Evidence in public policies:
What we know about the current use of knowledge in the process of creation and realization of public policies

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Outline

- Evaluation as a source of knowledge for policy and practice

- What we know about the current use of knowledge?

- What changes are on the horizon?

The role of evaluation in promoting the use of knowledge

As a structured process of assessing the success of a project, policy or programme in meeting its goals and reflecting on the lessons learned.

- Part of the creation and realisation of public policy

- Engagement with key stakeholders

- Evaluation experts key to debates about research utilization and impact

EvalYear invites **innovation** at many levels: methods of engagement and capacity building, peer-to-peer exchanges, use of technology for communications and scale up, and involvement of new partners.

EvalYear will bring together a **strategic partnership** of committed individuals and organizations around the world for coordinated action to promote evaluation as a catalytic intervention for better human development.

http://mymande.org/evalyear/Declaring_2015_as_the_International_Year_of_Evaluation

The Four 'I's that shape policy

Information

Ideologies

Interests

Institutions

Weiss 1995

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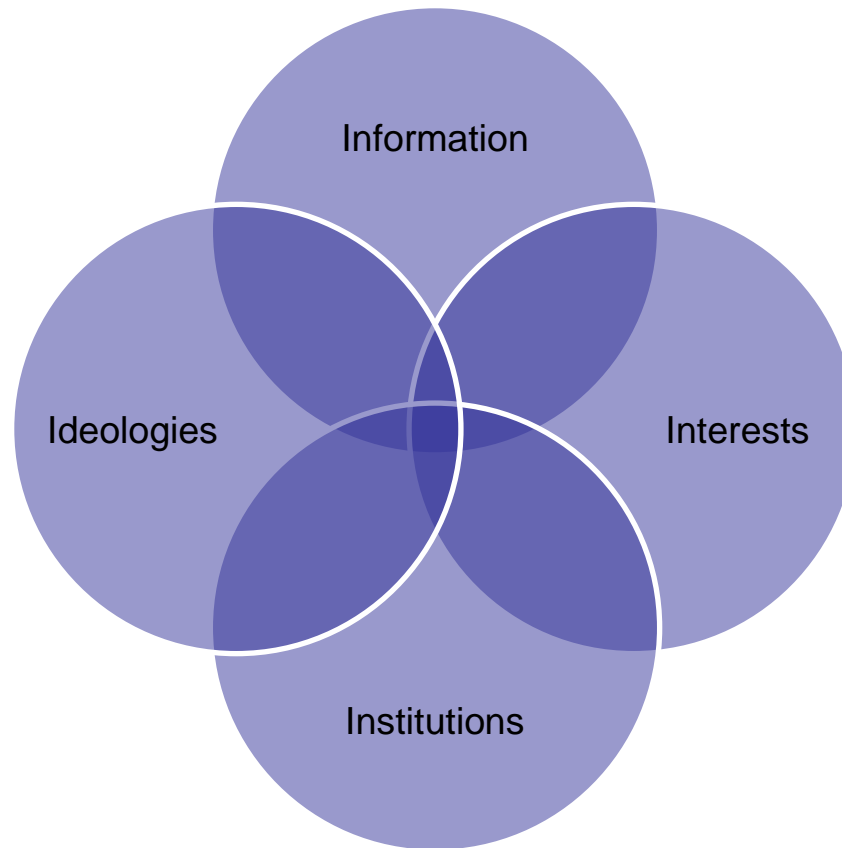
The rise of 'Evidence based' policy

- Infiltrated our language
- Affected staffing and budgets in government
- Influenced policy development
- Influenced planning/ change programmes
- Led to new agencies and initiatives

Notion of evidence **based** policy has led to renewed assumptions that decisions follow directly on from evidence

Why has it proved hard to promote evidence use?

- It competes with many other factors

- It isn't valued as an information source

- It isn't relevant

- It isn't easy to use

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And even at the best of times, evidence...

- **competes with many other factors**

- isn't valued as an information source

- isn't relevant

- isn't easy to use

'Well, obviously there is a political context to almost everything that we do. Ministers want to be seen to be taking action and sometimes any action is better than no action... There are often political commitments that lead you in directions that the evidence doesn't necessarily strongly support.'

(Campbell et al 2007)

- competes with many other factors
- isn't valued as an information source
- **isn't relevant**
- **isn't easy to use**

"..You've [the analytical expert] been researching this area for ten years, have you got any ideas? It can be quite irritating sometimes when somebody then just shrugs their shoulders and says 'that's not my job, i'm just an analyst.' You think, 'yes, take your analysis a bit further and give us some ideas about if these are all the problems which might some of the solutions be?' " (Campbell et al 2007)

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Evidence and argument

As politicians know only too well, but social scientists too often forget, public policy is made of language. Whether in written or oral form, argumentation is central to all stages of the policy process'

(Majone 1989)

Evidence and coalitions

Policy change driven by contests between coalitions and their beliefs

Sabatier, 1998 Advocacy Coalition Framework

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"Social science should be at the heart of policy making… we need social scientists to help determine what works and why, and what types of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective."
David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education

"No one with the slightest common-sense could take seriously suggestions by University researchers that homework is bad for you."
David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education

Evidence and policy windows

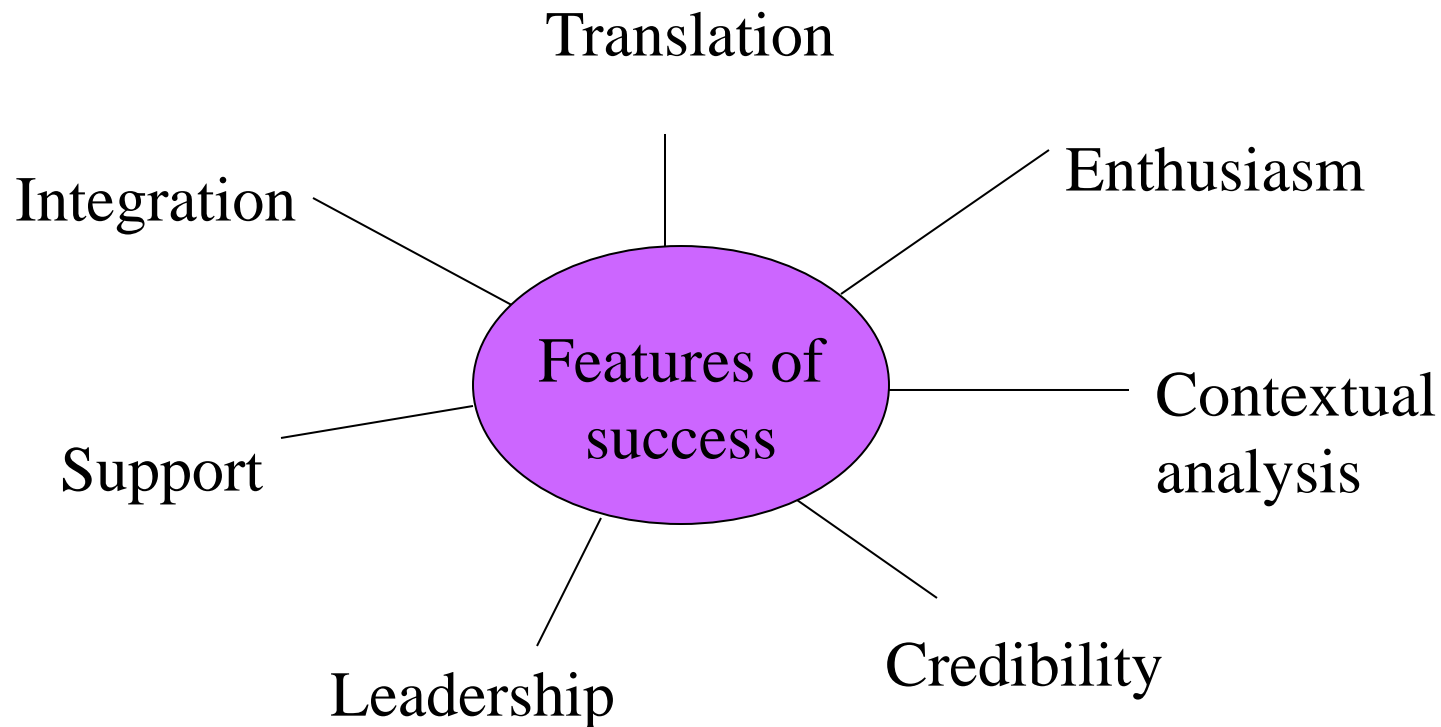Kingdon's model of three separate streams operating in parallel:

- Problems
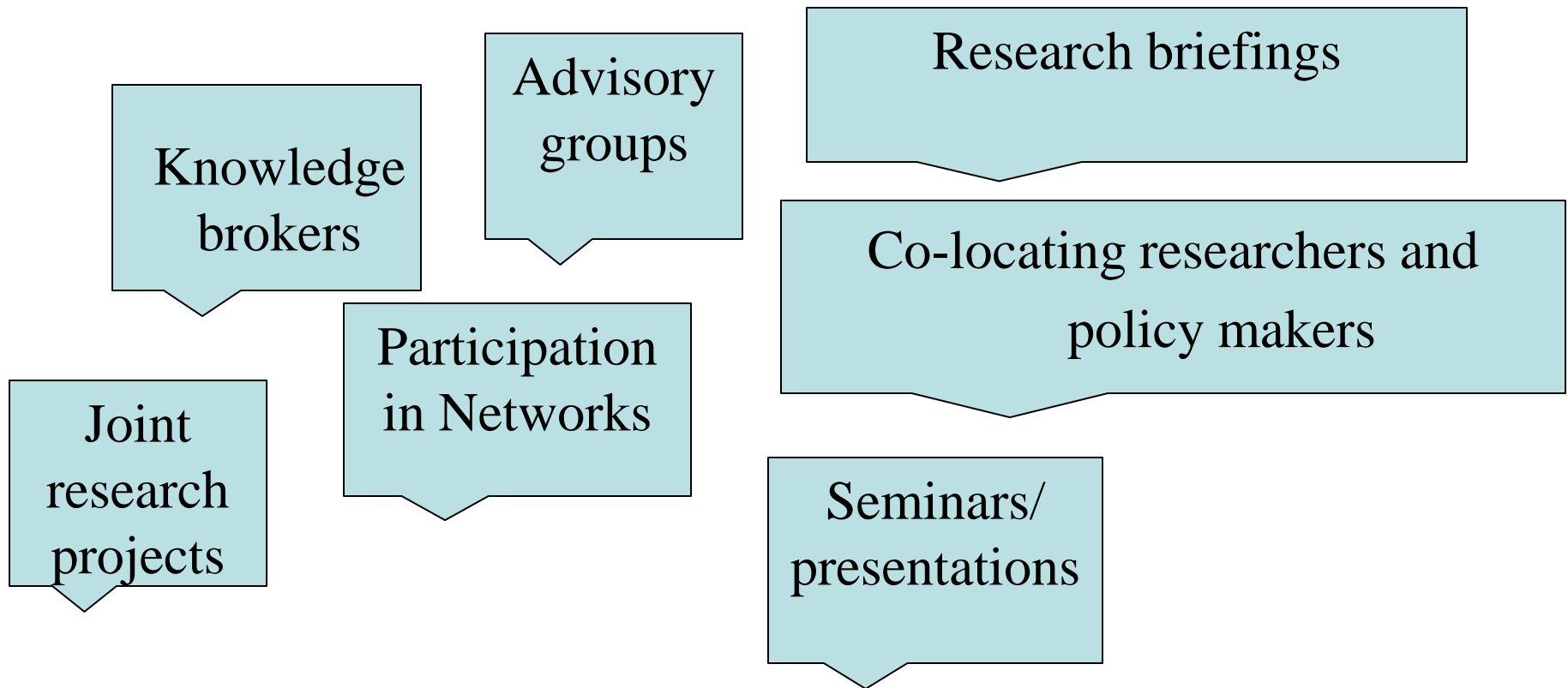- Politics
- Policy

Kingdon 2003

Promoting the use of evidence in policy requires:

Translation

Enthusiasm

Integration

Features of success

Contextual analysis

Support

Leadership

Credibility

Nutley et al 2003

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Activities designed to promote research impact

Knowledge brokers

Advisory groups

Research briefings

Joint research projects

Participation in Networks

Co-locating researchers and policy makers

Seminars/ presentations

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But still a gap in terms of getting evidence into policy and practice:

Practice change from knowledge transfer activities is only about **8-15%**

Grimshaw et al 2001; Crowley et al 2004

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Relevant models:

Three generations of thinking about knowledge transfer/ evidence into practice:

1. Linear models
2. Relationship models
3. Systems models

Best and Holmes (2010)
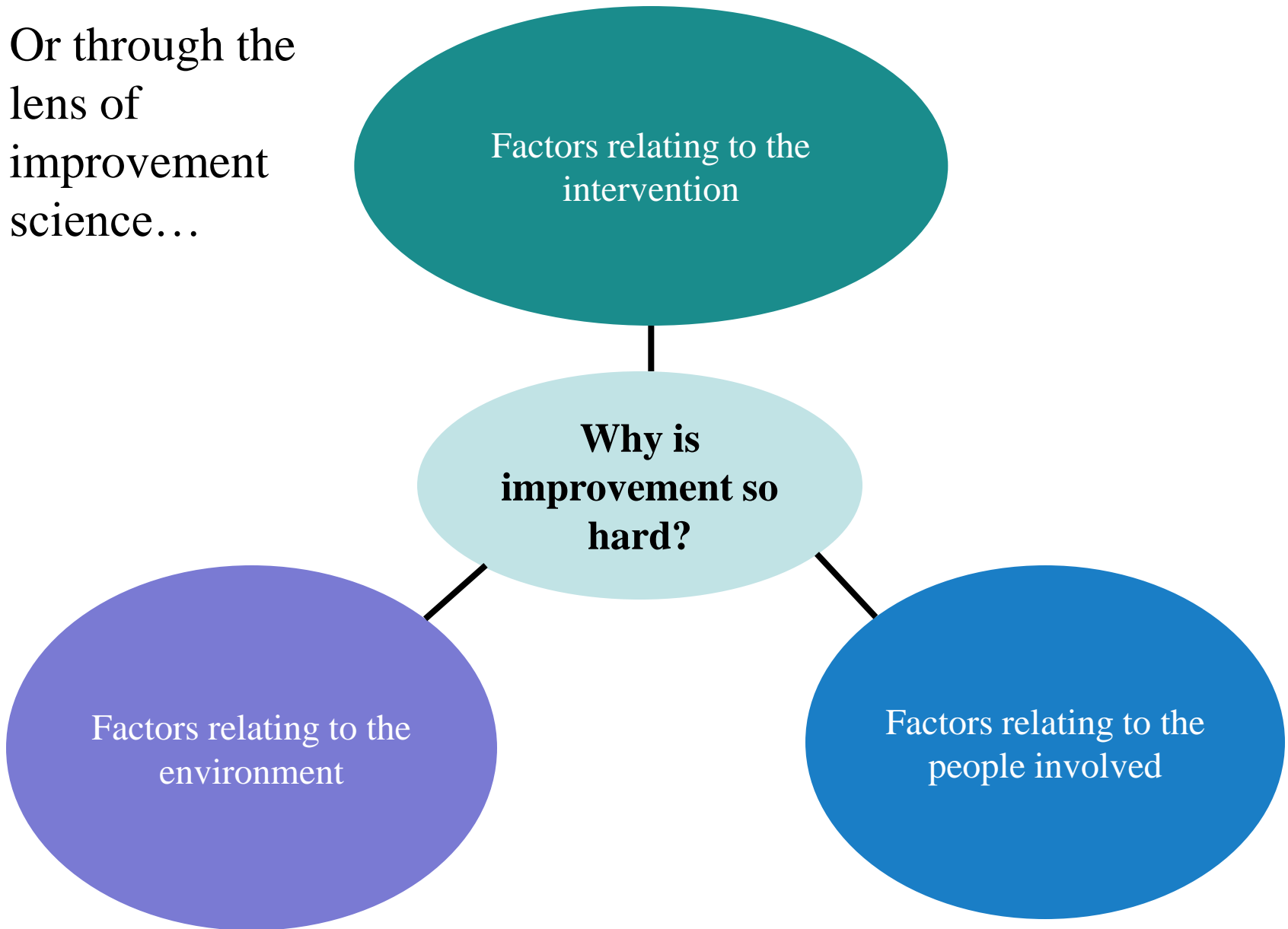
Advisory groups

Relationship – two communities

Research briefings

Joint research projects

Linear – relay race

Systems – co-production

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Or through the lens of improvement science…

Factors relating to the intervention

Why is improvement so hard?

Factors relating to the environment

Factors relating to the people involved

Martin Marshall, Health Foundation

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Changes on the horizon

- Implementation and improvement putting evaluation back in the spotlight
- Use of social science theory to understand evidence use
- The role of stakeholders
- Focus on the role of intermediaries

Some references:

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