

# H4 Consulting Brief

## The Policy Hare

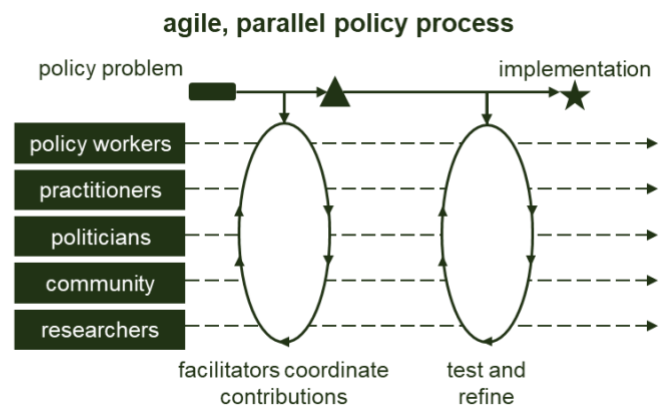
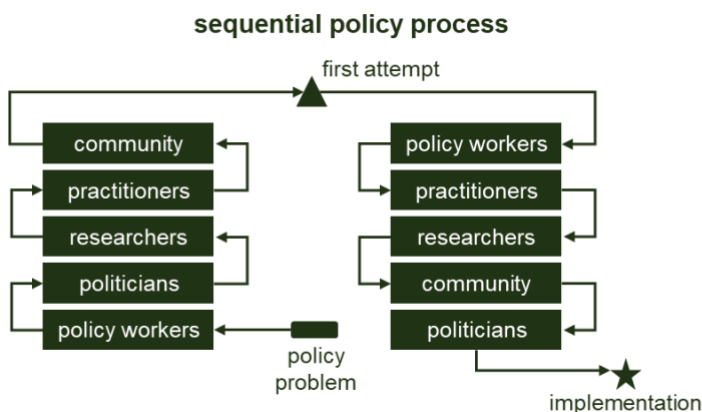
Traditional policy development takes time. Policy workers analyse research evidence, community and political expectations, and implementation considerations to design policy responses to wicked problems. This rigorous process can leave a gap between public expectations and the pace of the policy tortoise, sometimes prompting knee-jerk, often ineffective, political action. In public policy, slow and steady does not always win the race.

Ambitious reforms and wicked problems are complex. It takes time to formulate and test evidence-based policies with practitioners, experts, politicians, and communities. Traditionally, this was an expected and comparatively well-resourced function that included many researchers and domain specialists. Over time, the emphasis of publicly funded organisations has shifted to front line services, and policy teams have become smaller and more stretched.

Most significant reform also requires significant planning. This includes coordinating the work of people from different backgrounds and perspectives, as well as recognising and managing risks and unintended consequences, such as harm to vulnerable people. Sometimes, moving too fast can hurt.

Policy workers try to design evidence-based policies that will have enduring value, but political or public priorities and resources can shift rapidly, leaving policy work lagging. The decline in resourcing for policy work contributes to delays in gathering and analysing contributions from research, political, implementation, and community perspectives. Overworked specialist policy teams no longer maintain deep expertise in-house, and are even more reliant on other contributors to policy design.

When the, often slow, process of rigorous policy work falls short of community expectations about the pace of change, politicians may announce weak policy changes or investments that give the illusion of action but offer little lasting benefit for the public.



Thinking more explicitly of policy work as a facilitation function, rather than a design function, can mobilise resources to solve policy problems more rapidly. Policy facilitators bring together diverse perspectives, such as researchers, practitioners, politicians, and communities, to quickly design, test, and refine policy. This kind of rapid, outcomes-oriented collaboration accelerates the policy process by engaging stakeholder expertise simultaneously rather than sequentially, exposing participants to different points of view and involving them in compromises or adjustments, and making progress more transparent.

Regular engagement through iterative cycles of development also improves the likelihood that the final product will be effective, and will be supported by key stakeholders.

Faster cycles of developing and refining policy can simultaneously increase pace, by combining previously sequential processes, and quality, by drawing on multiple perspectives. Small policy teams can focus on the core skill of facilitating policy design by mobilising experts and stakeholders, rather than needing to maintain all relevant knowledge in-house. Politicians and communities with faster responses to policy challenges, and better visibility of the policy development process, will be less likely to demand fast, but ultimately unsatisfactory, action.

Winning contemporary public policy races is not about making tortoises run faster, or hares have more stamina. It's about building on their combined strengths by using agile policy hares to facilitate rapid access to the experience and skills of policy tortoises.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: [info@h4consulting.com.au](mailto:info@h4consulting.com.au)  
Find additional resources at [www.h4consulting.com.au/resources](http://www.h4consulting.com.au/resources)