mentality more.”

Ask questions, be upfront

“Ask for clarification more upfront.. Ask silly questions!! Maybe nobody has asked them... Communicate concerns earlier... The need to communicate intentions and listen to a) what is happening and b) ask more questions to increase understanding.”

Source: Pathfinder group

DOING A PATHFINDER PROJECT AGAIN: SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON REDESIGN AND REPLICABILITY

In light of the reflections of the group, core team and external advisers, we have identified four aspects that will most need careful thought the next time a method like this is deployed:

1. **The early phase of problem-solving needs some redesign.** The initial phase of problem-solving was a little bumpy, especially the two steps of getting a focus and structuring the problem. This needs to be redesigned to allow more time for initial open field visits, better equipping people to develop system and journey maps as well as issue trees. More time practicing and stepping through the methods could also help.
2. **What is the right answer on pace and timing?** While frustrations about pace and lack of time are familiar in this style of project, apart from the early phase outlined above, the pace and timing were about right. You could do twice the work in twice the time and still not achieve anything close to the quality of the group's outputs. The fast pace ensures that the 80:20 principle has to be applied, which in turn brings great rigour and discipline.

3. **The core team.** A core team giving more time to manage the process is crucial. Their energy, skills and engagement really drove the small-team work and brought the capacity to get the final output up to a high standard in a short period of time. The core team needed to be given more time to support a project like this – too many other tasks remained on their workload. Towards the end, it took between three and four days a week to keep the momentum going.
4. **Project leadership was subtle, respectful, collaborative and crucial.** In the view of the external advisers, the leadership and intellectual input of the head of the core team was critical. It would be easy to take this quality of leadership for granted. Our main concern about the replicability of the success of this pathfinder in another part of government would be: Who will bring the leadership and other qualities that we relied on the head of team for at key points?



CONCLUSIONS

The pathfinder project began with two objectives: first, to make progress on the urgent policy challenges in improving youth mental health outcomes in Ireland; and second, to produce a new template for how to engage and work productively across a complex network of actors operating in a complex, interdependent system.

Although it remains too early to judge the impact on outcomes for young people, the quality of the report and recommendations allied with the positive support it has received across the leadership of the Civil Service, coupled with the appetite to keep going, provides strong assurance that the product of just 15 days of working together might lay the foundation for positive and lasting change.

However, what we can tell now is that the story of the Youth Mental Health Pathfinder shows the value of closely designing and supporting collaborative processes within government. It also highlights the time and attention that is required to plan ‘how we work’ as well as ‘what we work on’, a part of project management that can often be rushed or undervalued.

There can be a tendency to skip over process when we evaluate the impact of a particular project, focusing only on objectives and outcomes. However, oftentimes the secret to success and replicability lies in the process – how good it was and why, and what were the critical ingredients.

Real teamwork requires great skill and attention. Achieving this within traditional reporting lines and organisational structures is challenging; achieving it across boundaries is rare.

While we hope that in the final telling, the story of this pathfinder will show the difference that working in better, more productive and more collaborative ways within the Civil Service can make to critical public policy issues – in this case to the well-being and health of young people in Ireland – we are confident that, at least in the first telling, the story of the pathfinder shows the promise of a new template and a new way of working through groups that has the potential to truly maximise the sum of its parts.

This report is intended to support those who hope to learn, apply and replicate a process which the authors are satisfied at this juncture can be considered a success.



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COLLABORATION TOOLS

For explanation, resources and training on the pinpoint method, see: <http://www.pinpoint-facilitation.com>

NESTA in London has produced a brilliant, free-to-download DIY toolkit that draws on the research of hundreds of design, innovation and group tools – explaining them and giving examples of how and why they were used. <http://diytoolkit.org/media/DIY-Toolkit-Full-Download-A4-Size.pdf>

The Wheel in Ireland has developed an online Collaboration Hub which is targeted at community and voluntary organisations but is applicable to any organisation interested in collaboration. The hub includes a step-by-step guide to collaboration, resources on how to collaborate to support innovation and other useful online tools. <http://www.wheel.ie/collaboration>

The campaigning group Seeds for Change has a great, open-access set of easy-to-understand tools for group working.

<https://seedsforchange.org.uk/resources>

The Facilitator Tool Kit from the University of Wisconsin–Madison is a comprehensive, easy-to-use guide to tools, methods and techniques for assisting groups with planning and improvement projects and interactive meetings. <https://oqi.wisc.edu/resourcelibrary/uploads/resources/Facilitator%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>

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