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# WHAT WORKS NOW?

*The changing contours of the evidence landscape*



**Research Unit  
for Research  
Utilisation**

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# Looking ahead:

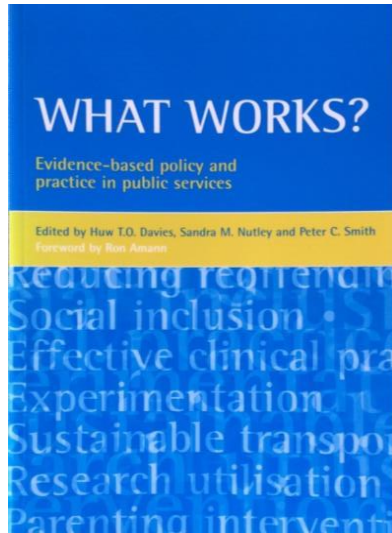


- **A little bit of history  
(but not too much!)**
- **Some of the complexities of  
'evidence-based practice'**
- **Learning from developments  
across diverse sectors**
- **Continuity & change: enduring difficulties  
and emerging opportunities**
- **Articulation of three themes  
for better use of evidence  
(for reflection and discussion)**

*'What counts is  
what works'*



## Departure point – the 1990s



**Policy Press, 2000**


- Relative optimism...
- Default model: *'Evidence Based Medicine'*
- Substantial investment more broadly in 'evidence-based policy & practice' (EBPP)
- A major plank of 'New Public Management'
- An international phenomenon (e.g. Cochrane & Campbell collaborations)

**But, when it comes to getting research *used*...**



***"Yes, it's quite a noise - but are we having any impact?"***



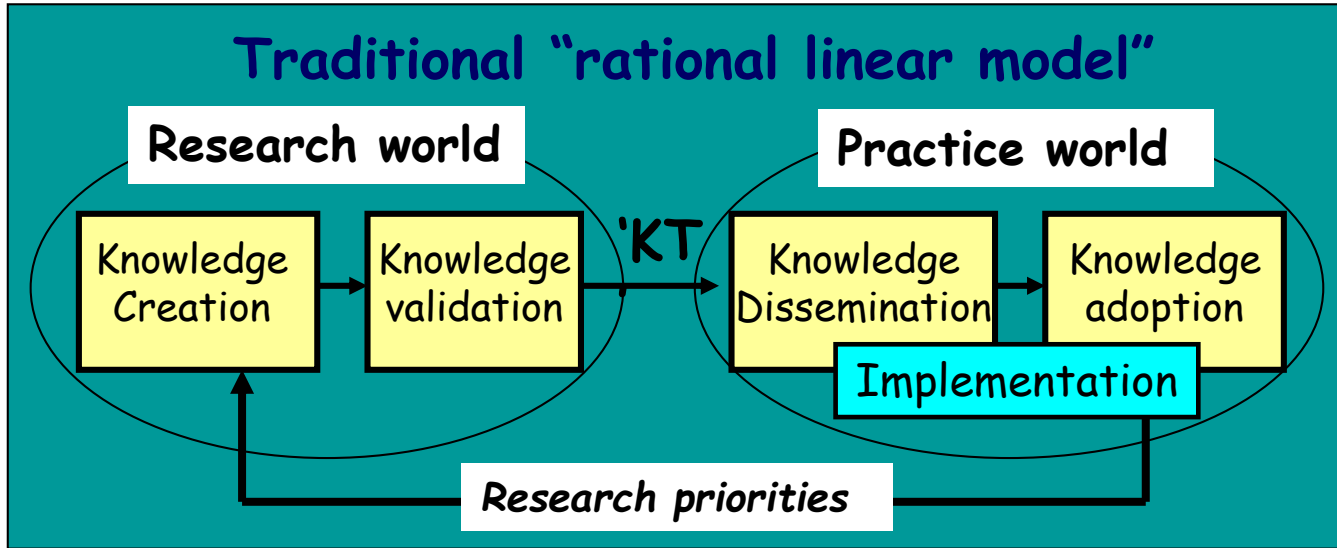
Derby Hospitals   
NHS Foundation Trust

In 50 years who will ever  
believe that Irish pubs  
banned smoking before  
English hospitals?



**Tricky thing,  
using evidence...**

# Default thinking: from *Knowing* to *Doing*



*Assumes rather uncomplicated relationships  
between **research/knowledge** and **knowledge/action***

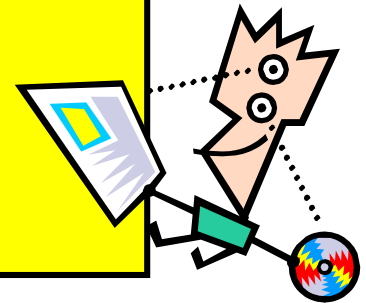
## **-- THE PROBLEMS WITH THIS MODEL --**

Too - simple, rational, linear, uni-directional, individualised, unproblematised, asocial, and acontextual (otherwise, OK 😊)

# So, what IS *EVIDENCE*?

For some, ‘evidence’ is primarily high-quality research on ‘what works’ -- with a focus on *systematic reviews* and *randomised controlled trials*.

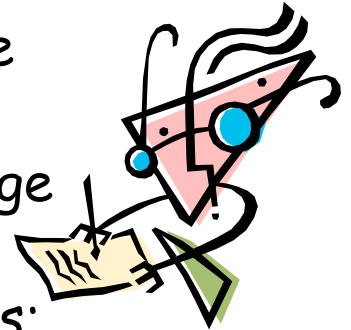
- ⇒ Assumes *generalisable* knowledge is possible
- ⇒ Focus on *instrumentalist* knowledge: i.e. about *choosing* effective treatments/programmes
- ⇒ Research ‘quality’ is assessed mainly on methodological considerations





# BUT knowledge required for effective services is *much* broader than simply “what works”

- *Know-about (problems)*: understand the nature, origins, natural history and interrelations of health & social problems...
- *Know-why (solutions might work)*: understanding the components of successful practices *in context*...
- *Know-how (to put into practice)*: pragmatic knowledge to support service and programme implementation...
- *Know-who (to involve)*: skills needed by practitioners; service team composition; building alliances for action...



**Enlightenment knowledge: so, problematizing and re-framing...**

**Engagement with *values*; diverse perspectives; politics & negotiation**

**Ontological, epistemological & methodological *diversity* -- arguments!**

# Challenge of integrating “knowledge”

Moving from 'Research' ⇨ 'Evidence' ⇨ 'Knowledge'

- very uncertain processes: engages with *values*; draws on *tacit* knowledge; incorporates professional and user *experiences*...
- socially and contextually *situated*...
- not necessarily *convergent* or *shared*...
- may require some difficult 'unlearning'.

And, not just what knowledge/evidence, but whose ??

- 'evidence' may be used selectively/tactically
- knowledge/power intimately co-constructed

⇨ Significant limits to 'stand alone' knowledge; knowledge is *contested*

**So much for**

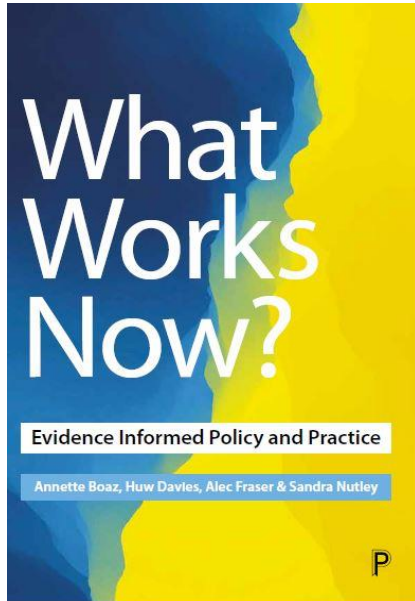
**Evidence-BASED**

**Policy and Practice...**

**Evidence-informed, perhaps?**

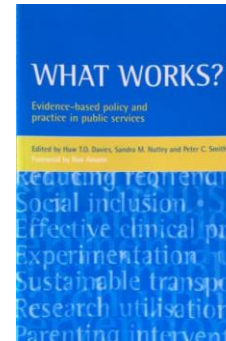


# Bringing the story up-to-date

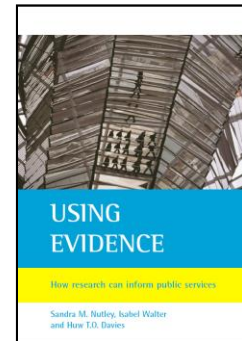


**Policy Press, 2019**

- Overview of current state of field and key changes since 2000;
- Not uncritical, but generally supportive of the role of evidence;
- Aimed at a wide audience;
- With practical intent...

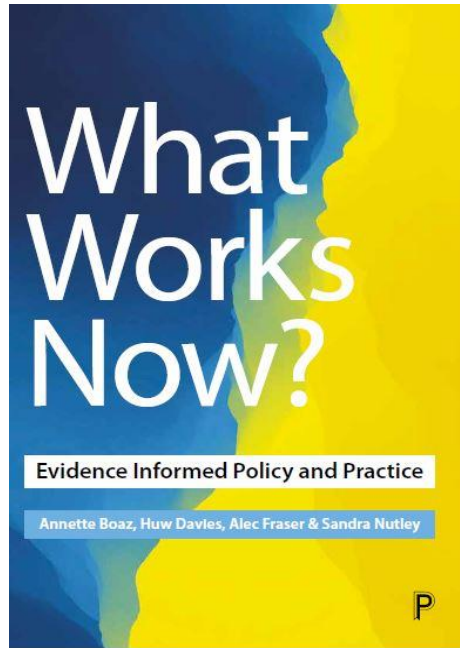


**Policy Press, 2000**



**Policy Press, 2007**

## Key features



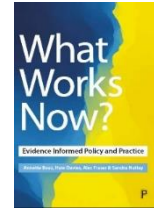
Policy Press, 2019

- **Cross-sectoral** public services focus; exploring both policy **and** practice.
- UK analysis alongside international commentary and comparison.
- Broadly pragmatic and supportive of the wider evidence-**informed** agenda.
- Contains three-part thematic analysis: on the practicalities of **generating, labelling & using** evidence.



# Continuity and change... ten key points

PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT 2019  
Vol. 39 (4): 310–316 (free to download)



1. Evidence is still viewed as an *important resource* for policy and practice, ***but there is now a more realistic view of the nature and extent of its influence.***
2. Central government continues to be the main investor in evidence initiatives (especially evidence supply) ***but alongside a growing role for regional and not-for-profit initiatives and investments.***
3. There are some ongoing and longer-term initiatives to support evidence use, but ***short- to medium- term investments in project-based activities still prevail, leading to sustainability issues.***

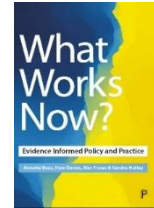




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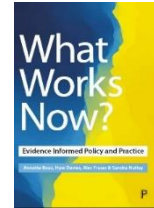


4. The ‘what works?’ question still dominates the evidence-use discourse, albeit with ***an increased appreciation of how evidence can inform other policy and practice questions.***
5. There is continuing emphasis on methods for improving, categorizing and labelling evidence though ***traditional ‘evidence hierarchies’ are now more nuanced and complemented by evidence matrices and principles.***
6. Recognition of the need to combine research-based evidence with other forms of knowledge continues, with ***more emphasis now on creative ways of achieving knowledge integration.***

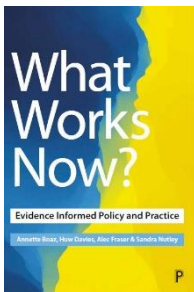


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7. Lack of evidence use is still an issue but ***greater appreciation that addressing this is about more than 'generate, collate and share'***.
8. Continuing awareness of the importance of *relationships* between evidence producers and users, ***and greater experimentation with different ways of supporting these closer relationships.***
9. Interest in building multi-faceted *systems* for evidence use, with ***more recent recognition of the need to conceive of comprehensive evidence systems as complex and adaptive 'eco systems'***.
10. Increased emphasis on using evidence to inform and check public debate, although ***service users and the public are often still at the margins...***

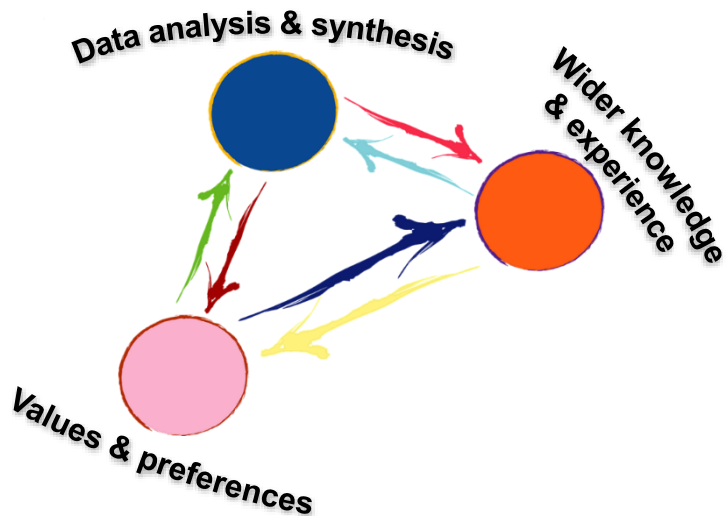


Themes of:

- Breadth...
- Plurality...
- Integration...



About balancing & interweaving...



...from multiple voices...



...as part of integrated knowing...



## Some examples of more integrated knowledge use in practice (knowledge *integration*, knowledge *co-production*...)

- **'In house' research training programmes:** building capacity to do and/or use research, ranging from formal training programmes to peer support, mentoring and coaching.
- **Local research networks:** provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and facilitating interactions between individuals and organisations.
- **Knowledge brokers:** connecting research producers and users to identify areas where research might be of help, encourage interactions, and develop mutual understanding amongst research producers and users.
- **Research champions:** individuals who provide leadership to support the use of research within different environments including organisations.
- **Research-practice partnerships:** long-term collaborations between researchers and practitioners, working together to identify problems for research, conducting studies and applying the findings in practice.
- **Embedded researchers:** *co-locating* researchers and practitioners to work together on practical problems in a service-orientated environment.



**Sometimes overly simple ideas about how research gets used and is influential...**

**...but more nuanced understandings can open up fresh avenues for better use of research.**



## So, some take home messages -

Be wary of rational/linear models of KT (think more of connected social systems than 'two communities')

Research that informs new thinking may be more influential in the long run (think 'enlightenment')

Engagement 'up-stream' in the research process more likely to bring influence (think partnerships)

Research influence, application, use and impact are social, situated and highly contextual (which presents many challenges and many opportunities...)





**Thank you – and Good Luck!**