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Evidence-Based Government: How Do We Make It Happen?

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Summary

- What is Evidence-Based Government?
- Why Evidence-Based Government?
- Making Evidence-Based Government Happen:
 - Wanting it to happen
 - Requiring it to happen
 - Incentives for it to happen
 - Getting compatible systems for it to happen
 - Reconciling different notions of evidence
 - Reconciling different sources and types of evidence
 - Some Suggestions for Action



What is Evidence-Based Government?

“Evidence-based policy helps people make well-informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects *by putting the best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation.*

(Davies, P.T., 1999)



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“But what about factors other than evidence?”



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Evidence-Based Government: Factors Other Than Evidence



Evidence-Based Government

“Evidence-based government means *integrating* experience, expertise and judgement etc. with the best available external evidence from systematic research.”

(Davies, P.T., 2000)



Why Make Government/Practice More Evidenced-Based?

- Effectiveness - ensure we do more good than harm
- Efficiency - use scarce public resources to maximum effect
- Service Orientation - meet citizen's needs/expectations
- Accountability - transparency of what is done and why
- Democracy - enhance the democratic process
- Trust - help ensure/restore trust in government and public services



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Evidence-Based Government: Wanting It To Happen

“Social science should be at the heart of policy making. We need a revolution in the relationship between government and the social research community - we need social scientists to help determine what works and why, and what type of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective ...”

(UK Secretary of State for Education, 2000)



Evidence-Based Government: Wanting It To Happen



PROFESSIONAL POLICY MAKING
FOR THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

Report
by
Strategic Policy Making Team
Cabinet Office

September 1999

- Policy making must be soundly based on evidence of what works
- We must improve departments' capacity to make best use of evidence
- We must improve the accessibility of the available evidence to policy makers



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Evidence-Based Government: Requiring It To Happen

Professional Skills for Government *Policy Makers' Core Skills* (from October 2005)

- Leadership
- Financial Management
- People Management
- Project and Program Management
- Communications and Marketing
- Professional expertise
- Broader Experience
- Analysis and Use of Evidence

**Incentives to Make it Happen
Build Into Appraisal and Rewards Systems**



Evidence-Based Government: Requiring It To Happen

PSG: *Policy Makers'* Core Skills Analysis and Use of Evidence

- Anticipate and secure *appropriate* evidence
- Test for *deliverability* of policy/practice
- Use evidence to *challenge* decisions
- Identify ways to *improve* policy/practice
- Champion a *culture* of collecting/using evidence
- Ensure *incentives* consistent with wider government
- *Work* in partnership with a wide range of experts/analysts

**Incentives to Make it Happen
Build Into Appraisal and Rewards Systems**

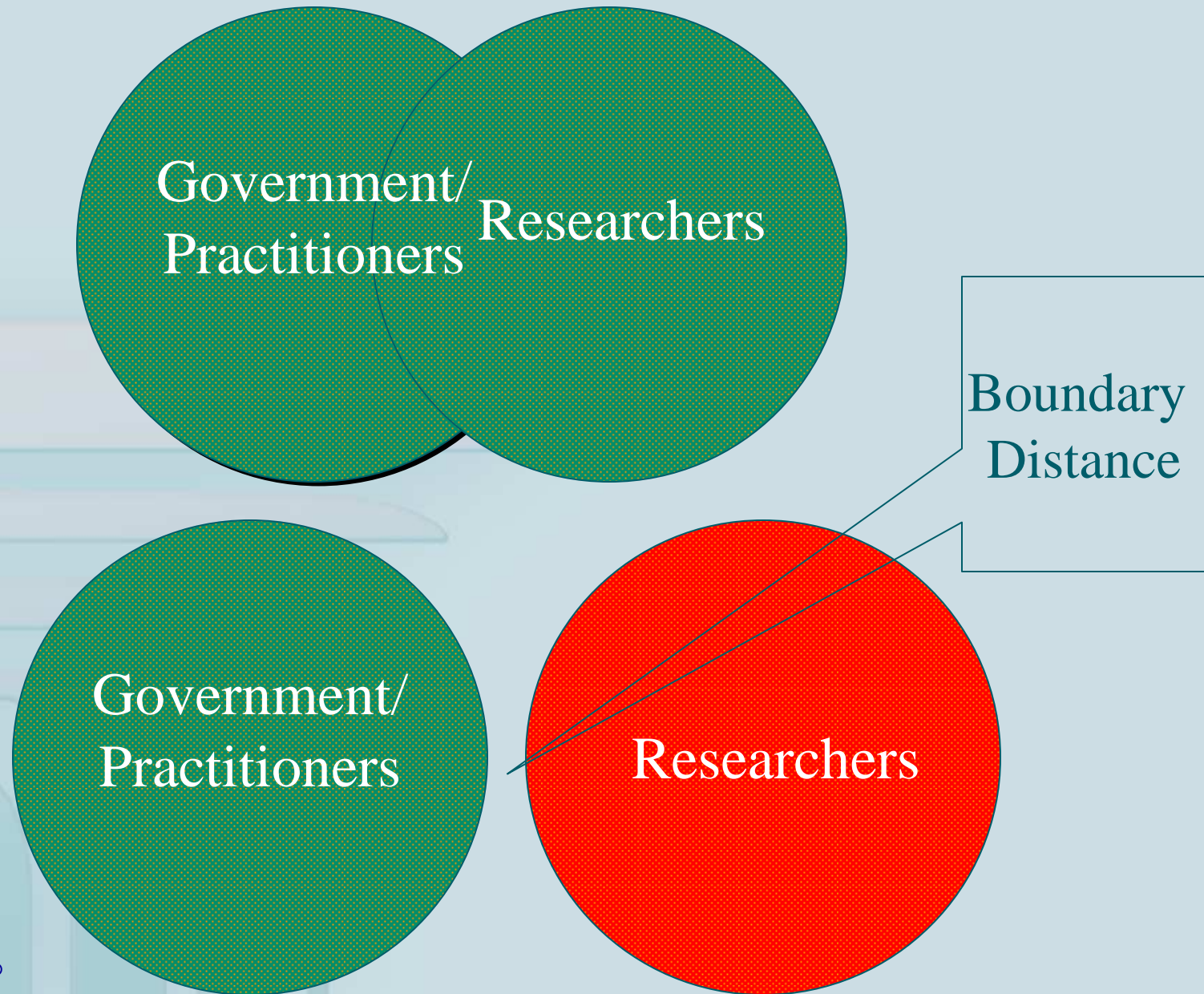
Evidence-Based Government: Requiring It To Happen

PSG: *Researchers' Core Skills*

- Meet *customers' needs*
- Works in *partnership* with other analysts and practitioners
- *Critically evaluate* data and information
- *Synthesize* and use data from multiple sources
- Make sound evidence-based judgments
- Understand *policy* - think imaginatively
- Use *writing* and other *communication* skills
- Communicate *written* and *oral* information clearly/concisely

**Incentives to Make it Happen
Build Into Appraisal and Rewards Systems**

EBG: Getting Compatible Systems for It to Happen



Getting Compatible Systems for It to Happen Some Problems

- There are often *systemic* differences between the research and the policy/practice communities
- ‘Boundary distance’ between social systems
- Different values and expectations
- Challenge function *versus* problem-solving
- The ‘awkward squad’ *versus* the ‘handmaidens’
- Knowledge for its own sake *versus* as a basis for action
- Different *notions* and different *sources* of evidence



Different Notions of Evidence

(J. Lomas *et al*, 2005)



Make It Happen


Policy Makers' Evidence

- Colloquial
- Anything that seems reasonable
- Policy relevant
- Timely
- Clear Message

Researchers' Evidence

- 'Scientific' (Context free)
- Proven empirically
- Theoretically driven
- As long as it takes
- Caveats and qualifications

Policy Makers' Types of Evidence

- Research/Analytical Evidence 
- 'Experts' evidence
- Opinion-based evidence (incl. lobbyists/pressure groups)
- Ideological 'evidence'
- Media evidence
- Internet evidence
- Lay evidence (constituents', citizens' experiences)
- 'Street' evidence (urban myths, conventional wisdom)
- Cabbie's evidence



Where Do UK Policy Makers Go For Evidence?

Policy or Practice

Special Advisers

'Experts'

Professional Associations

Think Tanks/Opinion Formers

Lobbyists and Pressure Groups

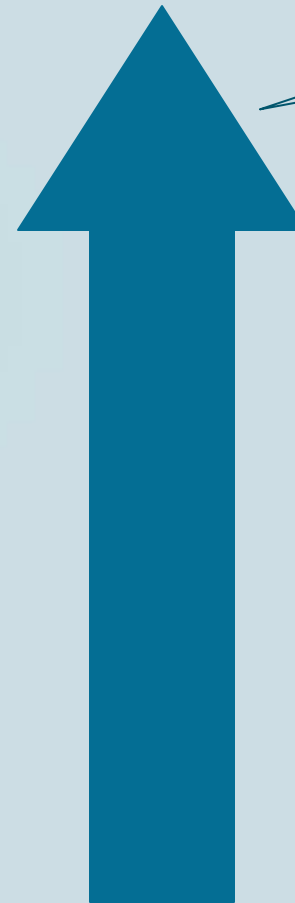
Media

Constituents, Consumers and Users

Academic Research

Sharks

Make It Happen



Plankton

EBG How Do We Make it Happen: Some Suggestions

- Strategic planning of policy and research systems - *together*
- Incentives - taking people from ‘require’ to ‘want to’
- Ownership of the evidence, not just the policy
- Systems to search, find and capture knowledge/evidence
- Critical appraisal systems - separate the wheat from the chaff
- *Data* extraction systems (‘what are the data?’)
- *Knowledge* extraction systems (‘what do the data tell us?’)
- Clear and concise messages, and diverse evidence ‘products’
- Appropriate presentational formats (*1:3:25*)
- *Active* dissemination and knowledge management systems
- Persistence and Opportunism (Matthew Taylor, 2005)

Davies' Theorem[©]

Evidence-Based policy is no substitute for
thinking-based policy



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