

PMDU's framework for assessing likelihood of successful delivery

The framework was used to enable PMDU to make a judgment about the prospects of successful delivery based on the initial plans and ideas of the departments leading on the PSA. As the stage of delivery progressed it would be used to fuel the annual delivery report to the Prime Minister. It evolved over the years – this is a mid noughties PMDU version. The initial conclusions would form the basis for an early 'stocktake' where senior officials and ministers look at the assessment agree what needs to be done next in order to make it more likely that the priority is achieved.

PMDU provided a traffic light' rating, and short rationale and rating of the four judgements that combine to produce that overall rating of the likelihood of successful delivery of the priority.

The assessment requires four judgements (see annex 1 for detailed explanation of what factors are looked at to come to each judgement):

- Degree of challenge
- Quality of planning, implementation and performance management
- Capacity to drive progress
- Stage of implementation

What is unusual about the approach that it is done in collaboration between central departments, the agency and state body and centre.

And what is also unusual for most governments is that PMDU and departmental leads aimed to talk to people, agencies who are involved in trying to achieve the priority, including customers and frontline staff. This provides a 'reality check' about how well government policies and strategies are being translated into action that is having the right impact for citizens themselves.

In the summary report on the next page you can see that we only provide three or four bullet points as the rationale for each of the four judgements.

Having such a simple, visual summary statement makes it very clear what the judgement is – and allows the strategic monitoring meeting (the stocktake) that receives the report 'stocktake' conversation to focus on testing and challenging the judgements, and agreeing what needs to be done to improve the likelihood of success.

Further explanation of the framework in Annex 1. The framework breaks down each judgement into 'areas to consider' accompanied by some example questions to prompt discussion with the departments.

As every priority issue is different these questions are intended as a guide rather than a strict checklist. Every issue does not need to be addressed. PMDU would judge which were the most relevant and consider whether there were any other questions worth asking.

Recent performance is defined as progress against trajectories or plans over the previous 6 months. Recent performance is a factor which should be take into account throughout the assessment.

An example of a completed assessment:

This shows how short and clear the final report is. It is just one page.

Department:	Home Office	ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK	
PSA target:	7 – Ensure an effective asylum system		
Judgement	Rating	Rationale summary	
Degree of challenge	H	Challenge remains high due to the requirement to maintain/exceed current performance while remaining dependant on high risk external factors including global migration trends.	
Quality of planning, implementation and performance management	AG	Most sub targets are clearly defined and have delivery plans in place. Credible actions are in place and having an early impact on the most important targets. New performance management structures and reports in place for most areas and are starting to be used to drive progress – but will need to mature fast. Some of the many interdependencies between programmes are beginning to be addressed.	
Capacity to drive progress	AG	The new top management team is ambitious and focussed. They have clarified the over-riding priority of intake reduction and what else matters most. Nonetheless major development work remains to drive these through the organisation. Further progress hinges on successful engagement of middle managers and staff. Management capacity is being addressed purposefully with major change made in the top tiers of management. At this stage the potential failure to achieve a budget settlement hangs over many of the ratings of capacity.	
Stage of delivery	2	Stage of delivery varies by sub target. New legislation containing major system reform under development which swings balance to stage 2.	
Recent performance	Current performance on track to meet achieve targets in most areas, most importantly the in year target for the reduction in unfounded asylum applications by 50% by September.		
Likelihood of delivery		Key to ratings:	
Amber/Green		Red	Highly problematic - not addressed in delivery plan, requires urgent attention/action
		Amber/Red	Problematic - not fully addressed in delivery plan, some points require urgent attention
		Amber/Green	Mixed - aspect(s) require substantial attention, some are good
		Green	Good - delivery is clear and implementation can take place

Some background to the framework: planning for successful implementation

The foundation for success of a government priority is development of an implementation plan and implementation trajectory for a priority area that is owned by the agency or state body that is the lead on implementation of the priority.

The implementation plan sets out the policies and strategies for implementation, and the interventions in the system that will be made to achieve success. The trajectory is basically a visual summary of that plan - setting out visually the sequence of interventions and their expected impact on performance.

It seems like a small change from the usual array of strategies, action plans that are developed in many governments – but PMDU found that it made big difference to:

- the quality and rigour of the thinking and analysis;
- the collaborative cross-state body engagement and challenge that goes into developing the ‘trajectory’, and,
- the use of data to provide a very visual and transparent plan of what will be done when that will deliver the priority.

The implementation plan and trajectory provide the continuing focus for discussions with departments responsible for the strategy and plans. They enable the central departments to challenge whether plans to deliver the priority fit the degree of challenge posed by the priority.

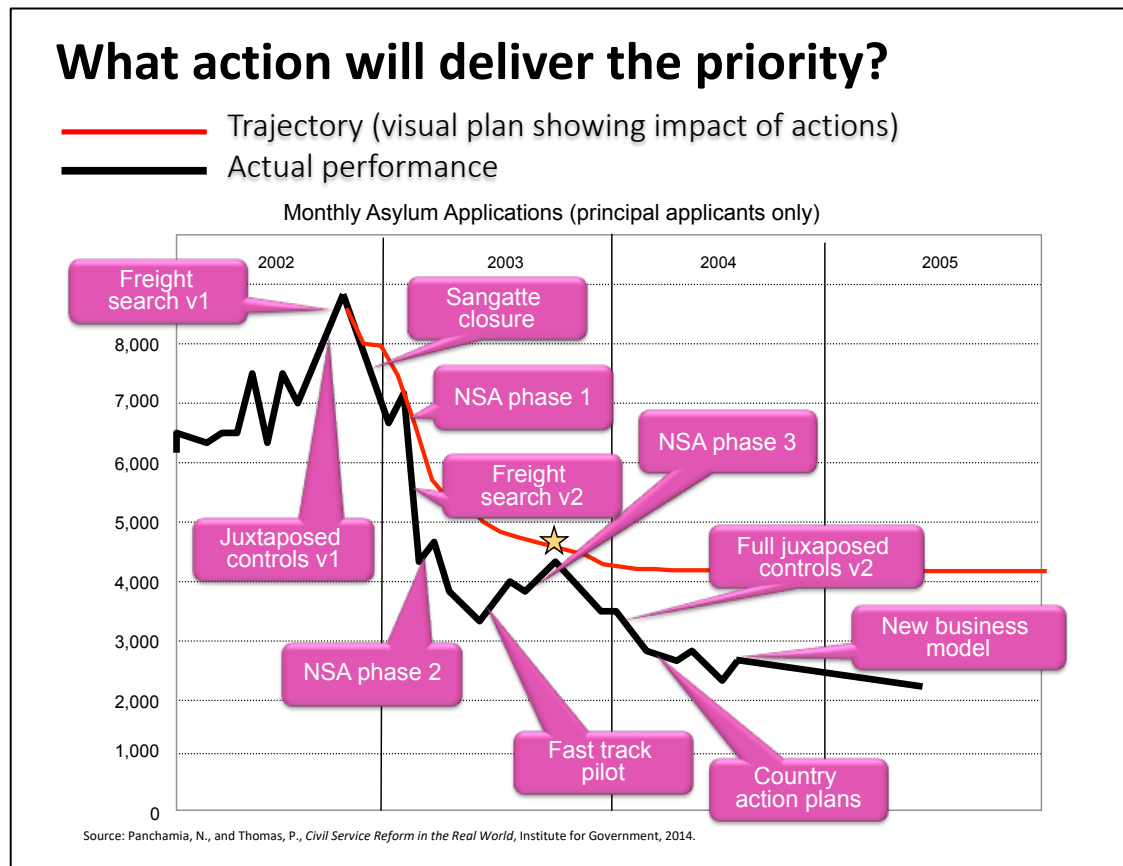
PMDU’s founder Michael Barber has set out three steps for the thinking that is required to assemble an implementation plan and create a implementation trajectory:

1. Determine the theory of change – this articulates your system’s belief about the best way to achieve its aspiration ... it is the organising force for your strategy ... The foundation for this is a thorough understanding of the implementation challenge ... understanding past and present performance, understanding drivers of performance.
2. Identify the interventions that could improve implementation. This might be changes to what is already done in the implementation system, or new activities that you have developed through your thinking on the theory of change.
3. Select and sequence interventions to develop. They need to be powerful in their own right, providing a good impact for the cost. They should be integrated with each other so that they build to have an effect greater than the sum of their parts; and be sequenced to reflect interdependencies, your resources over time and constant need to build momentum and sustain energy.

And he defines the trajectory as:

... an evidenced-based projection of a metric’s path over time from its current level to the level suggested by your implementation ambition ... It is your best estimate of the levels of performance your system will achieve en route to achieving its overall target.

Example of a trajectory plotting actions and their projected impact on performance



Some of the best trajectories are essentially a series of good-quality hypotheses and rough forecasts. Once finalised, the trajectories and implementation plan are the basis for monitoring, reporting on progress, being revised. Good implementation plans and trajectories are regularly revised and updated to reflect what is learned – to take account of what seems to be working and what doesn't. This cycle of monitoring and learning is how you improve and refine your hypotheses and estimates.

The more that the central departments work with state bodies and local government in co-developing and defining the priorities they will be working on, developing the key policies and strategies, or exploring the problems that are holding back performance, the more likely it is that their subsequent work on the monitoring and support of implementation will be successful.

And it follows that until the ambition and outcomes sought are clear, there is limited value in defining success and key measures. Sometimes targets will be useful, sometimes not – but to set a target before understanding the intrinsic degree of challenge and knowing at least the outline of a implementation plan risks unintended and sometimes dysfunctional consequences.

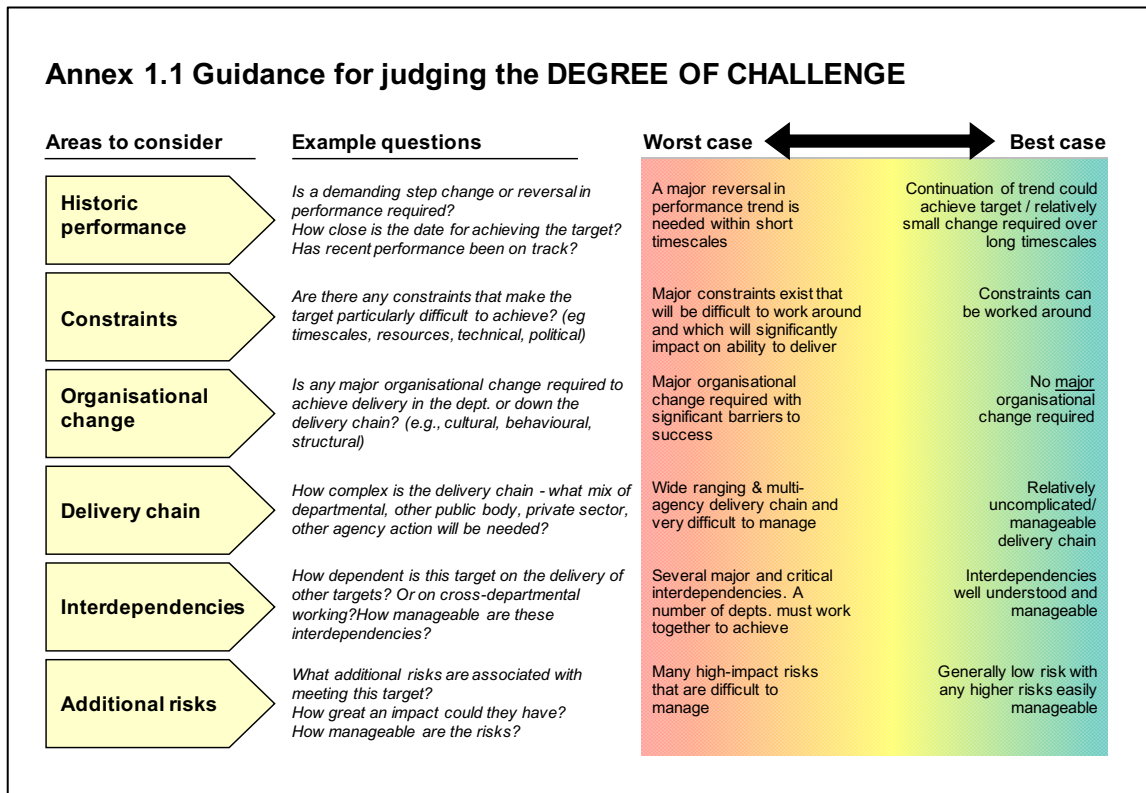
Annex 1: Template and guidance for the assessment framework

Department:	[Redacted]
PSA target:	[Redacted]

Annex 1.0 Template for DELIVERY ASSESSMENT

Judgement	Rating	Rationale summary
Degree of challenge		
Quality of planning, implementation and performance management		
Capacity to drive progress		
Stage of delivery		
Recent performance		

Likelihood of delivery	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="background-color: black; color: white;">Key to ratings:</th> <th></th> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: red; color: white;">Red</td> <td>Highly problematic - not addressed in delivery plan, requires urgent attention/action</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: orange; color: white;">Amber/Red</td> <td>Problematic - not fully addressed in delivery plan, some points require urgent attention</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: yellow; color: black;">Amber/Green</td> <td>Mixed - aspect(s) require substantial attention, some are good</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="background-color: green; color: white;">Green</td> <td>Good - delivery is clear and implementation can take place</td> </tr> </table>	Key to ratings:		Red	Highly problematic - not addressed in delivery plan, requires urgent attention/action	Amber/Red	Problematic - not fully addressed in delivery plan, some points require urgent attention	Amber/Green	Mixed - aspect(s) require substantial attention, some are good	Green	Good - delivery is clear and implementation can take place
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Annex 1.2 QUALITY OF PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION & PERF MNGT (1)

Areas to consider	Example questions	Worst case	Best case
1. Understanding the problem			
Understanding of desired outcome and target	<i>Is the overall vision/high level strategy clear? Is the target SMART and does it match the policy objective? Do people understand the scale of what is needed to achieve the target and the timescales? Is there a clear line of sight to the end goal?</i>	Significant ambiguity / evidence that target and policy are in conflict. Lack of appreciation or urgency and scale of change required.	Clear target supporting broader policy objectives. Understanding of degree of change required. Clear customer satisfaction measures
Understanding causation	<i>Have performance drivers been understood? Are effective levers and their relative impact identified? Have gaps in the existing levers been identified?</i>	Drivers and levers unclear / no evidence base. Lack of recognition that new levers need to be found	Sound analysis of drivers / levers, strong evidence of potential impact - used to drive action planning
Understanding what works	<i>Has evidence of what works been identified and used? If not are the gaps in knowledge being addressed?</i>	No analysis of previous experience or evidence about what has had most impact	Sound understanding of what will make a difference based on evidence
Understanding the delivery chain and key stakeholders	<i>Is the delivery chain clearly identified? Are the interests and influence of key stakeholders understood? Is it clear how communications with all stakeholders will support delivery? Are end users engaged from the outset?</i>	Poor understanding of who the key players are who will drive delivery; how they impact on delivery and how to engage them.	Clear understanding of delivery chain. Well thought through stakeholder strategy. End users engaged from outset.
2. Taking action			
Action plan	<i>Are actions identified that will drive performance? Are planned actions sufficient to meet the target? Are relative priorities clear? Are timescales & responsibilities clear?</i>	No action plan / no prioritisation / no causal chain to performance drivers	Convincing set of prioritised activities with clear timescales and responsibilities
Risk management	<i>Is the potential impact on delivery of the main risks understood. Are effective countermeasures planned? Are risks reviewed/ managed to minimise impact? Is there adequate contingency planning?</i>	No risks identified / evidence that risks are not being managed	Key risks identified, their impact evaluated and commensurate countermeasures identified and employed

Annex 1.3 QUALITY OF PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION & PERF MNGT (2)

Areas to consider	Example questions	Worst case	Best case
3. Measuring progress			
Measures (or indicators)	<i>Have effective measures of assessing progress towards the target been identified? Are proxy measures or lead indicators that are being used suitable? Will measures quickly tell you whether actions are working?</i>	No relevant measures/ timelag too great to inform delivery	Good measures selected which will enable monitoring at frequent enough intervals
Trajectories	<i>Is a credible trajectory (based on key actions) predicted for each measure, proxy measure or lead indicator? Are there trajectories based on regional indicators where appropriate?</i>	No trajectories or trajectories not based on any analysis	Each measure has a well considered trajectory clearly linked to key activities and milestones and sound progress tracking processes
Milestones (inputs, outputs and outcomes)	<i>Have meaningful milestones been set at sufficiently frequent intervals to focus progress assessment?</i>	No milestones / too many irrelevant ones risking blurring focus	Effective identification of milestones at appropriate intervals
4. Managing performance			
Implementation	<i>Are the actions being systematically implemented and to timetable? Are the milestones being achieved?</i>	Systematic implementation. Milestones achieved	Systematic implementation. Milestones achieved
Evaluating actions	<i>Are appropriate evaluations undertaken to understand whether the actions are having the intended effect e.g. reality checks?</i>	No evaluation taking place or planned	Well designed evaluations providing clear assessment of what is working. Good use of reality checks/inspection data.
Reporting performance	<i>Are sound governance and reporting structures in place? Are programme and project management systems used effectively? Is the content, frequency, timeliness and analysis of performance information appropriate? Is there sufficient data on local performance?</i>	Governance arrangements unclear. Lack of programme and project management structures. Poor quality performance reporting means problems are not identified or tackled urgently.	Clear governance arrangements. Systems efficient and reviewed regularly. Good quality performance reports being used by senior managers to drive timely action
Acting on performance information	<i>Where problems arise is remedial action being identified and taken promptly? Is the support and/or intervention sufficient/appropriate?</i>	Support or intervention too little, too late	Appropriate support or intervention at the right time.

Annex 1.4 Guidance for judging the CAPACITY TO DRIVE PROGRESS

Areas to consider	Example questions	Worst case	Best case
Leadership	<i>Is there demonstrable top level buy-in with clear roles and responsibilities? Are ministers providing the appropriate direction and focus? Do the leaders own the targets and drive performance? Do they focus enough of their time on delivery? Do they have the necessary support to drive delivery?</i>	Leaders lack drive and determination. Focused on problems not solutions. Lack of prioritisation and focus. Leaders isolated. Lack of direction or mixed messages from ministers.	Leaders set clear expectations & challenge poor performance. They own the plan and drive implementation. They are well-supported & committed to developing themselves and their teams.
Experience and skills	<i>Are the necessary skills and experience available?</i>	Major skills gaps likely to seriously hinder delivery e.g. PPM. Lack of relevant experience. No urgency about addressing the gaps.	Have the right mix of skills and experience. Have enough experience of running major projects.
Resources	<i>Are there sufficient people giving enough of their time? Are people assigned to the right priorities? Are the necessary funds allocated and to the right priorities? Has there been the necessary investment in premises, plant and equipment? Is necessary IT in place?</i>	No assessment of requirements. Mismatch between staff and priorities. Lack of investment in necessary equipment or IT systems. No urgency about addressing gaps.	Necessary resources in place and focused on the key priorities. Needs are reviewed regularly
Engagement	<i>Do key players in delivery chain understand their role in meeting the target? Does Dept. manage/monitor the delivery chain well? Is the combination of performance levers right? Are users consulted and engaged? Is communication with them effective? Are there adequate customer satisfaction measures?</i>	Lack of understanding or use of levers to influence key delivery agents and/or front-line deliverers. Lack of communication with the delivery chain. Little feedback up the delivery chain.	Good understanding of performance of delivery chain. Good 2 way communications. Effective use of performance levers. Clear customer satisfaction measures.
Culture	<i>Are people ambitious to improve - do they believe it can be done? Are responsibilities clear - yet giving room to people to deliver and innovate? Is performance assessed, challenged and learned from regularly? Is best practice identified and spread? Is success celebrated?</i>	Lack of faith in ability to make progress. Focused on obstacles rather than finding ways round them. Lack of ambition. Not learning from mistakes. Lack of ownership of responsibilities. Lack of trust. No rewards for delivering	Ambitious. Results seen as important. Get round obstacles. Progress is reviewed. Learning is applied. People have clear responsibilities, trusted to deliver and rewarded for success.

Annex 1.4 Guidance for judging the STAGE OF DELIVERY

Stage of delivery	Description
Stage 1. Policy Development	<i>At this stage policy is still being written and the major steps towards implementation have not yet commenced.</i>
Stage 2. Implementation	<i>The key policies are in place and early implementation is beginning. Pilots are underway. Systematic communication of objectives is underway.</i>
Stage 3. Embedding change	<i>Implementation is now impacting on the entire intended audience. The emphasis is now on strengthening and deepening the impact of policies. The objectives of policies are well-understood down the delivery chain. Approaches to implementation are being refined in response to experience. Regional variations in quality of implementation are being addressed.</i>
Stage 4. Irreversible progress	<i>Implementation is now complete and progress would continue without central Government attention.</i>