



Regional Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Guidance Note 2

Establishing a Learning Framework

Purpose

Establishing a learning process early in the planning phases is a fundamental component of climate change adaptation, and it is more than just monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement or adaptive management.

This Guidance Note seeks to help adaptation planning teams and stakeholders think about how they will establish an ongoing learning process that is mutually understood by all parties involved and can be referred to throughout the planning process, including implementation and evaluation.

Learning is fundamental to adaptation because adaptation is a complex social and environmental problem that requires action and collaboration at different scales, involving various organisations and individuals with

a range of values, visions, needs, risks, vulnerabilities, etc, and all of these interact in complex, dynamic ways, including with the changing climate.

This means, no single individual or organisation has ‘the answers’ or the right way to ‘do’ adaptation. It also means without some understanding of the ‘system’ or region, and a capacity to learn as we implement adaptation actions, our actions could have negative consequences, lead to maladaptive outcomes, undermine sustainability or justice efforts.

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Important Considerations

Successful adaptive decision-making requires drawing on different types of knowledge, and actively building new knowledge about a situation, to broaden the possibilities for effective adaptation.

The focus of developing a place-based or regional climate change adaptation strategy, therefore is not to only to produce a strategy document (although this is important), but to create an active planning, engaging, learning, and acting process that will develop and evolve over time.

As new stakeholders are brought into the process with different views, values and understandings, the richness of the picture of the region will expand, as will the range of potential adaptation actions. It could also mean the scope of complexities and uncertainties about the system will likely also expand.

Suggested Methods

Effective adaptive processes incorporate learning and reflection into each stage. It is common practice to reflect on a process by evaluating how well it met expected outcomes.

Although this is important, it will only reveal one way of seeing and thinking about that process. To really understand the implications of the work that has been undertaken, reflection should encourage 'thinking about the thinking' that had informed the work for example how the parameters of an initiative were set and by whom.

The following is a suite of questions that help reflection at the end of each piece of work. Responses to these questions could be documented. This is one example of an approach to learning; the adaptation planning team and/or stakeholders may have others that they have used before.

Regional Climate Change Adaptation Strategy reflection questions

Regional adaptation planning teams and stakeholders should evaluate the learning that has emerged through the process (e.g. the vision, objectives, understanding/description of the region) and consider what steps may need to be revisited based on new information, knowledge, insights, and perspectives including gaps and issues identified by 'new' stakeholders.

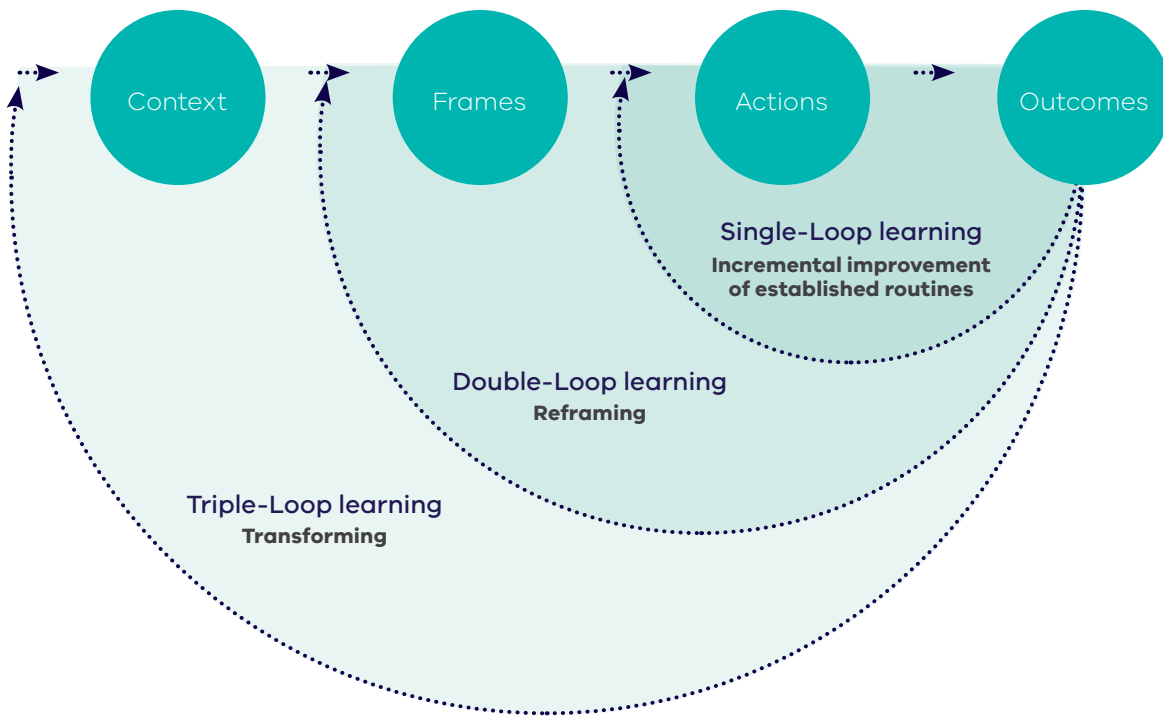
Additionally, each piece of work should be evaluated for equity and fairness in participation. This suite of suggested reflective questions have been incorporated into all the Guidance Notes:

- Who has participated?
- Who was missing?
- What options did different stakeholders have for participation and did the targeted stakeholders think these methods were appropriate, considerate, safe, etc? (e.g. timing, language, resources, culture, ability, power asymmetries, organisational priorities)
- Were stakeholders fully engaged in the process? If not, why not and what can be done?
- Were there any voices that dominated or voices that were not adequately heard? What can be done to (re)address this?
- What worked well and did not work well?
- Were there unexpected outcomes?
- In what ways has this step addressed the minimum standards?
- What has been learned during this step about the process, people or region?
- Does the learning from this step change what we know (or thought we knew) about the region or adaptation dilemmas?
- Has the learning from this step been documented?
- Do new stakeholders need to be engaged or invited into the process?
- Does new information, insights, knowledge or identification of gaps during this step require revisiting and re-working through previous steps – including the vision, objectives and goals of the strategy?

Reflect on the level of learning

It might also be useful for the adaptation planning teams and stakeholders to think about the 'level' of learning. Triple-loop learning is a conceptual framework that understands learning as occurring at different levels of depth and scale that correlate, roughly, with the extent of transformation of change within that process (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Sequence of learning cycles in the concept of triple-loop learning¹



Single-loop learning

is incremental improvement of a situation through specific actions or strategies. At this level questions are asked about how well a process met expected outcomes. This learning is useful in assessing the efficiency and/or effectiveness of an action towards achieving desired or projected goals. It can develop new knowledge about cause and effect relationships, for example how a system responded to a particular intervention.

Single-loop learning is appropriate in less complex situations where the goals are specific and there is general agreement and understanding. Single-loop learning is unlikely to drive deeper change or understanding of a system of concern.

Double-loop learning

is more appropriate when working with complex systems. It involves thinking more deeply about the broader consequences of actions and objectives of the project.

This may involve asking questions about why the project/actions are being undertaken, and who will benefit or be disadvantaged? It also involves questioning key assumptions. For example:

- Why do we want to do this?
- Who will benefit or be disadvantaged?
- What are the key assumptions we are making?

It might also be useful for the adaptation planning teams and stakeholders to think about the 'level' of learning

1. Pahl-Wostl, C., 2009. A conceptual framework for analysing adaptive capacity and multi-level learning processes in resource governance regimes. *Global environmental change*, 19(3), pp.354-365.

Triple-loop learning may drive more fundamental system change, reorganising structure and changing power dynamics, and in some cases transformative change can emerge. Setting up a learning framework that allows for this type of deeper enquiry will drive regional adaptation teams and stakeholders to confront deeper issues about the underlying purpose, structure and function of the system.

Triple-loop learning can also be seen as a matter of scale; it may ask similar questions to double-loop but involve a wider group of stakeholders. Diversifying and expanding the group involved in social learning processes will inevitably broaden the scope of interest.

- Who defined the adaptation problem and how did this drive the work?
- Who set the objectives?
- Was the process fair and transparent?

- Was it open to all stakeholders, including the less powerful or marginalised?
- How well does the decision-making process match the scale and dynamics of the system and issues?
- Is the long term vision for the system truly sustainable and fair one?

It will not necessarily be possible for the regional adaptation planning team and stakeholders to engage in triple-loop learning processes within the scope of this process. However, it is important for the groups to have a framework to encourage a learning approach, and to be aware of how that learning is being used and influencing the adaptive process.

A learning framework provides a foundation for assessing if action strategies will continue to move toward a sustainable, safe and just future.

Triple-loop learning is a conceptual framework that understands learning as occurring at different levels of depth and scale that correlate, roughly, with the extent of transformation of change within that process

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