

Making impact evaluation useful: capturing subtleties, ranges and dynamics

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RURU Workshop:
Evaluating Knowledge
Mobilisation: Issues,
challenges and works-
in-progress



Outline

- Background
- Why evaluate?
- Premises
- Illuminating complexity
- Subtle factors, roles
- Range of impacts
- Dynamics
- Formative evaluation
- Parallels between Knowledge Mobilisation & its evaluation?

Background

- Design, catalysis & leadership for novel initiatives and strategic alliances across disciplines, institutions & sectors
- Evaluations of (too?) many research programmes and schemes, including and often focusing on non-academic impacts, for multiple funders (e.g. ESRC – 2007 onward -multiple, SG-RESAS, EUPHRESKO, DFID-BBSRC, Forestry Commission, SNIFFER-SEPA, SFC – various, EPSRC-related -- several)
- Good fortune to have good colleagues! – e.g. Catherine Lyall, Sandra and Huw at RURU, and others

Why evaluate knowledge mobilisation initiatives?

- Converging pressures for: ‘evidence-based policy or practice’ and ‘impacts of research’
- Funders of research are keen to have impacts beyond academia identified, *but* ‘impacts’ will be viewed narrowly unless the full range is articulated clearly
- Opportunities to learn, *but* impact identification is hard to do! (e.g. subtleties, complex processes, intangible nature of many impacts, attribution issues, timeframe)

Premises

- Evaluations should be *helpful* --- develop insights, learn lessons for future
- If evaluation of impacts recognises importance of processes (not just formal outputs), evaluation will be more appropriate *and* processes can be improved to enhance likelihood of future impacts.
- Nonetheless, knowledge mobilisation activities are *not* the same as impacts!



Illuminating complexity

Evaluations of knowledge mobilisation and impacts need to:

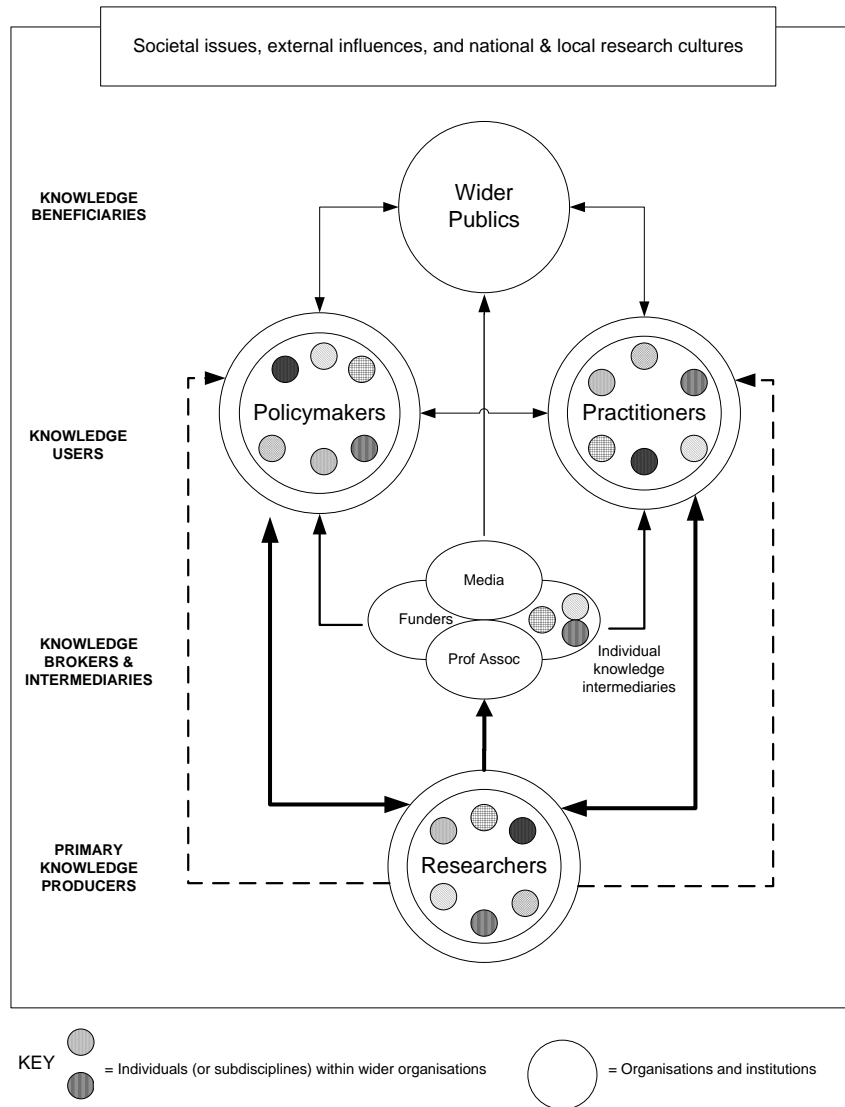
- capture subtle indicators, factors and roles
- identify a full range of types of impacts and
- be keenly alert to processes such as the unfolding of impacts over time

Multi-method, multi-perspective evaluations help.

Subtle factors, roles

- Interdisciplinary integration (facilitator and/or analogue of knowledge mobilisation?)
- Key roles played by heterogeneous individual or organisational Knowledge Intermediaries
- Value, incentives, support, context

Conceptual Framework



Conceptual framework to elaborate flows of knowledge and interactions generating impacts from research

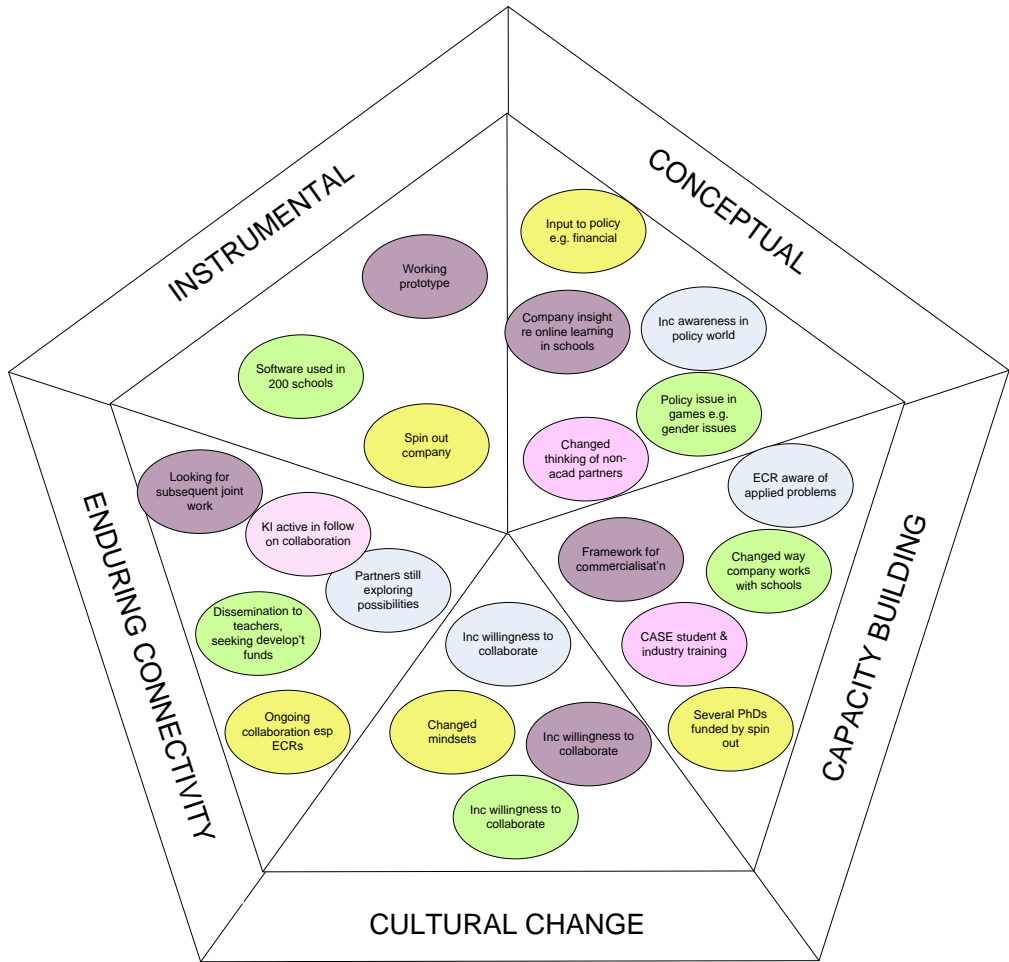
See: Meagher, L., Lyall, C., & Nutley, S., (2008), "Flows of knowledge, expertise and influence: a method for assessing policy and practice impacts from social science research", *Research Evaluation* 17(3): 163-173



Range of Impacts (and impacts-in-progress)

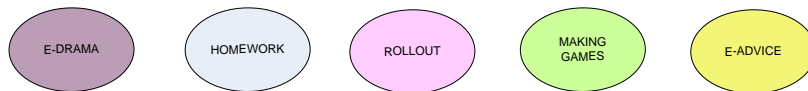
- Instrumental
- Conceptual
- Capacity-building
- Attitude/Culture Change
- “Enduring Connectivity”

Set of 5 types of impacts has proven very useful –
when gently explained, the range often
stimulates/elicits thoughtful responses



Examples of impacts generated by five PACCIT Case Study projects

(Meagher, 2008)



ECR = Early career researcher

Distribution of Categories of Impacts

(SNIFFER/SEPA impact evaluation survey; Meagher *et al.* 2010)

Instrumental Impacts	Conceptual impacts	Capacity-building impacts	Attitude/culture change	Enduring Connectivity
Environmental improvement (59%)	Increasing the evidence base (62%)			
	Knowledge exchange/up-take/learning (60%)			
Risk mitigation (35%)				Continuing communication between researchers, SHs (35%)
Societal benefits (29%)		Training/ capacity-building(28%)		Follow-on collaborations (26%)
Service improvement (22%)	Wide dissemination (22%)		Improved reciprocal und & willingness to work together (22%)	
Improved productivity(12%)				
Cash-releasing (3%)				

Views of impacts achieved (RELU)

(Meagher 2012)

Type of impact/% SA+A of respondents	Researchers re Project	Project Stakeholders	Researchers re Programme	Programme Stakeholders
Instrumental	48.6	34.4	83.3	54.6
Conceptual	97.3	70.6	88.9	95.3
Capacity-building	81.0	54.6	88.9	90.9
Attitude/Culture Change	75.7	59.7	91.6	95.4
Enduring Connectivity	83.7	53.7	88.9	70.0



Dynamics

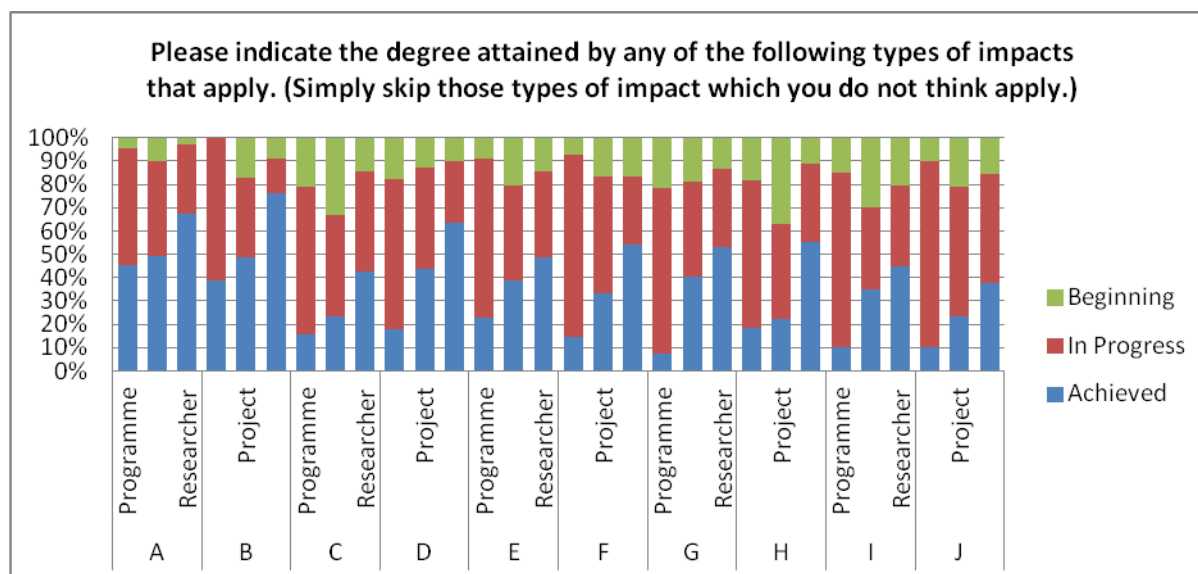
Evaluation can enable identification of impacts by illuminating processes, time frames until achievement

Timing of Impacts: SEPA/SNIFFER


(Meagher *et al.* 2010)

Impacts	Instrumental	Capacity- building	Conceptual	Attitude/ culture	Enduring connect
Short-term (0-2 years)	35	61	67	42	66
Mid-term (2-5 years)	27	2	9	12	9
Long-term (5+ years)	10	0	4	2	0
Cannot estimate	29	37	20	44	26

Perceptions of impact development (Meagher 2012)



A Continuing dialogue, networking **B** Developing collaborative abilities in academics **C** Developing collaborative abilities in non-academics **D** Enduring collaborative activity **E** Generating new understanding or raising awareness among potential users of findings **F** Improved facilitation of knowledge exchange by universities and partner organisations **G** Increased willingness of academics to participate in knowledge exchange **H** Increased willingness of early career researchers to access knowledge exchange opportunities **I** Increased willingness of non-academics to participate in knowledge exchange **J** Uptake/use by Industry, Policymakers, Practitioners



If only all evaluation were formative.....

- Deep evaluation capturing insights & lessons learned
- Deconstructing processes & roles leading toward impacts
- Learning from multiple evaluations
- Learning for future improvement

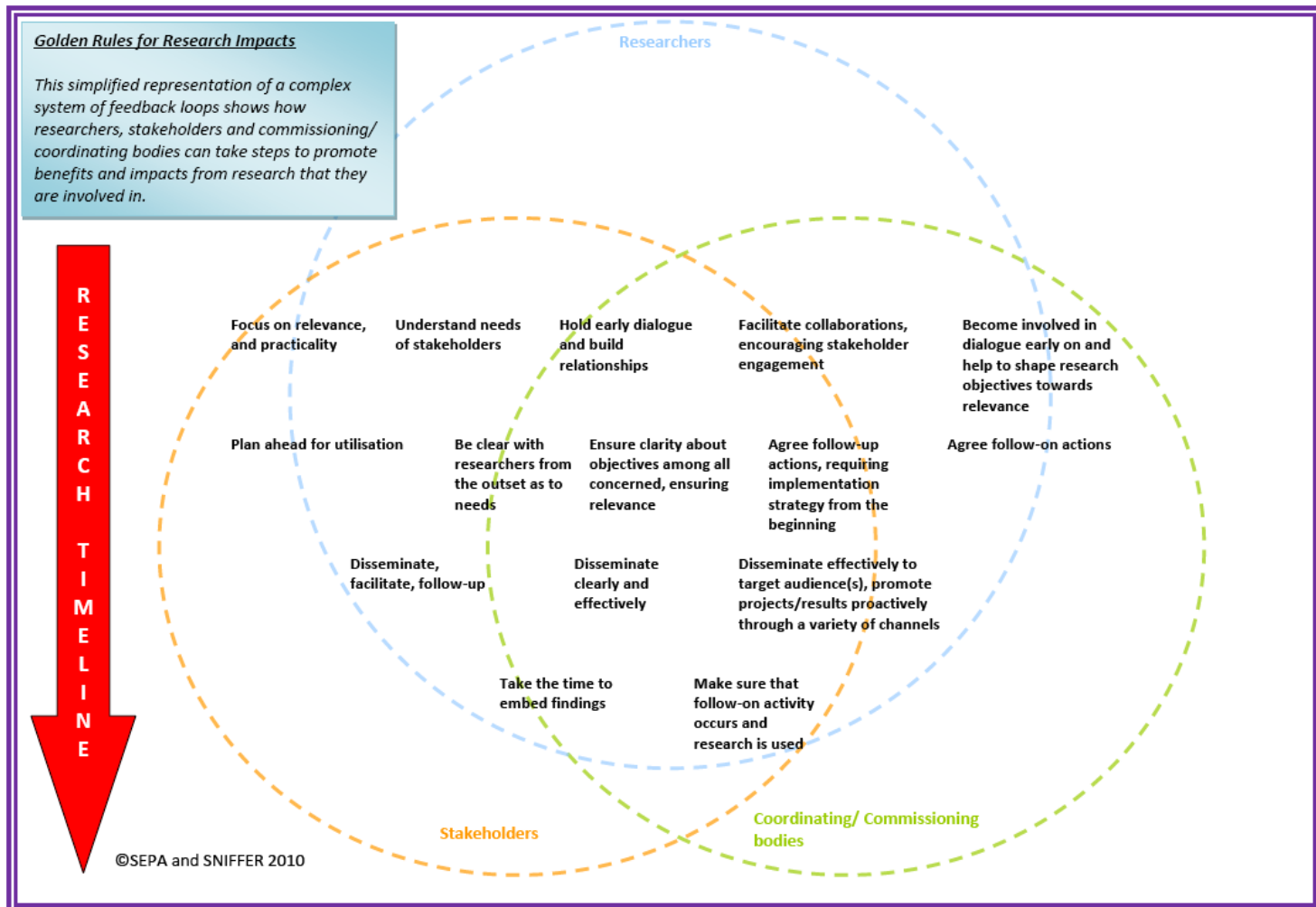
Why Evaluation?

Summative & (Especially) Formative

- Designed to **help CHI+MED** by:
 - feeding real-time insights gained from ongoing evaluation into continuous improvement of the programme
 - gathering along the way subtle information that may prove later to act as useful indicators of progress toward long-term aspirations
- Also, designed to **help others** in future attempts at transformational change by:
 - capturing lessons learned, effective processes & practices

“Golden Rules for Research Impacts”


www.sniffer.org.uk






Is it useful to draw parallels between knowledge mobilisation and its evaluation?

- Effective knowledge mobilisation requires multiple players – so too do evaluations and impact identifications
- Early framing of research questions/expectations is important
- Inclusion of stakeholder as well as researcher views

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- Emphasis on critical factors, roles, processes, appreciation of time frame(s)
 - Integrative approach
 - Constructive tone – joint contribution to future benefit



Evaluation: Issues, Challenges – and Learning!

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