

Principles for impact

Summary

About the project

The **Research for Impact** project built the capability of researchers across ten agricultural research organisations so that they could effectively integrate adoption thinking and practice into their processes.

This project built on earlier pilot work, *Designing the integration of extension into research projects*, which developed seven principles to improve adoption and impact from the start of the project scoping. These principles were trialled with researchers and extension practitioners across rural research and development corporations (RDCs) and other investor organisations.

This document provides a summary of each principle, providing a quick overview of what could be involved to put that principle into practice.

Overview of the principles

1. Think in systems

A system is a human construct to help us better understand how a set of elements work together to form a unified whole, often involving processes and practices. We need to be cognisant that we're working in an Agricultural Innovation System where many of the elements are interconnected and where feedback loops are important. Additionally, we're often working with multiple stakeholders along the value chain.

2. Focus on people

This is important because we are predominantly working with the humans in the system, even if we're studying the plants or animals. This is similar to the farmer-first approach but is wider to include all key stakeholders. Design thinking is a human-centred approach to innovation that integrates the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.

3. Engage stakeholders

Do so throughout the project (ideally prior to writing a funding application). This ensures the problem is well understood and defined, and that potential solutions are appropriately tested with end-users. This also provides greater ownership of the outcomes of the project, hopefully leading to widespread adoption where appropriate.

4. Co-design wisely

While co-design is a good principle, it should be applied appropriately; so, it's suitable for the problem being addressed. Some projects have a focus where they are extending technologies and practices that have already been developed and used elsewhere, or are required by regulation (e.g., water quality practices). In this case, it is not appropriate to go into a deep co-design activity with end-users. It may be that such a product easily slips into the new situation, or it may need to be modified, trialled or demonstrated.

5. Design for impact

We're often good at planning and implementing projects, but we need to spend more time designing them for success - in this case, the adoption of R&D. To achieve this, we can use design thinking, build a theory of change, and understand the psychological drivers for change.

6. Stay flexible

When appropriate, as these enable a collaborative approach, allowing end-users to provide feedback throughout the process. It increases flexibility, allowing the team to adapt more easily to change and minimise risk by failing-fast.

7. Communicate clearly

Frequent and targeted two-way communication with key stakeholders will ensure everyone has a clear understanding of their roles and the project's desired outcomes and impact. Use of multiple contemporary processes such as peer-to-peer learning, social network analysis, and social media will help to empower end-users to make informed decisions about adoption. The time invested in communicating and engaging helps build trust and rapport with all stakeholders, and especially end-users.

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