Enhancing the educational research-practice nexus

Speakers:

- Angela Ferguson, Department of Education and Training, Queensland
- Liliana Ructtinger and Rob Stevens, Department of Education, NSW
- Shani Prendergast, Catholic Education Melbourne
- Tiffany Roos, Association of Independent Schools, NSW
- Zoran Endekov, Department of Education and Training, Victoria
- Mark Rickinson, Monash University

The development of a user-centric model to research translation throughout the research cycle

Angela Ferguson, Qld DET

- The quandary – disparity in language and purpose between researchers and end-users
- Not unique to education, but higher stakes
- An ethical principle – providing schools/participants with access to findings in an understandable, useful way
- An academic paper is unlikely to be suitable
- Different project and participant groups may require different feedback mechanisms

The imperative in Queensland DET

- A plan to *Create a Culture of Rigorous Inquiry*
- New $1m annual grant scheme
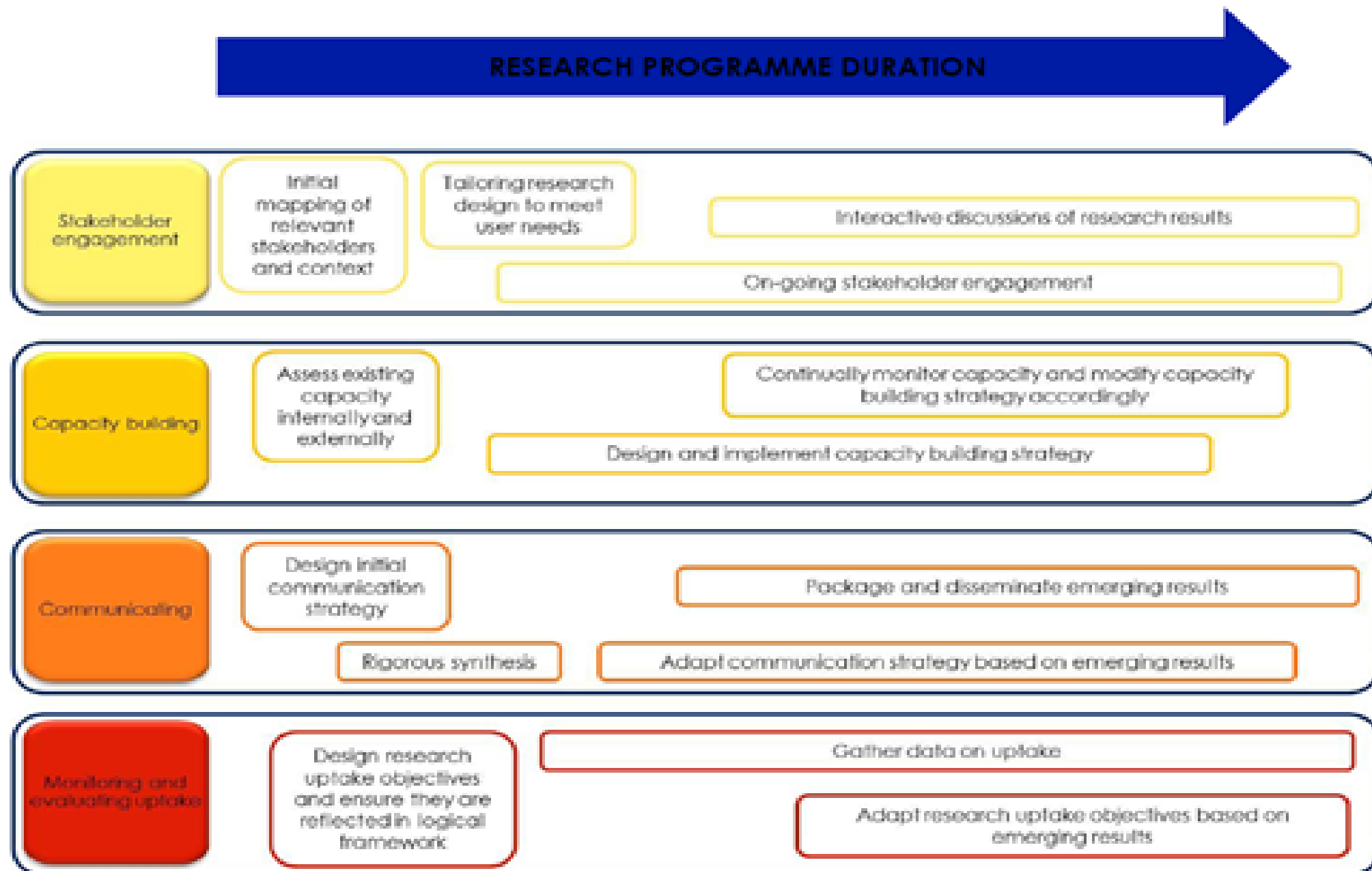- ARC partnerships
- How to maximize <u>Value</u> for investment

A Best-practice Framework

RESEARCH PROGRAMME DURATION

Stakeholder engagement
- Initial mapping of relevant stakeholders and context
- Tailoring research design to meet user needs
- Interactive discussions of research results
- On-going stakeholder engagement

Capacity building
- Assess existing capacity internally and externally
- Continually monitor capacity and modify capacity building strategy accordingly
- Design and implement capacity building strategy

Communicating
- Design initial communication strategy
- Package and disseminate emerging results
- Rigorous synthesis
- Adapt communication strategy based on emerging results

Monitoring and evaluating uptake
- Design research uptake objectives and ensure they are reflected in logical framework
- Gather data on uptake
- Adapt research uptake objectives based on emerging results

Traversing the nexus

- New research application and database system – QERI – making findings more accessible
- Translation required to be demonstrated in applications – and a criteria in grant assessment
- Regular research forums and other communication strategies
- New template for reporting research findings to the Department

Research informing innovative practice in NSW
Overview

- 14 case studies documenting good practice already happening in schools
- Research questions:
  1. **What** are these successful innovative practices in learning and teaching?
  2. Have the innovative practices been **scaled**?
  3. How have innovative practices been **informed by research** findings?
  4. What kind of **evidence** is used to identify successful innovations?

Findings: the practitioners and the connecting web

- Innovative practitioners are informed by research and are active users
- Activity space between research production and research utilisation
  - Organisations (knowledge brokerage)
  - Researchers (synthesising research)
  - Practitioners (blogs, social media)
- Interact with different communication formats and settings

Research informing innovative practice in NSW (continued)

Findings: the research

- 70 researchers or organisations informing practice
- Common characteristics:
  - Audience primarily teachers
  - Synthetic works
  - Balance theory and practice
  - Intellectually challenging
  - Clearly communicate sophisticated arguments

Findings: research use

- Conceptual research use; not much instrumental or strategic use
- Combined with tacit knowledge and personal experience

Findings: evaluating success

- Range of qualitative and quantitative feedback and data "fit-to-purpose"
- Pragmatic approach
- "Researcherly disposition"
- Evaluative thinking

Research in Education Network

The **Understanding School Engagement in Research (USER)** project aims to help Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) better understand and meet the needs of schools in regard to their:

1. engagement in research projects, and

2. engagement with research findings and evidence.

Rationale

Schooling jurisdictions receive hundreds of applications per year from external researchers wishing to conduct research in schools.

School feedback through the USER project will enable CEM (and other jurisdictions) to better understand what schools want and need in regard to research, and enable us to make more informed decisions that maximise the benefit of school engagement in research.

Phased approach

Phase 1: School feedback (Aug-Sept 2016)

Survey, focus groups, school visits (principal interviews).

Throughout phase 1, CEM gained valuable feedback from 73 schools, approximately 25% of our system.

Phase 2: Further feedback (Sept 2016-Mar 2017)

Present findings to CEM Research Committee, CEM staff and universities to gain further feedback.

Prepare final report and recommendations.

Share findings with CEM, schools and universities.

Phase 3: Implement recommendations (2017…)

Update CEM *Research in Schools* policy & guidelines.

Develop CEM research priorities.

Others depending on findings!

Part 1: School engagement in research projects

How much are schools engaging in research projects?

79% schools receive 5 or more research requests/year.

47% schools receive 10 or more research requests/year. **BUT…**

80% schools only say 'yes' to 2 or less research requests/year.

55% schools say 'yes' to only one or no research requests/year.

On average, schools say 'yes' to 1:5 research requests/year.

Number 1 reason for saying YES: *Identified as an area of need in their school improvement plan (88%).*

Number 1 reason for saying NO: *Demand on school is too great – time, effort and coordination required (93%).*

What else influences a school's decision to engage in research?

- Tangible benefits (eg school-specific report, careers session for students, PL for staff).

- If school is going to receive feedback and the immediacy of outcomes.

- Researchers understanding of the school context and impact on schools.

- Relevance to school or even education, and if it aims to improve teacher effectiveness and student outcomes (or at least a line of sight to this).

- Whether there is a capacity building component (ie professional learning for staff).

- If communications are clear and concise with *what is required* and *time demand* upfront.

- Previous experience – put off if research in the past was poorly conducted.

Part 2: School engagement with research and evidence

Do schools value research/evidence AND use it in practice?

80% schools 'highly value' keeping up-to-date with educational research and evidence. **BUT…**

Only 34% 'often' use it in practice.

More schools *value* **research/evidence, than use it** *in practice*.

Why do schools value research and evidence?

- Provides a solid foundation for school improvement planning, decision making and future change;
- Has the potential to strengthen teacher effectiveness and improve student learning; and
- Can challenge traditionally held and popular views.

How do schools use research and evidence in practice?

When interacting with colleagues during school planning and professional learning; taking on new programs; framing questions and coaching conversations; trialling new classroom strategies.

Enablers to engaging with research/evidence:

- School-specific feedback/evidence.
- Accessible, user-friendly and visually engaging.
- Promoted and supported by leadership and part of staff meetings, planning and professional learning.
- Built into day-to-day planning, dialogue, professional learning, and learning and teaching.

Barriers to engaging with research/evidence:

- Teacher time, cost, motivation, physical space, timetable restrictions.
- Confidence of teachers to translate research into classroom practice varies.

Number 1 source of research/evidence: *Within school, from colleagues and professional learning (91%)*

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SUMMARY – What our schools have told us: 10 key messages

1. Schools get a lot of requests to participate in research, but **choose very few**.

2. Schools tend to choose projects that are **CEM-led** or where CEM are partners.

3. Schools most often choose research projects that are aligned with **school priorities**.

4. Schools will more likely engage in projects that offer **tangible benefits** and outcomes for them.

5. The **demand** on schools must be reasonable, and outweighed by the benefit.

6. Schools often **do not receive feedback** from researchers or a copy of research findings.

7. Schools value research projects that have a **capacity building** component (ie PL).

8. Teachers and school leaders mostly **access** research and evidence from **within their school**.

9. Teachers and school leaders mostly **engage** with research and evidence through **dialogue, interactions with their peers, and professional learning**.

10. An evidence-informed culture in schools is enabled by supportive **leadership** and a **culture** where using research and evidence is built into the day-to-day dialogue and operations of the school.

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Supporting Practitioner Research
AISNSW School Based Research Projects

How do we bridge the research to practice gap?

AISNSW School Based Research Projects 2014 - 2016

- ➢ Application process
- ➢ 3 cohorts of projects
- ➢ Two-year projects
- ➢ 16 school based research projects
- ➢ 18 schools actively involved in conducting research
- ➢ Specialist/academic mentor

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Criteria for assessment:

- Rationale

- Project Design

- Wider Contribution

- Organisational Capacity

- Professional Response

Funding primarily used:

- to provide time for the research work to be undertaken by educators from the school(s)

- to meet costs associated with the specialist mentor component of the project

- for basic costs associated with undertaking the research.

School Based Research Team Commitments

➢ School Based Research Network Days

➢ Specialist mentor relationship

➢ Reporting:

    ➢ Interim project report

    ➢ Final research paper(s) and artefacts

➢ Contribute to education conferences, publications and professional activities as appropriate

Benefits of engagement in practitioner research

➢ Relevant up-to-date teaching practices

➢ Increased understanding of educator practice and improvement strategies

➢ Improved educator understanding of the learner and the learner's perspective

➢ Renew teacher enthusiasm for teaching

➢ Increased recognition - importance of educator's work

➢ Improve teacher identity in terms of both capacity and capability

➢ Improve professionalism

(McLaughlin, Black-Hawkins, & McIntyre, 2004)

Research Partnerships – a model to access high impact research and analytics

Historically, DET used a number of models to access external research and analytics expertise

- Discrete, commissioned research
- ARC / NHMRC projects
- Utilisation of existing academic relationships
- Research panel

Decisions about how to generate evidence needed were driven by:
- Timeliness of when evidence was required
- Research capability of DET staff
- Capacity of DET staff to undertake 'nice to know' vs 'need to know' analysis

It also created a number of challenges for DET

- Ad hoc and duplicated research across the Department
- Underutilisation of the Department's extensive datasets
- Less effective evaluation of programs
- Limited ability to build the skills and knowledge of the Department's staff in research and analytics
- Research less likely to be linked to the Department's strategic objectives and policy agenda

Why a Research Partnership approach?

- Greater **flexibility** to pursue **complex and longer term** research and analytics in **important policy areas**, rather than tightly defined, short-term commissioned research projects.

- Opportunities for **development** of **research and policy capabilities** in both the **Department** and **research partners**.

- Greater **understanding** and **improved utility** of the Department's (and other related) **datasets**.

Research Partners
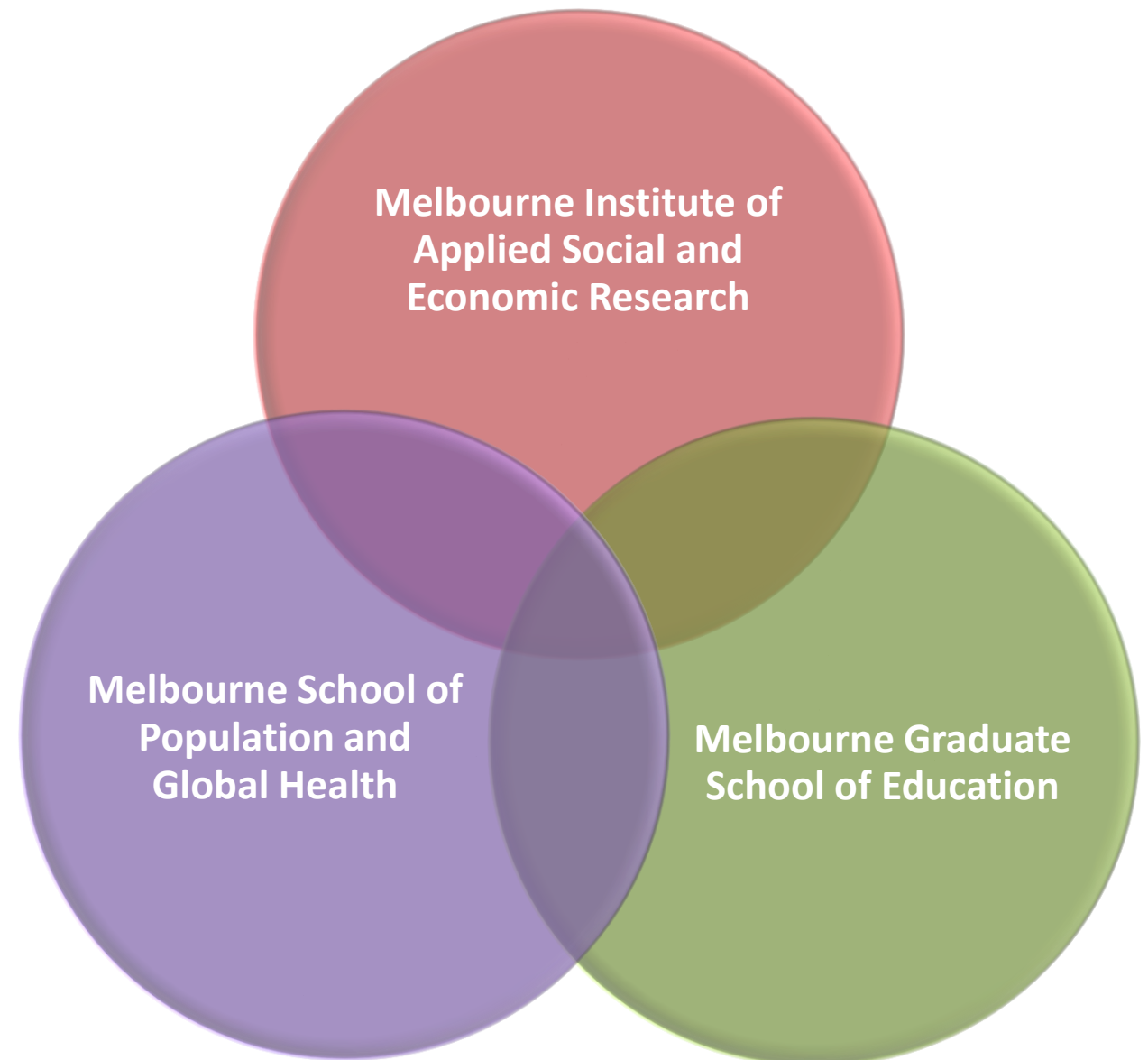
Melbourne Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

Melbourne Graduate School of Education

Research in Education Network

STRONG GOVERNANCE

- High-level decision making committee with senior representation from DET
- Research Partnerships Board to endorse research agenda and provide oversight of research activity
- Research Partnership Management Committees
- Research project design teams

COLLABORATION

Shared principles emphasising **cooperation** and **commitment**:

- A shared vision to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children, young people and adults.
- Mutual respect for each partner's autonomy and responsibilities, whilst recognising that the true partnership may require change, innovation and risk.
- Collaboration and the fostering of opportunities to work together on issues of mutual benefit or concern.
- Communication, consultation and engagement on decisions by one partner that will impact upon the other.
- A relationship that celebrates success, addressed challenges, resolves differences and acknowledges contributions to outcomes that are achieved.
- Joint leadership of the Partnership, including joint agenda setting.
- The promotion of a joint ownership approach to sharing and disseminating findings.
- A commitment to building research and evaluation knowledge, skills and capacities

NEW AND OLD DISCOVERY

- Building the evidence base through:
  - Testing the 'knowns'
  - Investigating the 'unknowns'
- Building capability through:
  - new analytical techniques
  - Understanding organisational processes and priorities
- Exploring complex policy questions and doing deep dives into underutilised datasets

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A number of benefits were identified for both the Department and the research partners

Improved collective understanding and increased utility DET data - including tools to link and analyse datasets

Access to important research capabilities in areas where DET capacity and capability is constrained – particularly in econometric modeling and causal/predictive data analysis

As the Partnerships matured, the Research Partners acquired contextual knowledge of policies and reforms - enabling more effective and better targeted research projects and data analysis

More effective and purposeful collaboration to support critical thinking about complex policy issues - including research into causality across education and other policy areas

The Research Partners afforded DET highly credible, relevant and rigorous research evidence, which in turn adds weight to policy discussions and confidence in policy decisions

Research Partners were able to contribute ideas and lines of enquiry from other research and experiences that may not have been conceived otherwise

DET gains access to research capacity – the funded and long-term nature of the relationship ensures that "DET has the University's attention" and timely responses to requests for support

Research in Education Network

Challenges of the Research Partnerships

Funding required to sustain the Partnerships can be substantial and over long periods of time

A significant investment is needed, up front, to ensure Research Partners understand policy priorities and requirements for targeted research deliverables

Significant effort to maintain DET support and consistent engagement over a long period of time

Expectations about research activity and outcomes may not always align

Unrealistic timelines to undertake the research / link data

Formal Research Partnerships are seen as a commitment to a small number of researchers, potentially at the expense of being able to access knowledge and expertise from other research organisations

Delays in approving research through the authorising environment before it can be published

Final reports and analysis may be too complex and not suitable for policy audience

Additional time and effort required to translate research outputs to meet Departmental requirements

The research-practice nexus: some starting questions

Mark Rickinson

Monash University Faculty of Education

Research in Education Network (RiEN) Symposium

AARE Conference, Melbourne, 1 December 2016

Who are we working with?
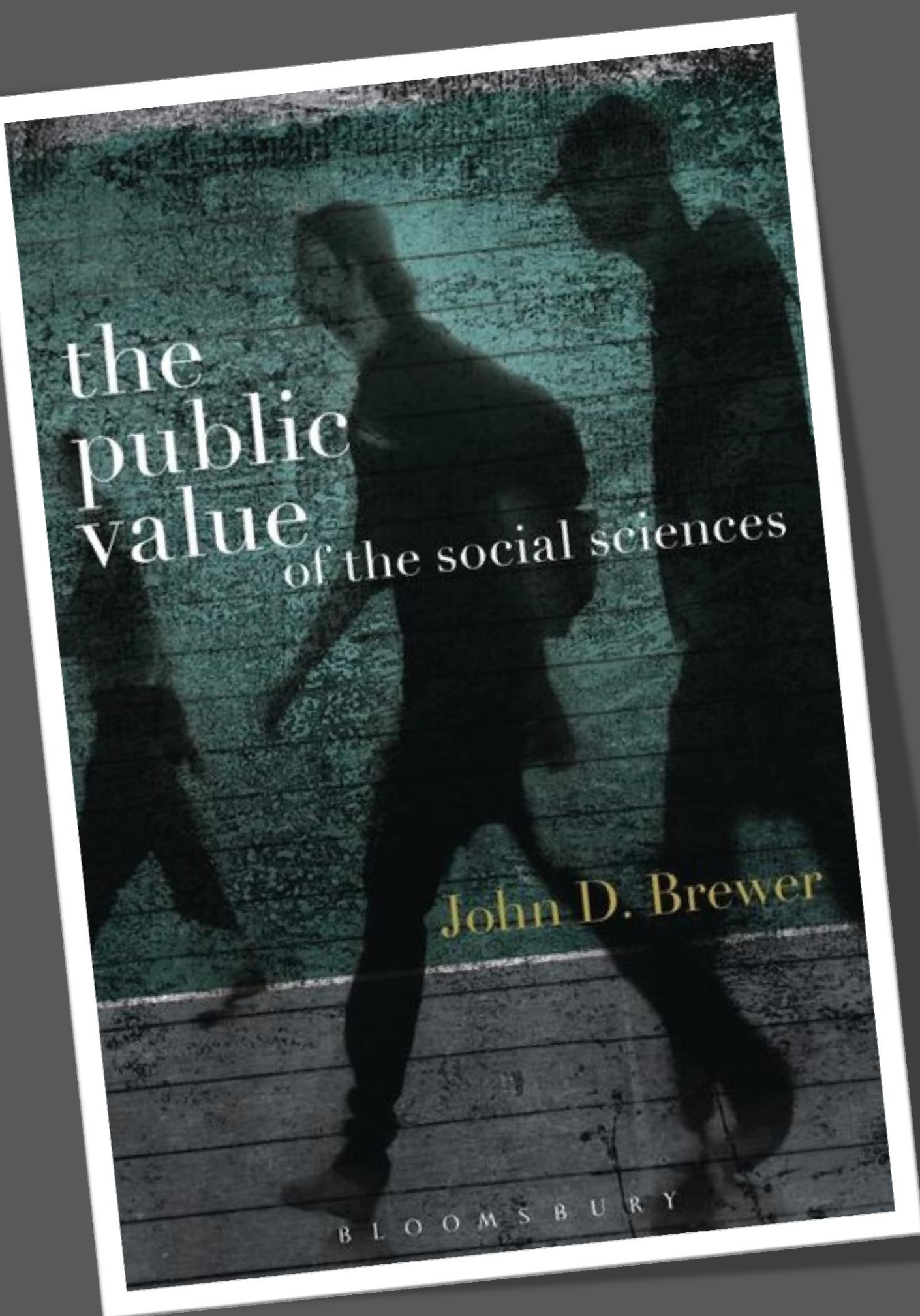
'**Most social scientists have preferred working either with […] local, community-based […] groups, without much access to formal power, or with people in these very systems of formal power, such as governments and policy-makers**'.
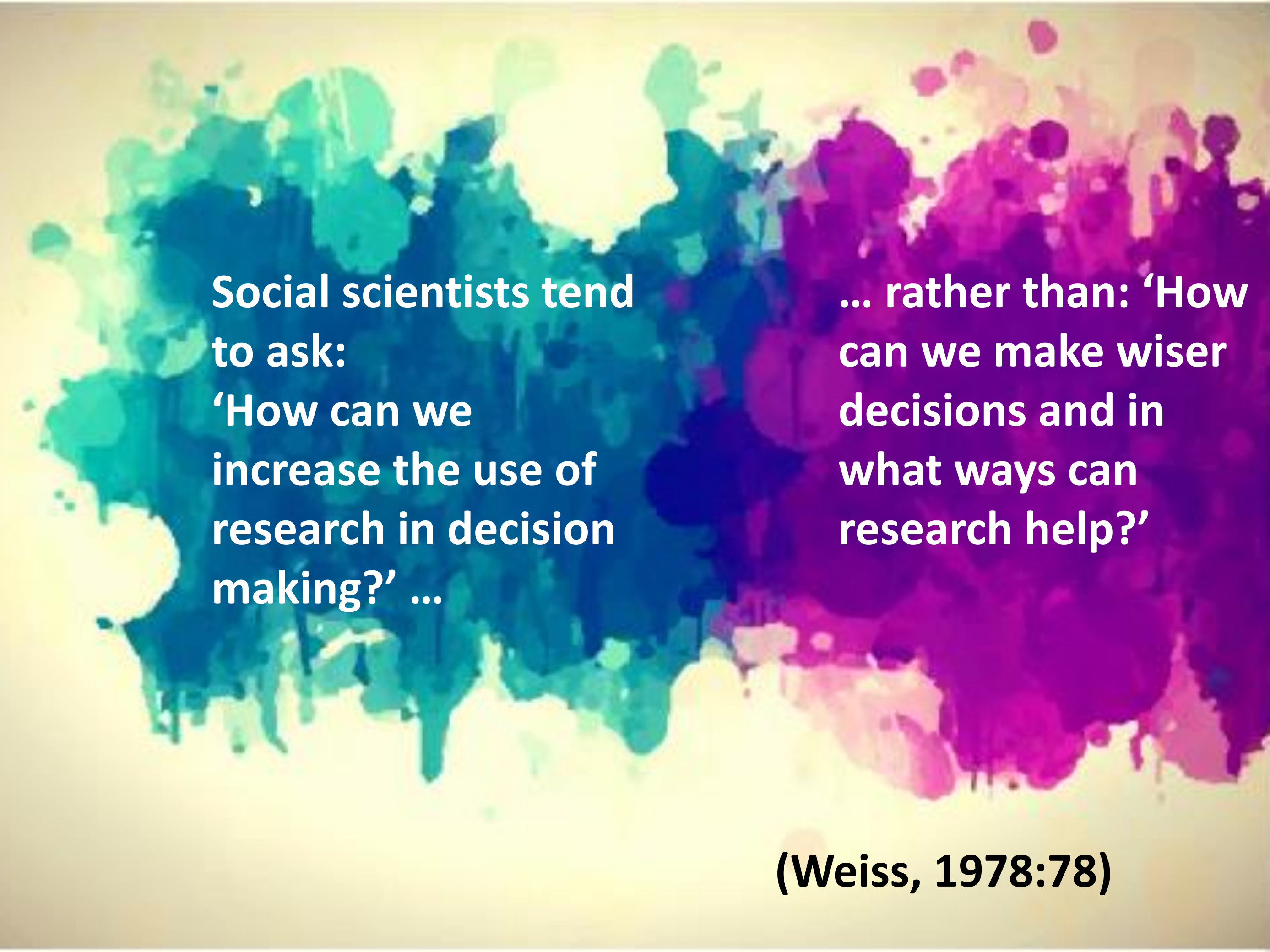
(Brewer, 2013: 161)

Elements of Research Impact

Levin (2004: 8)
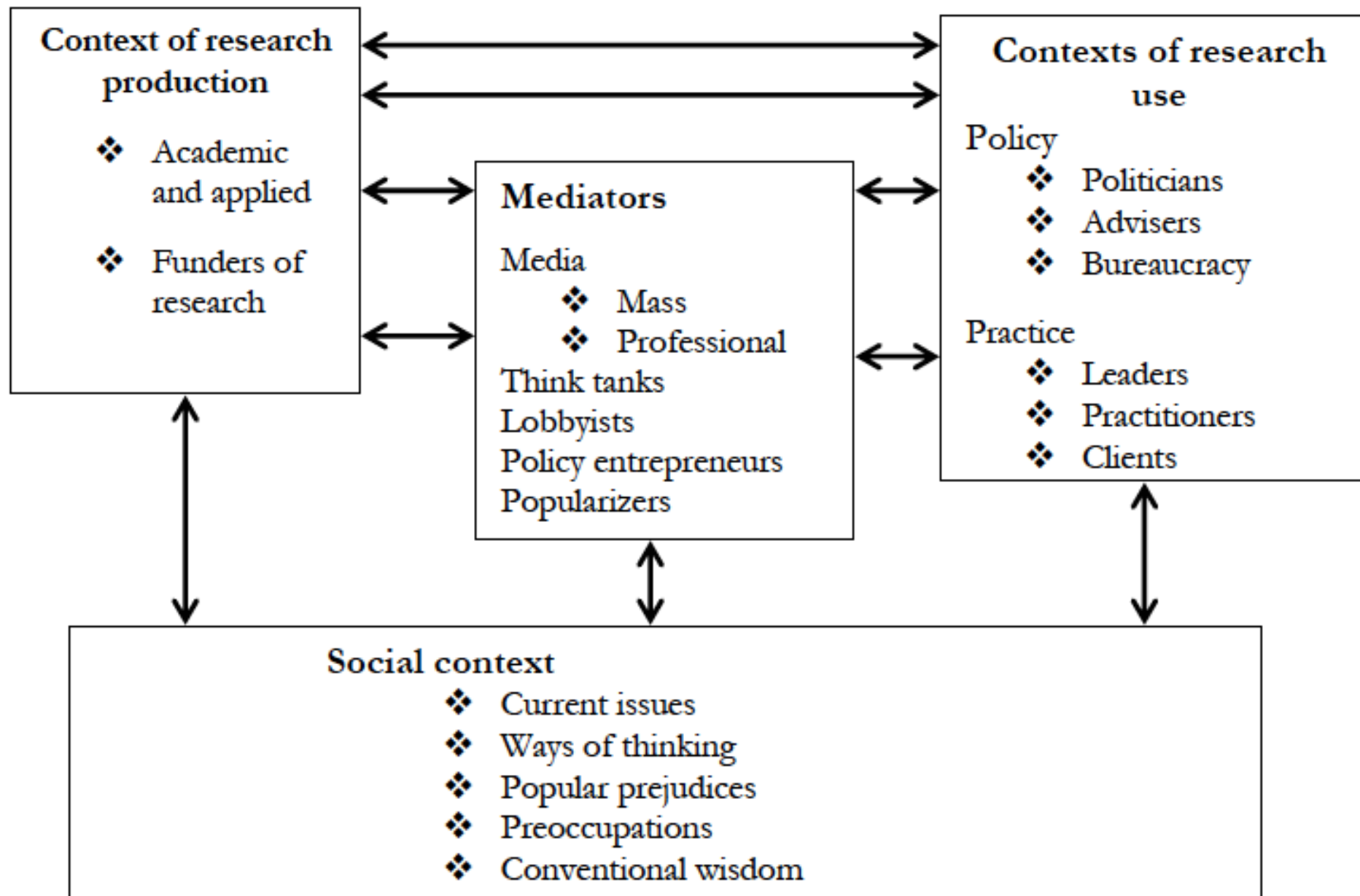
What are we focusing on?

Social scientists tend to ask:
'How can we increase the use of research in decision making?' ...

... rather than: 'How can we make wiser decisions and in what ways can research help?'

(Weiss, 1978:78)

Most research in the area studies the use of research evidence by policymakers …

… not what knowledge or information policymakers use.

(Oliver *et al*., 2014:6)

How well do we understand?
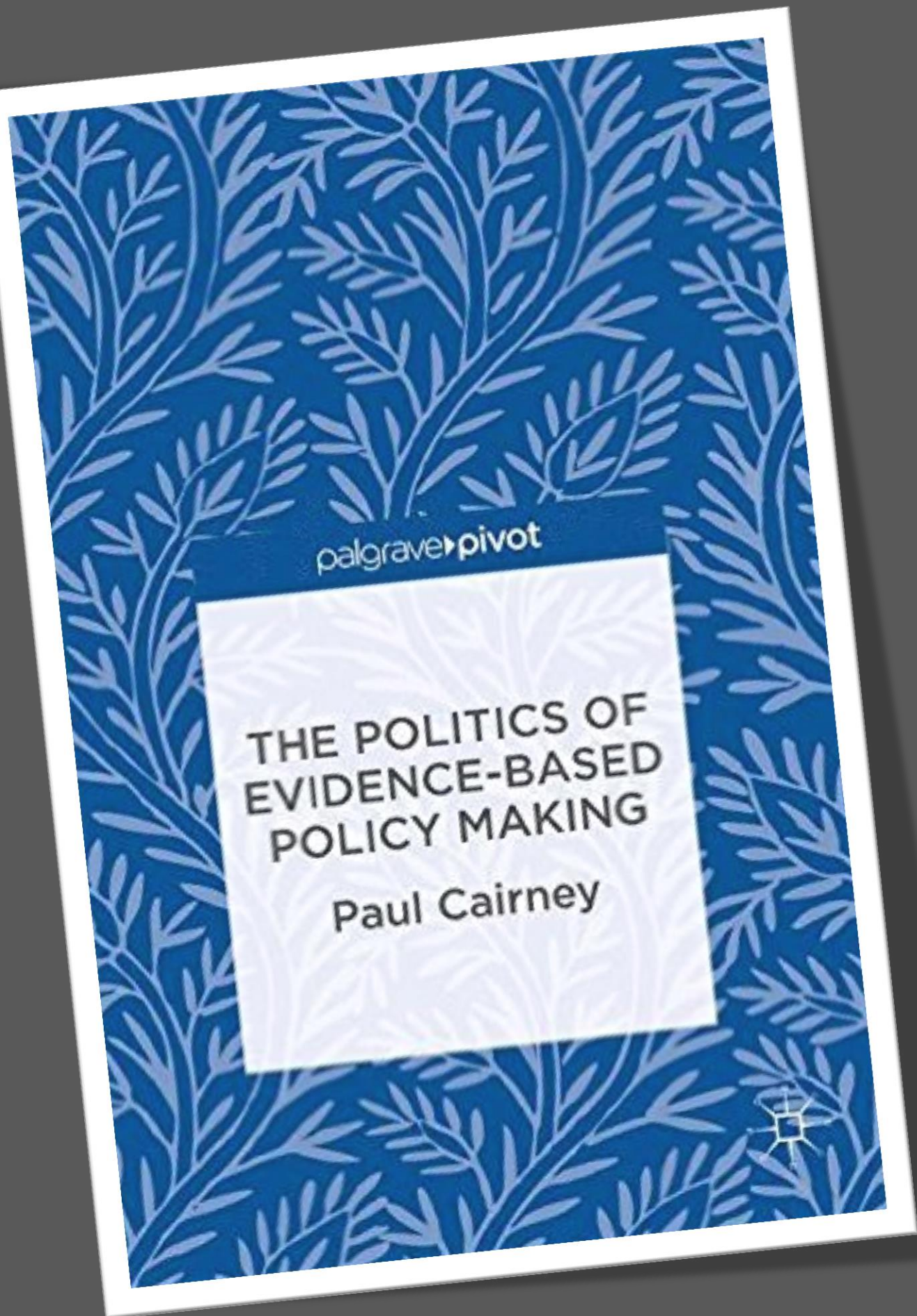
'If you want to inject more science into policymaking, you **need to know the science of policymaking**.'

(Cairney, 2016: 119)
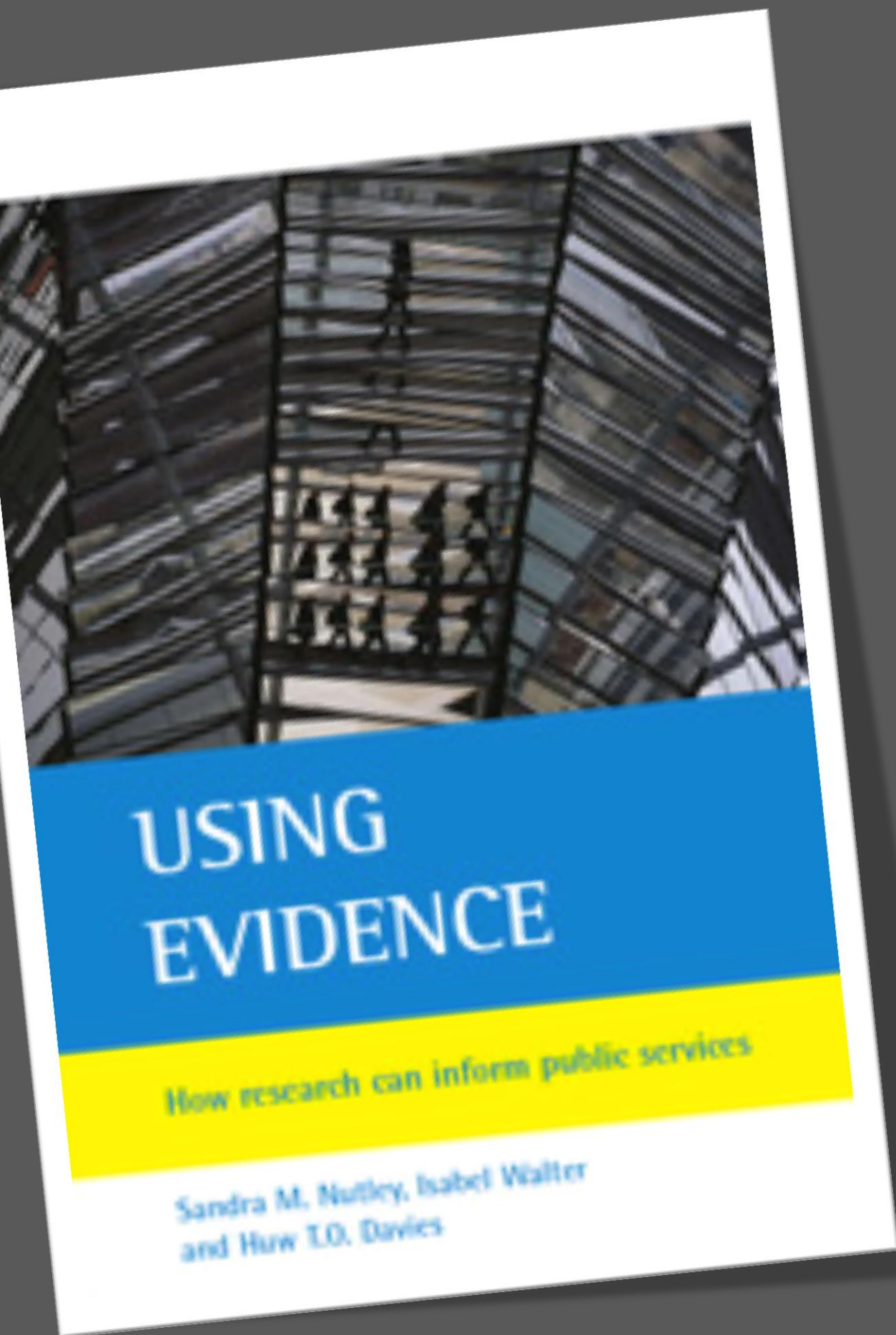
'[Certain] models of research use […] **are more likely to help us** when it comes to understanding how research actually gets used'

(Nutley *et al*., 2007: 319-320).

What relationships are we developing?

(a) Advisory committees
Agency — sets up → Advisory Committee
advice, evaluation
serve
Other stake holders
academics
Univ depts

(b) Episodic contracting
Agency
Tech staffs — spot contracts → Univ dept
ad hoc research or consultancy
academics
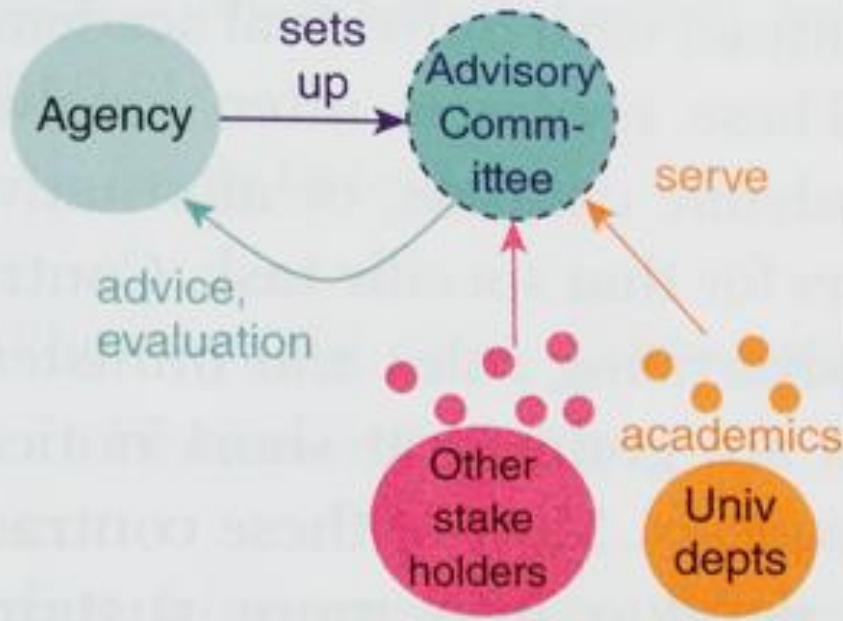
(c) Strategic commissioning
Agency — funds → Applied unit — Univ dept
planned research or consultancy

(d) Long term research asset
research community
runs — Unis
Research agency — funds → Long-term research asset — use → Other unis
advise, consult
research
Line agency ← research ← Data, reports events
Stake-holders
read, view, use
Media
policy network/community
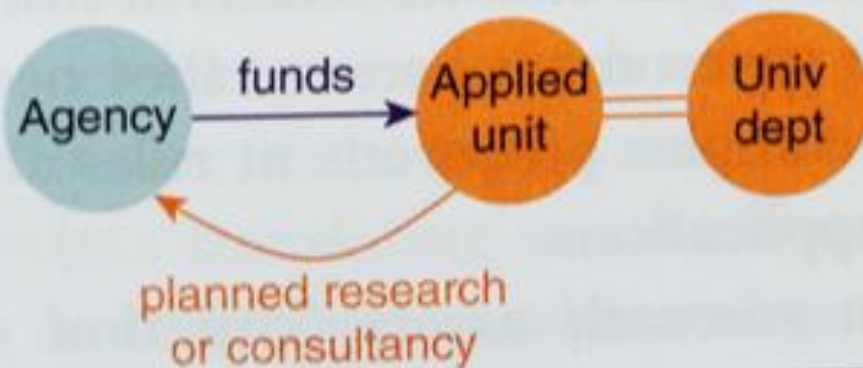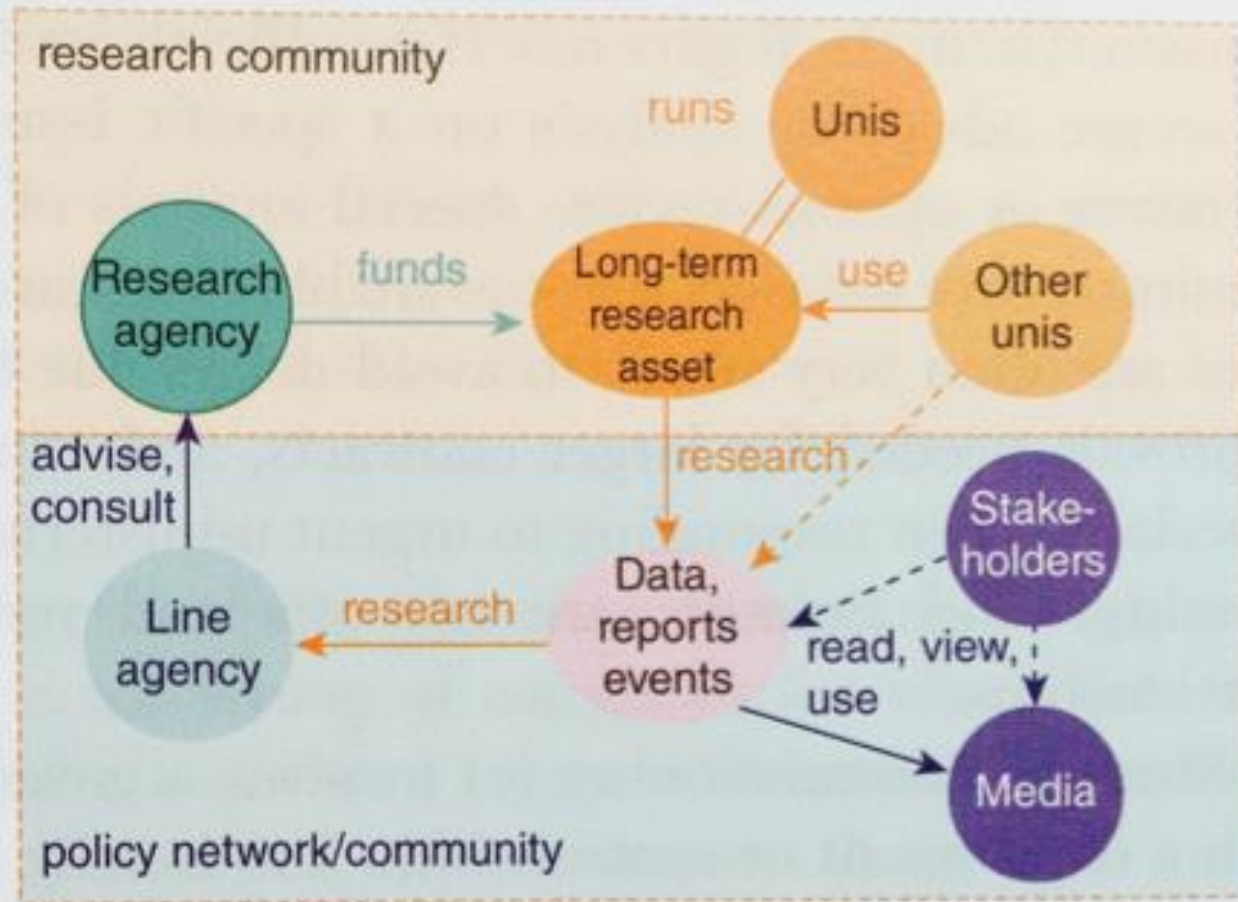
(e) Policy marketing and dissemination
Agency
Elites
Media
attend, read
funds
presence
Univ dept — research → events, reports
read, view
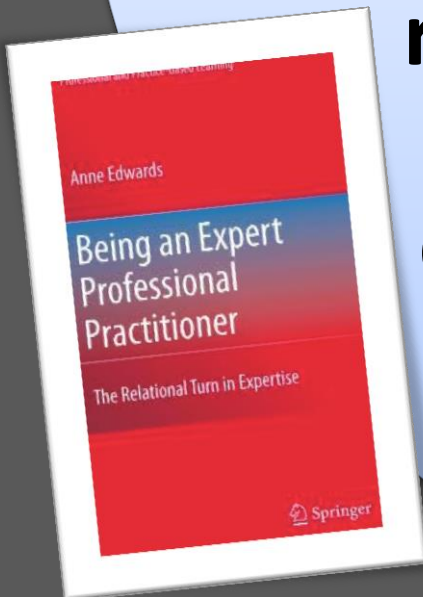Mass public
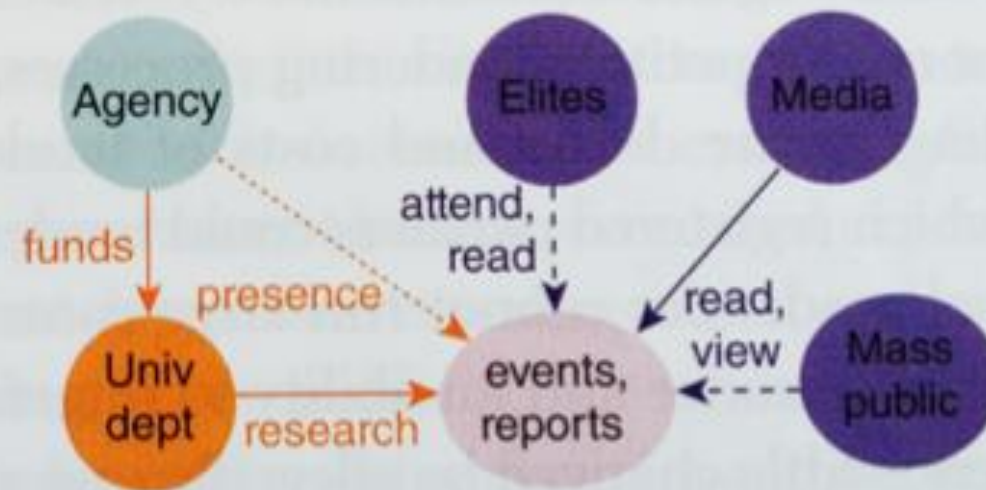
(Bastow *et al.*, 2014: 151)

'**Relational expertise** ... a form of expertise which is in addition to one's specialist expertise'
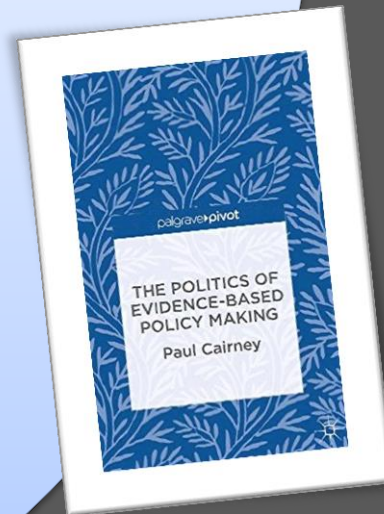
(Edwards & Stamou, forthcoming)

Further reading …

Rickinson, M., de Bruin, K., Walsh, L. & Hall, M. (forthcoming, 2017) 'What can evidence-use in practice learn from evidence-use in policy?', *Educational Research* 2017 Special Issue on 'Evidence-informed Practice in Education'

Rickinson, M. (forthcoming, 2017) 'Communicating research findings', In: D. Wyse, E. Smith, L. E. Suter and N. Selwyn (Eds) *The BERA/Sage Handbook Of Educational Research*. London: Sage.

Rickinson, M., de Bruin, K., Walsh, L. & Hall, M. (2016) *The Use of Evidence in Education Policy: A Pilot Study in Victoria*. Research Summary for DET.

Rickinson, M, Sebba, J & Edwards, A (2011) *Improving Research through User Engagement*. Routledge: London.

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