DEISC Tool

Doing Ethical Innovation in Social Care

The Innovate Project conducted a year long review of innovation in social care. One of its most significant findings was that, despite significant investment and acceleration of innovation activity in recent years, very little attention has been paid to the ethical dimensions of innovating in the sector. In addition, the review found that innovation that was more closely aligned with professional standards and codes of ethics had features that made achieving successful implementation more likely.

The Innovate Project
Researching youth, risk and complexity

In order to support professionals in the sector we created the DEISC tool. The tool is designed to help senior or strategic leaders, operational managers, frontline practitioners and innovation designers who:

- Are interested in the ethics of innovation and want to maximise the chance that innovation design or innovation activity meets basic ethical thresholds;
- Want a process that helps demonstrate to others that the ethical dimensions of innovating are being considered at every stage of the implementation process;
- Want to know what questions to ask in conversations or planned sessions about either the general overarching ethics of innovating or an innovation in social care or specifics at each of the six stages of the innovation process;
- Want to embed ethics into innovation implementation strategies and plans at a systems, organisation, service or practice level;
- Are planning innovation review or learning processes for new or existing innovation activity and want to identify ethical issues as they emerge and soprompt discussion;
- Have a commitment to innovation in social care that meets ethical thresholds and want justifiable rationales to stop, pause, repeat and return during the implementation process for ethical reasons.

A full account of why ethics should be central to innovation is set out in the article 'Towards a framework for ethical innovation in children's social care', which can be read in full here: https://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/98712/

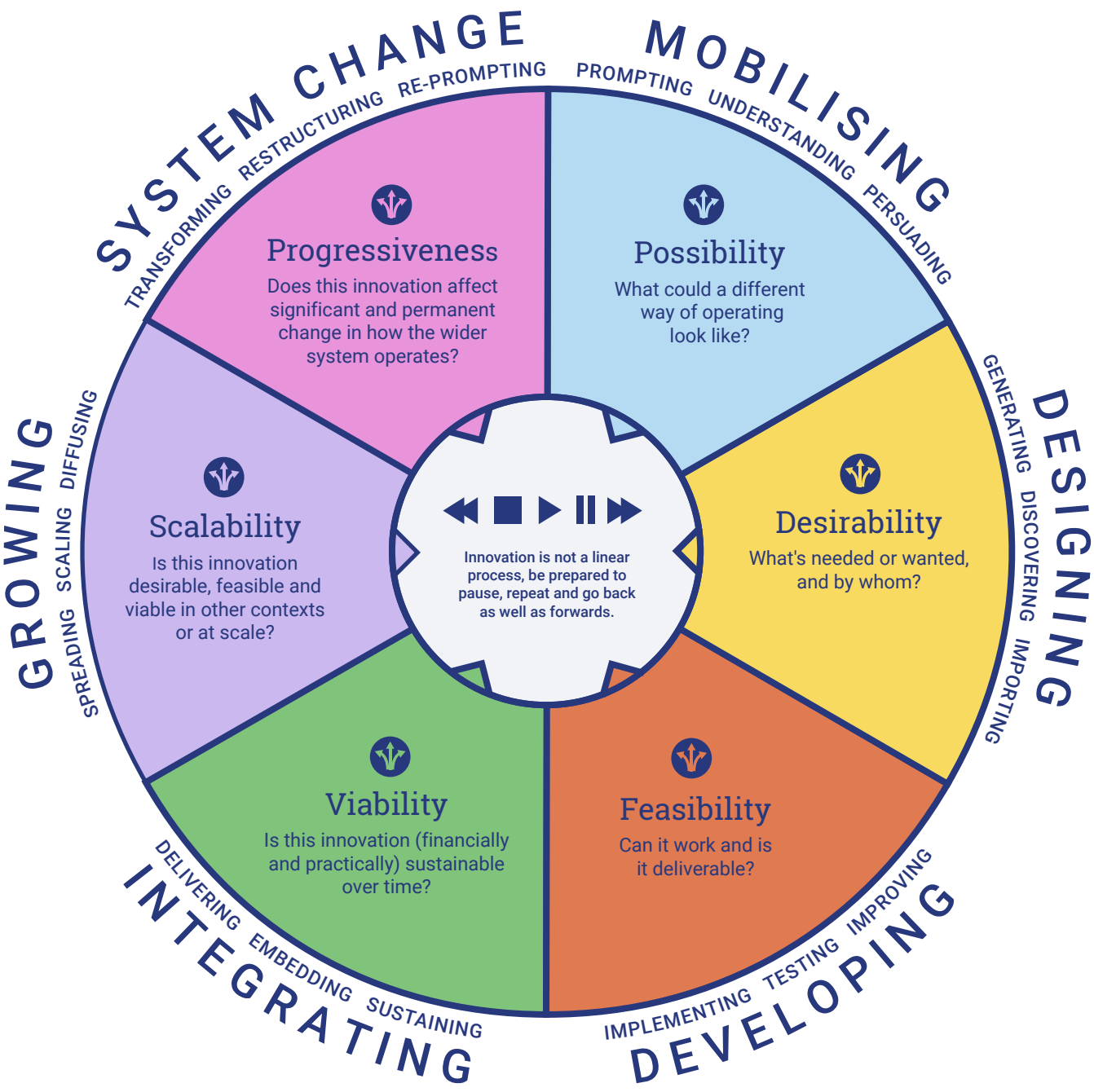
The six stages of innovation set out in our Wheel were developed from our innovation review. More information on the stages of innovation can be found on the Innovate Project website www.theinnovateproject.co.uk.

The DEISC tool provides an ethical layer to the questions inherent in a typical innovation process and should be read in conjunction with our PEISC framework (Promoting Ethical Innovation in Social Care)

Using the DEISC tool

The tool sets out questions designed to provoke consideration of the ethics of planning, doing, and continuing innovation in social care and related settings. The tool begins with overarching questions about innovation activity, and leads on to questions specific to the six stages of the innovation process: **Mobilising, Designing, Developing, Integrating, Growing,** and **System change.**

We suggest creating space and time, perhaps across multiple sessions and at different levels, from strategic leader to frontline practitioner, to respond to the questions and take their implications into account across the innovation process. You do not have to be right at the beginning of the innovation journey to use the tool, but instead start from the stage that best reflects where you are at currently. We also recommend the tool is used to review ethical considerations at key points in the innovation journey.



Ethical Prompts relevant to each stage of the innovation process

An overview of the Ethical questions to consider

These five questions are intended to make sure the importance of ethical considerations, and the ways in which ethics applies to innovation, are an integral and visible part of the innovation process. The questions apply throughout the process, but the amount of emphasis and the activities undertaken to answer each of them will necessarily vary according to the stage of the process and the context in which it is happening.

QUESTION 1

Are the **aims, outcomes and parameters of success** for the innovation clear?

This includes:

- being confident that the change will have a positive impact;
- the motivations and drivers for the innovation are set in the context of a broader theory of change;
- short- and long-term goals and success measures are set in conjunction with adult service users, young people, children, carers and families, as applicable;
- identifying any conflicting priorities; and
- assigning responsibility and clear processes for learning, evaluation and measuring progress.

QUESTION 2

Do the proposed innovation and process align with and support the **professional principles** of the sectors, services or practitioners involved?

This includes:

- understanding the ethical case for pursuing the work;
- ensuring alignment with relevant professional ethical guidelines or practice;
- gaining support of professional bodies;
- understanding potential unintended outcomes;
- and ensuring informed consent and involvement in the work by people involved with services, including children.

For more detail on applying the ethical principles of social work to the innovation process, see our Promoting Ethical Innovation in Social Care (PEISC) Framework.

QUESTION 3

Is the innovation being developed through **working in partnership** with all groups who will be involved with or affected by it?

This includes ensuring that:

- the commitment, capacity and resources needed are in place to undertake co-production with adult service users, young people, children, carers, families and practitioners
- honest conversations can happen at all levels of a service about the success, impact or consequences of the innovation
- the change is supported by organisations that promote the rights of all people involved with services, including children.

QUESTION 4

Has the organisation, service or partnership's **readiness for innovation** been assessed in context?

This includes:

- taking into account the emotional labour required to innovate in addition to practical requirements;
- testing the robustness of evidence or hypothesis supporting an innovation process; implementing a robust learning and evaluation process;
- understanding how the context may affect what's needed for the innovation to be successful;
- and securing the political commitment required.

QUESTION 5

What **financial or resource commitment** does the innovation require and will it deliver **public value**?

This includes:

- testing whether innovation is the best tool for change in this context;
- understanding the financial investment required to achieve different outcomes; gaining commitment to provide the level of short- and long-term resource required for success;
- and ensuring that any diversion of resource does not negatively impact other areas of the service, organisation or wider system.

THE KEY DECISION AT EVERY STAGE OF THE INNOVATION PROCESS:

Is it ethical to proceed?

These questions support the key decision that is made during each stage of the process: is it ethical to move on to the next stage?

When making this decision, three further considerations can be taken into account:

- Are any ethical concerns outweighed by broader requirements to act?
- If a broader requirement to act applies, can any negative effects be mitigated in ways that do not raise additional ethical concerns?
- Can these decisions be adequately explained and justified to adult service users, young people, children, families, carers and practitioners?

STAGE OF INNOVATION:

Mobilising

Innovation activities in this stage focus on **prompting** new visions of how things could be, **understanding** the root causes of a problem and **persuading** others for the need for change.

ETHICAL PROMPT

POSSIBILITY

Are we confident that we have the knowledge, capability and resources to conduct any innovation process in an ethically-informed way?

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- What is the motivation for change and the parameters of success?
- Are adult service users, young people, children, carers, families, communities, and practitioners sufficiently involved in this process?

PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Does the motivation for change align with professional values?
- Is there a clear ethical case for pursuing this work?

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- What plans are there to consult with all groups, including adult service users, young people, children, carers and families, who will be affected by an innovation?

READINESS FOR INNOVATION

- What efforts have been made to test whether your service or organisation is ready to innovate?
- Has account been taken of the emotional labour required to innovate, not just the practical issues?

RESOURCES AND PUBLIC VALUE

- Is there a clear case for innovation being used to improve outcomes in this context?
- Have other potentially less costly or disrupted ways to create change been considered?

STAGE:

Designing

Innovation activities in this stage focus on **discovering** needs, strengths and ambitions, **generating** new models, practices, systems or structures and/or **importing** ideas from other contexts to adapt to local need.

ETHICAL PROMPT

DESIRABILITY

Do we understand what is needed and by whom? Are we confident that this innovation, in this place and time, is the right action to take for these children and families?

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- Who is responsible for setting the aspired outcomes, and who will judge if they are met?
- Have the possible consequences and potential unintended outcomes of innovating on the adult service users, young people, children, carers, families, workers, the workforce, the organisation and system been mapped out?

PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Do we have an understanding of the possible intended and unintended outcomes of innovation for the groups involved, the workforce, organisation and wider system?

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- Does the permission, commitment, capacity, relationships and resources needed to undertake co-production with adult service users, young people, children, carers, families and practitioners exist in the service, organisation or system?

READINESS FOR INNOVATION

- If an existing innovation is being imported, is there robust evidence or a strong hypothesis to support it?
- If not, what are the grounds for proceeding?

RESOURCES AND PUBLIC VALUE

- Has an assessment been made of the potential impact of focusing or diverting resource to the innovation (and away from other areas of the service, organisation or wider system)?

STAGE:

Developing

Innovation activities in this stage focus on **implementing** the model in a bounded environment to demonstrate proof of concept, **testing** prototyping and piloting to learn what works, and **improving** the model to better fit local context and understand the wider changes needed for the model to be effective.

ETHICAL PROMPT

FEASIBILITY

Are we confident that this innovation is deliverable in a way that will have positive consequences, and that there are mechanisms in place to stop the process and prevent adverse consequences if it is not?

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- Is it clear during testing what would be considered a successful outcome of this innovation?

PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Have those involved in the innovation testing process, including adult service users, young people, children, carers and families, been told about what is happening in a way they understand and can give informed consent?
- Are they able to opt out of taking part?

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- What has been done to ensure that honest conversations about the difference the innovation is making can happen at all levels in the service or organisation?
- Is there a commitment from those involved to stop or pause the innovation process if the measures of success are not met?

READINESS FOR INNOVATION

- Is there robust learning and evaluation processes in place?
- Does this include mechanisms to capture any potential consequences or unintended coutcomes of the innovation at test stage?

RESOURCES AND PUBLIC VALUE

- What process has been undertaken to assess whether the financial investment required to test the innovation offers public value?

STAGE:

Integrating

Innovation activities in this stage focus on **delivering** the model in the mainstream organisational context, **embedding** it as standard practice and **sustaining** it in the short- to medium-term while gathering qualitative and quantitative evidence of effectiveness.

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- Is there robust learning and evaluation processes in place?
- Does this include mechanisms to capture any wider unintended outcomes or adverse consequences for individuals, families, practitioners or the wider system?

PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Has proper consideration been given to how the individuals, families and communities affected by embedding this innovation be involved in the process?

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- What process has been conducted to decide if the service or organisation is ready to embed this innovation?
- Has this process accounted for the emotional cost of innovation, and not just the practical tasks.

READINESS FOR INNOVATION

- Does the innovation need to be adapted before it is embedded?
- Has the learning from the testing process been fully utlised?

RESOURCES AND PUBLIC VALUE

- If there is not clear evidence from the testing stage, a theory of change, robust evidence or a strong hypothesis that the innovation will produce improved experiences or outcomes for adult service users, young people, children, carers and families, why is it being embedded? Is this rationale justified?

STAGE:

Growing

Innovation activities in this stage focus on **spreading** the model to other places or organisations, **growing** the model within a local context and/or **diffusing** across national systems, practice and approaches.

ETHICAL PROMPT

SCALABILITY

Is the innovation likely to remain desirable, feasible and viable at a larger scale or in other contexts? What aspects of the innovation or context might need to be adapted in order to support this?

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- Is there robust evidence, a theory of change or a strong hypothesis that growing the innovation will produce improved experiences or outcomes for adult service users, young people, children, carers and families?
- Is this rationale justified?

PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Has it been established that individuals, families, communities, and practitioners support the growth of this innovation?

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- What process has been conducted to decide if the service or organisation is ready to grow this innovation?
- Has this process accounted for the emotional cost of growing an innovation, and not just the practical tasks?

READINESS FOR INNOVATION

- Does the innovation need to be adapted before it is grown?
- Have the contextual factors that will impact on the success of growing the innovation been identified and a plan developed?

RESOURCES AND PUBLIC VALUE

- What commitments are there to make the changes needed and provide the level of resources required in the short and long term to grow the innovation?

STAGE:

System Change

Innovation activity focuses on transforming systems through permanent shifts in underlying assumptions, functions and cultures, **restructuring** systems to enable new practices, services and outcomes, and **re-prompting** the system into the development of new innovation.

ETHICAL PROMPT

PROGRESSIVENESS

Are we confident that the innovation effects significant and permanent change in how the wider system operates, and will these changes will be of benefit to the local/national system of social care?

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- Will the innovation effect significant and permanent change (to systems, cultures, assumptions and structures) that supports a step-change in positive outcomes for young people?

PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES

- Do the relevant professional bodies feel that the system changes prompted by the innovation align with their values and ethical codes?

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- Do organisations that promote the rights of adult service users, young people, children, carers and families support the wider system changes promoted by the innovation?

READINESS FOR INNOVATION

- What, if any, commitments have been given from politicians and policy makers that there is a commitment to making the system changes needed to give the innovation the maximum chance of success?

RESOURCES AND PUBLIC VALUE

- Can the financial investment required to change the system be justified as offering public value?