



STAY TUNED

BOOSTING THE FREQUENCY OF QUALIFICATION

Solution Story // Implementation Journey Nantes

As part of Stay Tuned, the team from the city of Nantes, France, faced the challenge of turning a high-level strategy into something concrete that is measurable on the ground. Building collaboration and trust with stakeholders is key to their approach and their success.



01. WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT?

Nantes started with their *Projet Educatif de Territoire* (PEdT), their strategic plan for the local area – this included the specific element of *Bien Grandir A Nantes*, translated as “Growing up well in Nantes”.

It set out the city’s vision and strategic plan to increase the wellbeing of all children and young people in Nantes.

They use this as a core way to increase educational success by improving attitude and engagement with society in general and thus reducing the risk of early leaving from education and training (ELET) by young people in the city.

02. WHAT WERE THEY WORKING TO IMPLEMENT?

Bien Grandir A Nantes was developed following the city’s participation in the PREVENT Action Planning Network under URBACT II. Jean-Jacques Derrien led the local team through that first project and continues to lead the work in Nantes for the Stay Tuned project, working on the implementation of that plan.

The three most important goals of this plan were to:

1. Promote educational achievement by reducing social and geographical inequality, by recognising children’s skills and including their families
2. Ensure coherent, qualified educational services throughout children’s whole school experience, from early childhood to adolescence
3. Strengthen educational continuity with adolescents

Essentially, the plan leaves the academic education to the teachers and school directors, but focusses on the other aspects of children and young people’s lives to make sure that a “whole-person” approach is taken to supporting people to achieve their potential.

However, Jean-Jacques and the team were aware that this was a “strategic” plan, and whilst it was much more than just an aspirational vision, it was not yet described at the operational level, in terms of concrete actions and deliverables. One of their first tasks would be to work out how to transform a “global” vision into concrete actions.

Key Policy Themes for Nantes:

Informal Learning and Schools as Communities
School Leadership
Career Guidance

03. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION?

The first challenge faced by the team was that of making the plan operational. Local Stakeholders were bought into the vision, but that is different to being willing to commit time and resources on specific activities, yet to be defined. The team knew that getting a common set of values needed for collaboration would be difficult. They were also aware of the challenge of governing a large global plan in light of actions and projects that each also existed in its own right. It would be all too easy to get lost in the complexity of such a governance nightmare!

Another challenge that presented itself during the project was that of the restructure of the education department itself. This was to continue during the lifetime of the Stay Tuned project and meant that the team would need to respond to those changes as well as keeping the project actions on track. Achieving that in a constantly changing environment would be a challenge – there was a risk that they wouldn't be able to communicate the situation to stakeholders because they wouldn't fully understand it themselves whilst the changes were ongoing.

Key Implementation Challenges for Nantes:
Moving from Strategy to Operational Plan
Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

04. WHAT WAS THEIR DELIVERY APPROACH? HOW DID THEY TACKLE THE BARRIERS?

To deal with the complexity of the plan, the group agreed to focus on six specific actions. In parallel, they also thought about recommendations for governance and monitoring of these actions, looking at how these would link to the overall plan. In this way, the team were creating simplicity for their specific activities with stakeholders – work on tasks that are manageable – but without losing sight of those individual actions in the context of the full strategy.

The trick here was making the actions discreet enough; keeping the group meetings focussed on delivery of individual actions without confusing those sessions with the

complexities of the 'global' plan; but with at least one of the team having an eye on the links and implications for the global plan, and adjusting things accordingly.

They achieved this by using simple but effective tools, which Jean-Jacques and others are familiar with and comfortable in using. The main tactic was focussing on one action from the plan in each of six local group meetings. In each one of these meetings, the group conducted a SWOT analysis on the action in question, using two or three examples to illustrate and explore the activities, how well they were working and what could be improved.

Key Implementation Themes for Nantes:
Project Monitoring, Evaluation and Decisions
Open Working and Stakeholder Involvement
Conditions for Implementation

05. WHAT WORKED? AND WHAT DIDN'T?

The team were pleased to find that the focussed approach, conducting a SWOT analysis of a single action, with stakeholders was effective. They also decided to involve a wider range of stakeholders than the core local group in order to illustrate the actions. This worked because the core stakeholders had a role in defining the approach, but the larger group added extra knowledge and alternative perspectives but also helped to include a fuller range of stakeholders in the process.

They also asked the blunt question: "A PEdT – what for?". They felt that the group needed to collectively explore and answer this question.

There was no point having a 'global' plan if they had no way to measure it in the field. By tackling this question –not an easy one!– together, it built trust and shared purpose within the group. Complex questions like this require a certain amount of "working through the answer yourself" to truly understand and accept that answer. It's not something that you believe or accept so easily if you are simply "told" the answer by someone else. By being part of the process, the local group stakeholders had a greater ownership of the answer. Furthermore, this answer was also more of a compromise or 'agreed' answer than would have been the case otherwise.



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06. WHAT DID THEY LEARN?

The team saw clearly that there was indeed a large gap between concrete actions and global management of the plan. The approach they took helped to bridge that gap, by using a small group to help connect the actions to the plan, not trying to involve all stakeholders in that process. The shared analysis, conducted by the group of stakeholders also helped to build the common understanding and joint

ownership of the actions and of the overall plan.

The local group is small when compared to the total stakeholders they have in Nantes and who are involved in the high-level process of creating this type of plan. This made the practical work on the plan more effective, but they still had the option to include "extra" stakeholders when it was relevant or necessary.

Jean-Jacques in particular noted the need to be flexible to keep the project on track, particularly in light of the restructuring of the education department happening in parallel with the implementation of their plan. He admits this is easy to say and harder to do! But his point was that with both change processes happening together, they influenced each other simultaneously: the restructure influencing how they were delivering the actions; the experience of delivering the actions having an influence on how the department was restructured. It was not clear to them at the start that these two change processes would intersect in this way.

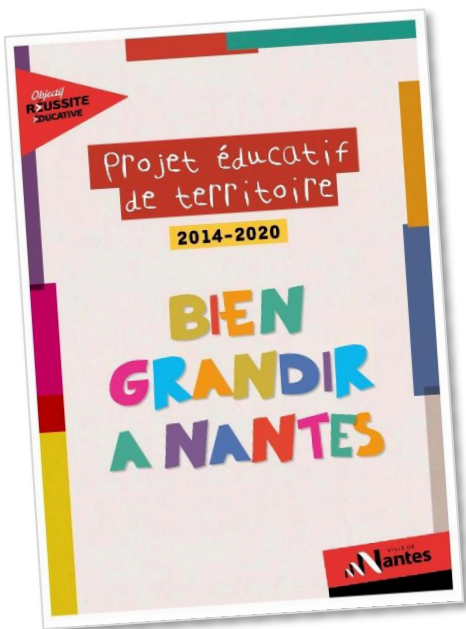
In practice, this meant there was no “final design” for the restructure or “final way” for the action plan implementation – both developed and evolved as time moved on. The team (and wider department) felt that this was for the better. Both of the two parallel processes were improved as a result of the influence of the other. But this came at a cost – of needing to be responsive and flexible;

keeping sight of what was happening and adjusting things accordingly. In Jean-Jacques' own words, “we must be flexible (which is easy to say!) not only to adapt to reality, but also to be affected by parallel processes... We have to be ready to adapt and to find the coherency between the two types of work we are doing.”

This is an example of working effectively to understand and respond to the Conditions for Implementation. When those conditions are changing during the implementation, the only real way to work with that effectively is to be flexible, responsive and iterative in your approach – constantly updating your activity and your approach to fit. This is what the team in Nantes managed to successfully navigate. Rather than a “big bang implementation” or “waterfall approach” they helped both parallel implementations to evolve and develop in sympathy with each other.

However, this takes both time/resource and focus to do well. Such a pair of parallel projects can't be left to run unchecked. It is also wrong to assume that the detail of the implementation will remain the same from start to finish. Observation, analysis, reflection and adjustments are needed almost constantly. Making such adjustments keeps both plans and implementation in touch with reality; but it does take resource and focus.

It also relies on good relationships with all stakeholders who are affected, both within the organisation and outside it. Nantes' approach to their stakeholder management and the working of their local group meant they had developed sufficient trust and involvement to be able to adjust the approach for both the action plan implementation and the education department restructure.



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07. WHAT DID THEY CHANGE AS A RESULT?

At the beginning, the team in Nantes knew that they would be involving stakeholders in the process. They have done so many times before; it is key to their working methodology in a context where they often have no direct control over actions and measures and where they rely on influence and cooperation to ensure things are delivered.

However, in this implementation they have taken a particularly co-creative process with their local stakeholders. Working

collaboratively on implementation of actions (and on the analysis and reflection of those actions) has meant that the wider group has worked together in new ways and gained even more new perspectives on their own work and role in the implementation process. This included a conference on Educational Success in the city in February 2019, which formed a key part of this journey. They are now moving on to run surveys and meetings in each of the 11 districts in the city to widen awareness and engagement.

08. WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS IT MADE? WHAT DO THEY PLAN TO CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

So what does the future hold? For “Bien Grandir A Nantes” the team will be taking a more “territorial approach” to managing the plan, building on their approach of working on defined and focussed actions at a local level, but with a clear connection to the global strategy at city level.

This approach will also look more at starting from the territorial challenges - building from the ground up when defining the challenges and also when starting to design and take action to tackle those challenges. Alongside this, Nantes still wish to further increase parents' involvement at the local level; as a key stakeholder group, they are underrepresented, especially in the more challenging localities.

For the team, this project has made a more “testing and experimentation” approach seem possible. They are working to develop more experimentation with a “Safe-to-Fail”

ethos. This is largely made possible through the close working, trust and shared ownership that has been developed with the local stakeholders. The approach is to test out ideas on a small scale, keeping the impact (if things don't work out) at a low enough level to be able to try them out safely. If they don't work as expected, nothing too serious goes wrong and the group have time and resource (and an expectation!) to analyse and reflect on the pilot, revise the approach and try again with an improved version. This agile and iterative approach to tackling ELET has been highlighted as an important methodology and ethos within the Stay Tuned project. It is exciting to see the city of Nantes embracing it and starting to work in this way.

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