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Australasian Evaluation Society  
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## The Importance of Evaluation for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice

Philip Davies PhD

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## Why Evidence-Based Policy?

- 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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## What Is Evidence-Based Policy?

- Helping people make better decisions and achieve better outcomes
- Providing better services (public and private)

By using:

- Existing evidence more effectively
- New research/evaluation to fill the gaps in the evidence base

And:

- *Integrating* research with decision makers' knowledge, skills, experience, expertise and judgement

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## Factors Other Than Evidence



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## Effectiveness of What?

- Intervention effectiveness - what works?
- Resource effectiveness - at what cost/benefit?
- Diversity of effectiveness across different groups – what works for whom and when?
- Implementation effectiveness - how it works?
- Experiential effectiveness - users' views

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## Two Main Types of Evaluation

- Impact (or *summative*) evaluations  
*Does the policy (programme, intervention) work?*
- Process (or *formative*) evaluations  
*How, why, and under what conditions does the policy (programme, intervention) work?*

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## Types of Evaluation Evidence

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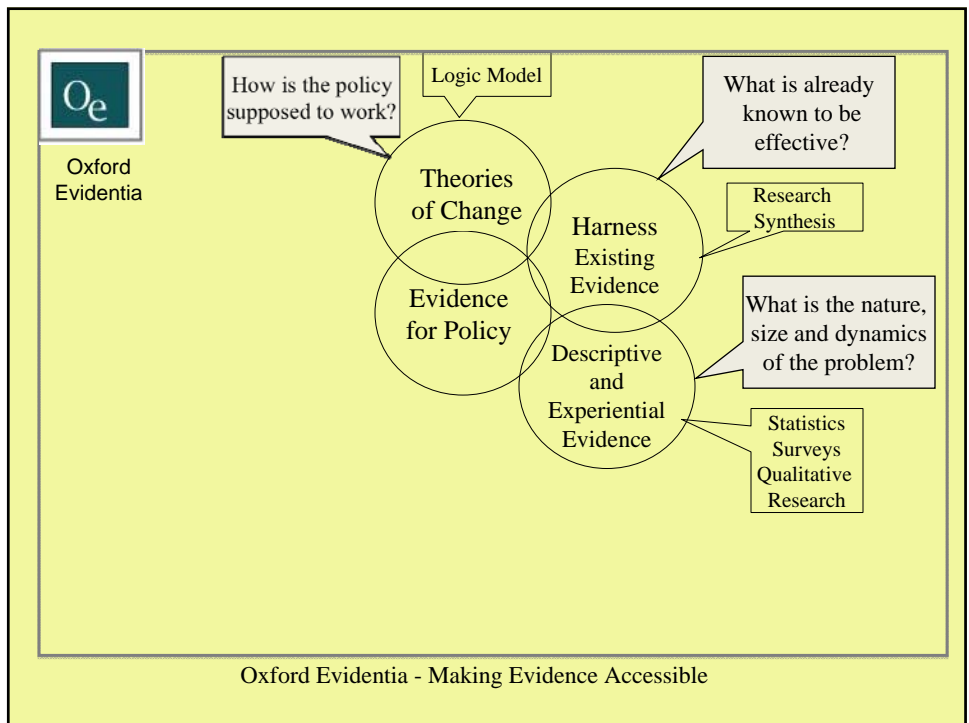
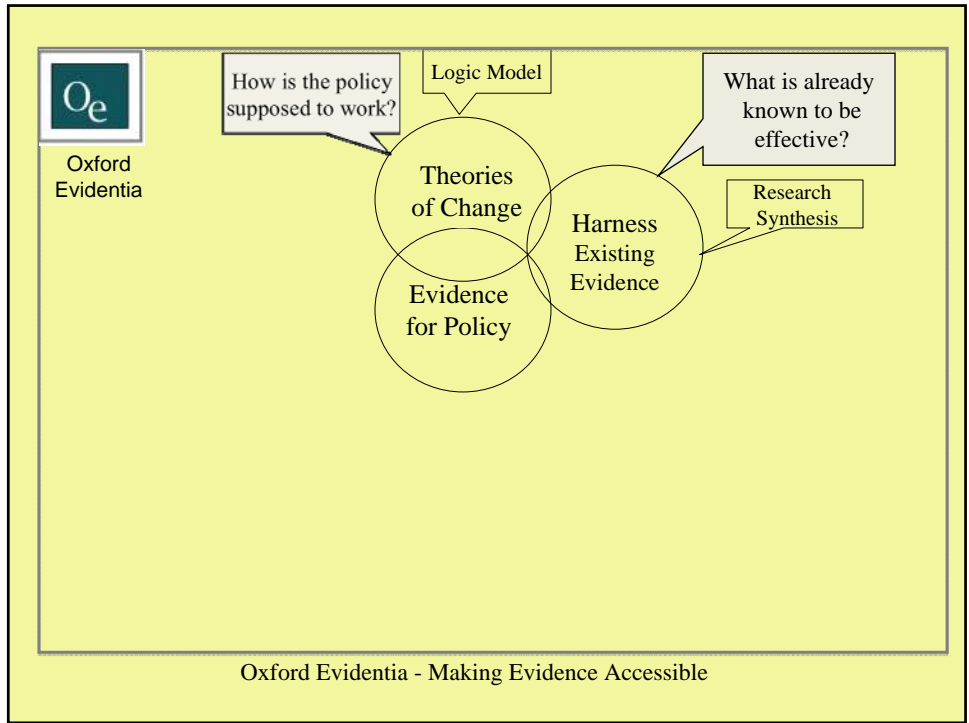
How is the policy supposed to work?

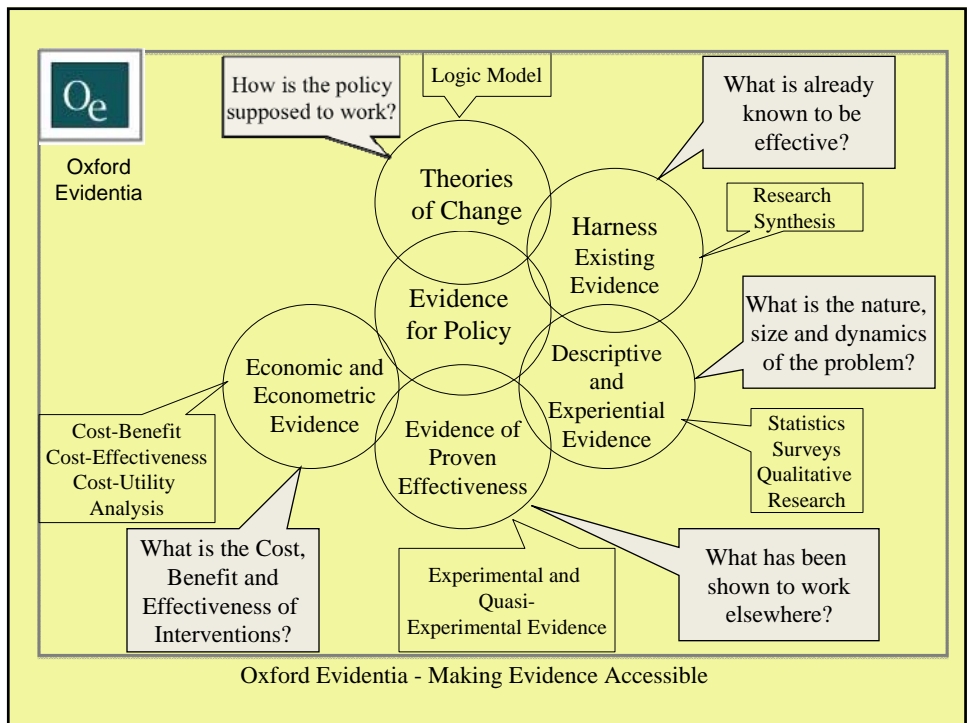
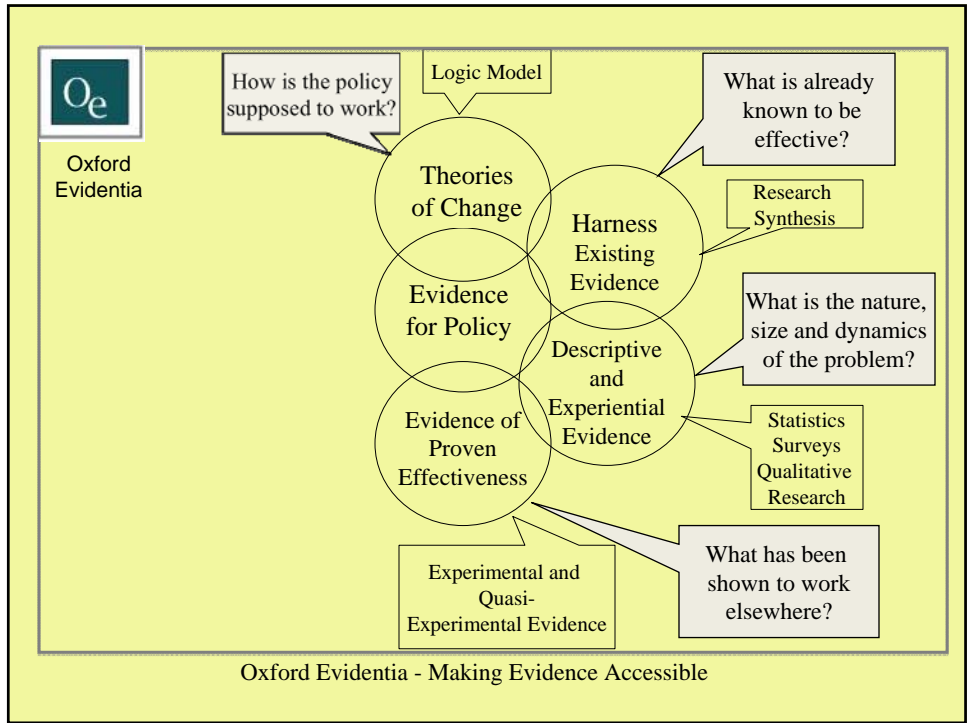
Logic Model

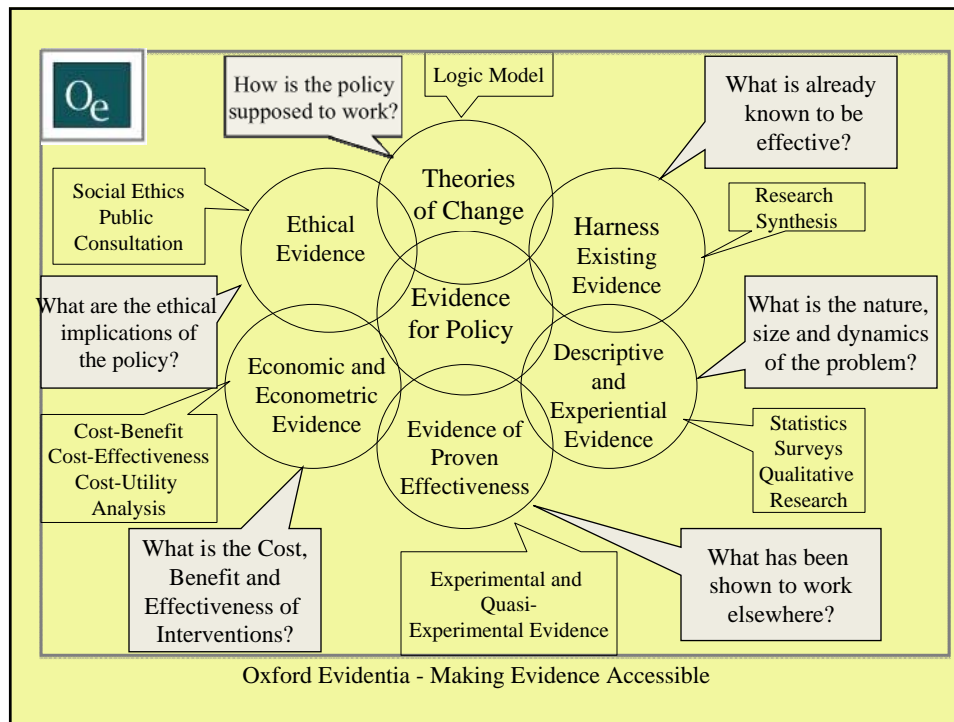
Theories of Change

Evidence for Policy

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### Evaluation and Policy Making - Challenges

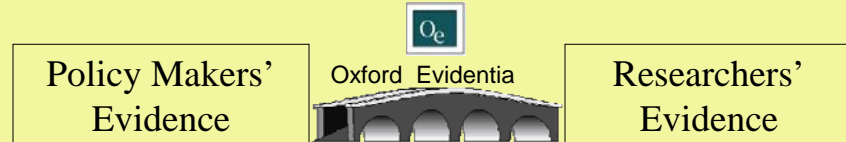
- Evaluation and policy timetables often differ/out of synchrony
- But not necessarily – important to develop (some) policy and evaluation *strategically*, and *together*
- And to evaluate and use *existing evidence* effectively
- Not all evaluation evidence is of sufficient quality
- Evaluation evidence is often inaccessible to policy makers
- Different notions of evidence

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## Different Notions of Evidence



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colloquial (Contextual)</li> <li>• Anything that seems reasonable</li> <li>• Policy relevant</li> <li>• Timely</li> <li>• Clear Message</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Scientific' (Context free)</li> <li>• Proven empirically</li> <li>• Theoretically driven</li> <li>• As long as it takes</li> <li>• Caveats and qualifications</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

Source: J. Lomas et al, 2005

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## Where Do UK Civil Servants Go For Evidence?



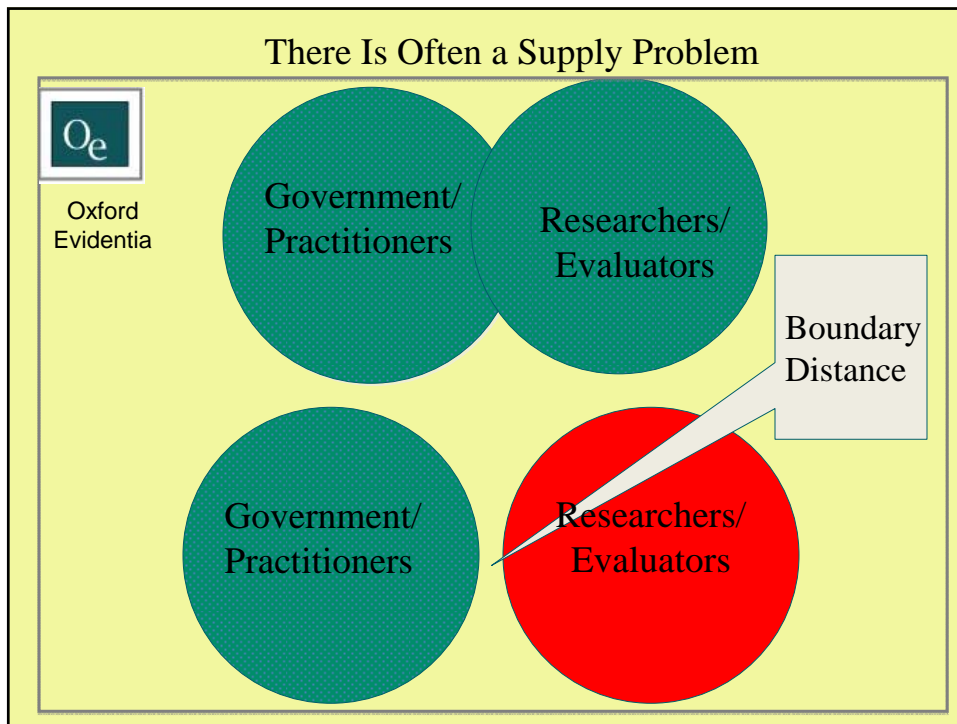
**Sharks**



**Plankton**

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### Bridging The Gap Between Policy and Evaluation

- Integrate and plan evaluation/research and policy *strategically*
- Clarify the policy/practice issues with stakeholders at outset
- Establish how policy is supposed to work - (theory of change)
- Establish ownership of the *evidence* for policy
- Establish and ask answerable questions
- Establish the policy/practice timetable
- Knowledge translation (establish key messages *clearly*)
- Use appropriate formats for presentation (e.g. 1:3:25)
- Establish incentives to *use* evidence (PSG initiative)

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## Making Evidence Work in Government Incentivizing Policy Makers to Use Evidence (PSG)

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

**Built Into Appraisal and Rewards Systems**

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## Making Evidence Work in Government Analysis and Use of Evidence (Policy Makers)

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

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## Making Evidence Work in Government Researchers' Skills for Providing Evidence (PSG)

- Meet policy makers' needs
- Works in partnership with other analysts and policy makers
- Critically evaluate data and information
- Synthesize and use data from a variety of sources
- Make sound evidence-based decisions
- Understand the bigger picture - think imaginatively
- Interpersonal and other communication skills
- Communicate written and oral information clearly/concisely

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## Making Effective Policy - Conclusions

- Evaluation is essential for effective policy making
- Integrate policy development and research/evaluation in a *strategic way* – and operationally
- Learn from what has been attempted elsewhere
- Use the full range of evaluation methods - *appropriately*
- Test/pilot options with sufficient power *before* national roll out
- Be prepared to do adjust/adapt policy in light of evidence

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Take-Home Message  
Evidence-Based Policy is no substitute for  
*thinking-based* policy

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