

Summary of a Collaborative Program Lifecycle: Implications for Program Sustainability

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In order to understand how programs achieve sustainability, one must consider the entire program lifecycle. While sustainability is often the final outcome of an effective program, it depends on the successful execution of the preceding steps in the program innovation lifecycle. The process by which innovative programs are developed, implemented, and sustained is a complex one with each step in the process informing the next and feeding back through the cycle for further refinement¹. Scherier (2005) identified the following overlapping stages of program design and implementation:

Initiation: A program idea is conceived by innovators within an organization or by researchers wanting to test a potential new solution to a problem or felt need.

Development and adoption: The program idea is “fleshed out” with details about its components and activities, to be tested in the intended real-life context.

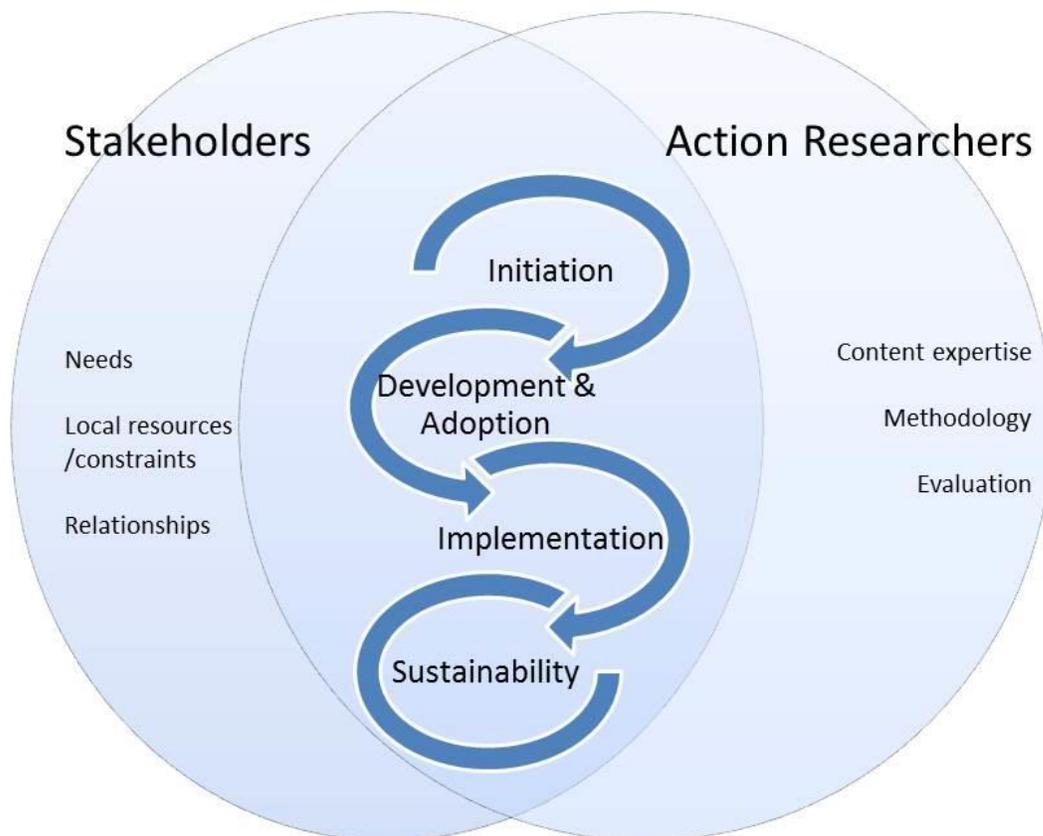
Alternatively, a program developed in a different location is adopted by the target organization or community.

Implementation: The program ideas are put into full practice within the target organization or community; implementation often may require a year or more of work to define work roles, train staff members, acquire necessary technology or other resources, and try out delivery options, as well as to secure needed administrative and/or community support.

¹ This model is referred to as the linear chain-link model developed by Klien and Rosenberg (1986).

Sustainability (or discontinuation): The program components developed and implemented in earlier stages are (or are not) maintained after the initial funding or other impetus is removed.

Dissemination: For some programs, the funding organization expects the new program idea to be communicated to other sites and adapted or replicated to serve new beneficiaries” (Scherier, 2005, p. 322).



Scherier’s (2005) discussion of the program life cycle is based on the work of Rogers (2003) diffusion of innovation model, but extends his work by including the concept of sustainability. Ideally, a collaborative model of the innovative program lifecycle allows for sustainability to flow more readily

from the initiation of the program because stakeholders participate in the process². Under this model, at the initiation stage program developers align their expertise with the needs identified by the organizations that will use the program. Then the organization provides input into the development of a program that is best adapted to meet its needs. Because the use organization works closely with program developers, adoption informs core component development and refinement to fit the realities of the local context. At this point, the program is ready for full-scale implementation in the organization and administration of the program by key stakeholders. The sustainability phase involves program developers and the use organization working to develop structures, policies, and practices that incorporate the new program into the institutional routine³. This final phase is where the action of sustainability occurs. However, sustainability is not possible without program design characteristics, organizational features, key individuals who execute the program, and an environment that can support the program once funding stops (Johnson et al., 2004).

² Stakeholder involvement ensures buy-in, allows for access to a broader network of support, and can enhance program development because the needs of the use community and researchers' expertise is available throughout the process (Scherier, 2005; Johnson et al., 2004).

³ This collaborative model draw on the innovation literature and has been adapted to construct a more collaborative model of the innovation process (Kline & Rosenberg, 1986; Kline & Sorra, 1996; Mayer & Davidson, 2000; Tornatzky & Fleisher, 1990)