

Methods and tools for assessing research impact

Dr Sarah Morton,
Director, Matter of Focus
and Honorary Fellow, University of Edinburgh

The starting point



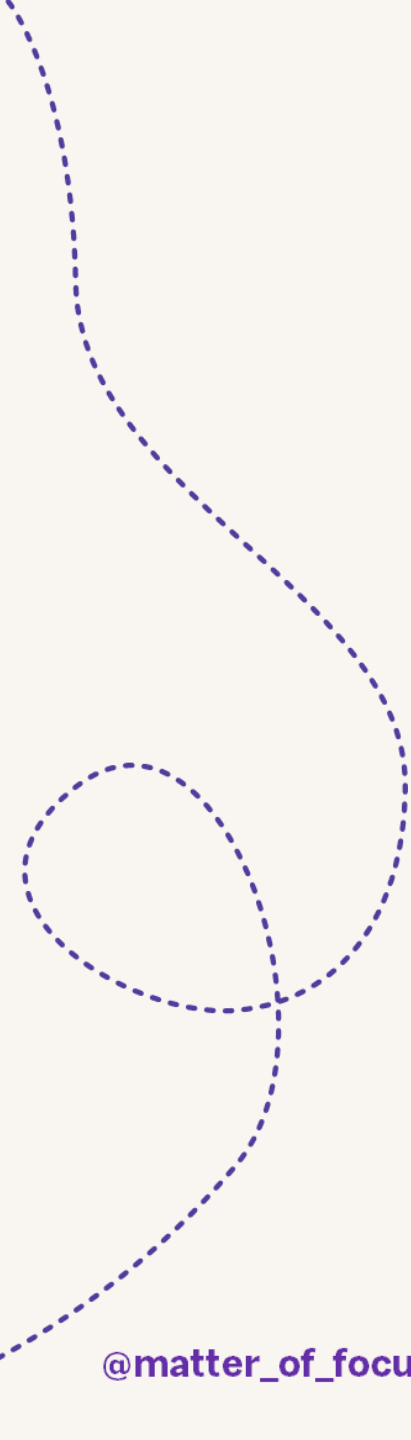
In this presentation

1. What is research impact?
2. What are the challenges of assessing research impact?
3. What tools and approaches can meet the challenges

Discussion sessions



What is research impact?



Defining research



IMPACT

Definition of research impact (UKRI)

“The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy. Economic and societal impacts embrace all the extremely diverse ways in which research-related knowledge and skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations by:

- fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom,
- increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy,
- enhancing quality of life, health and creative output.”

(UK Research and Innovation website)

EU Research and Innovation

“Through its multiannual research and innovation framework programmes, the EU provides funding to:

- strengthen the EU’s position in science
- strengthen industrial innovation, including investment in key technologies, greater access to capital and support for small businesses
- **address major social concerns, such as climate change, sustainable transport and renewable energy**
- ensure technological breakthroughs are developed into viable products with real commercial potential – by building partnerships with industry and governments
- step up international cooperation on research & innovation”

https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/research-innovation_en

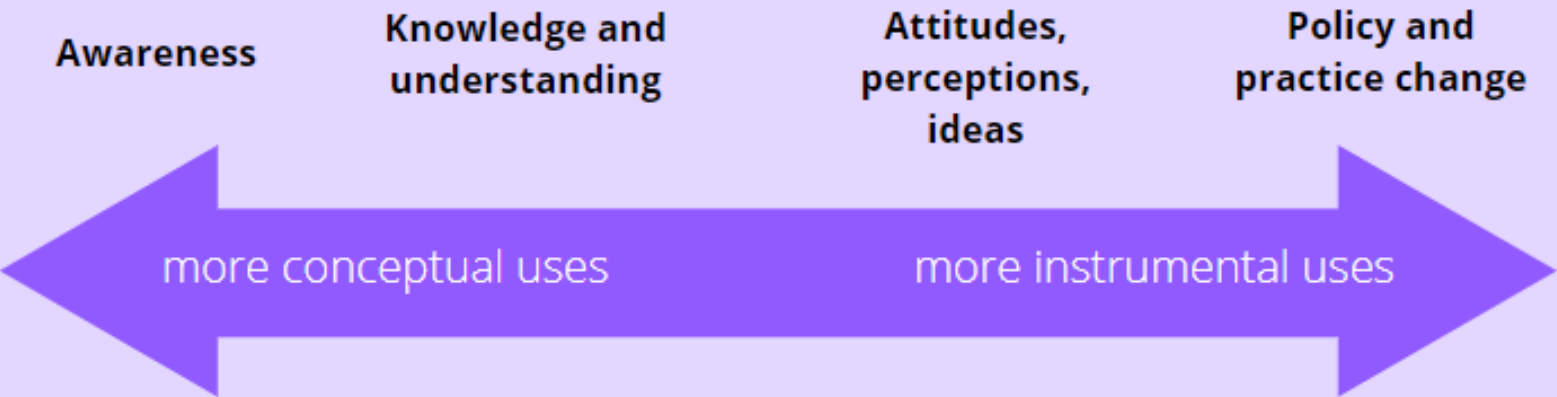
Definition of research impact for UK Research Excellence Framework

“Impact includes, but is not limited to, an effect on, change or benefit to:

- The activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding
- Of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals
- In any geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally”

(Higher Education Funding Council 2011):47

A continuum of research use (Nutley et al 2007)



Nutley, S., I. Walter, et al. (2007). Using Evidence: How research can inform public services. Bristol, Policy Press.

Unpicking the concepts



Research uptake: *people are interested in research, read it, talk about it, go to a presentation, event etc..*

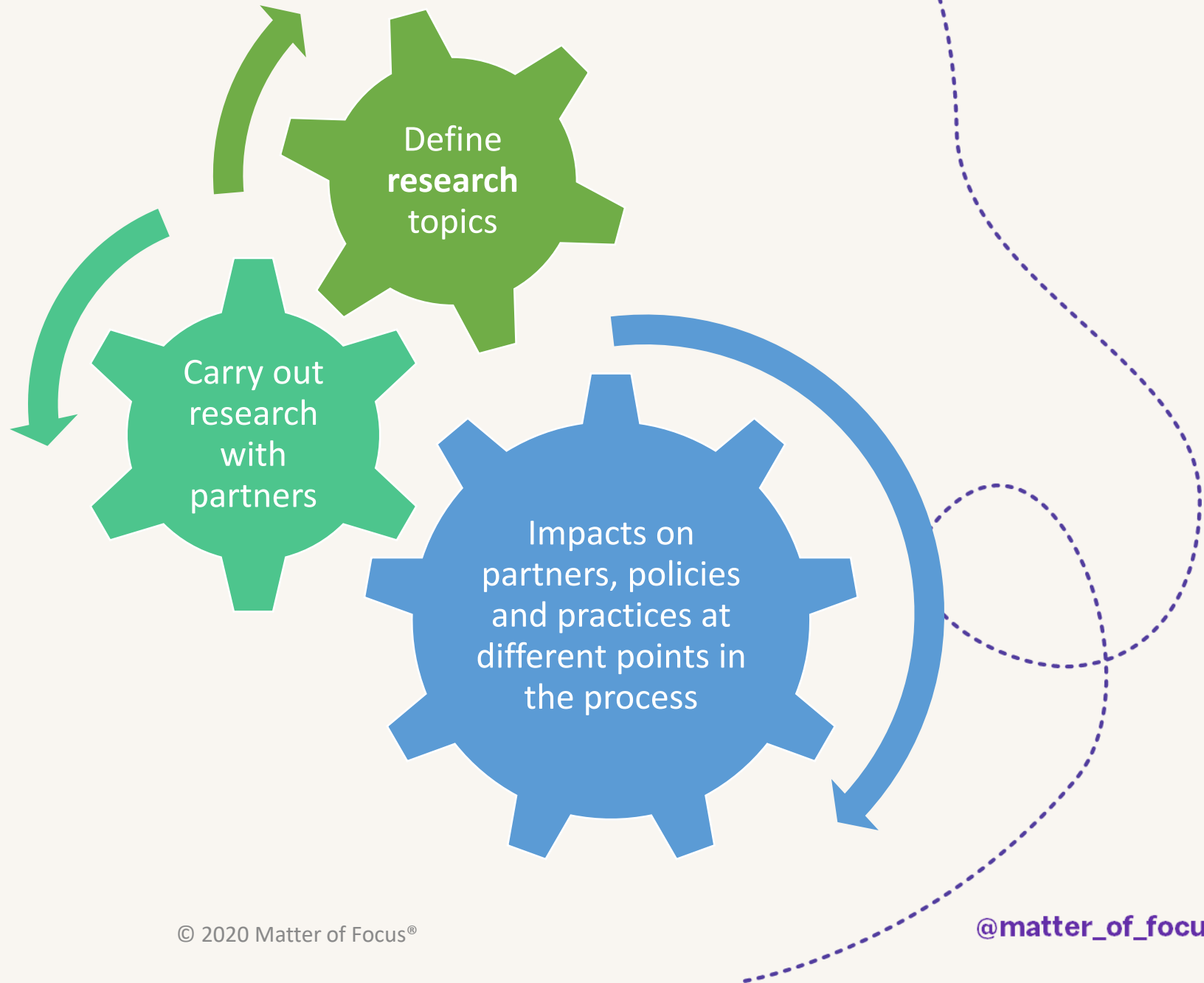


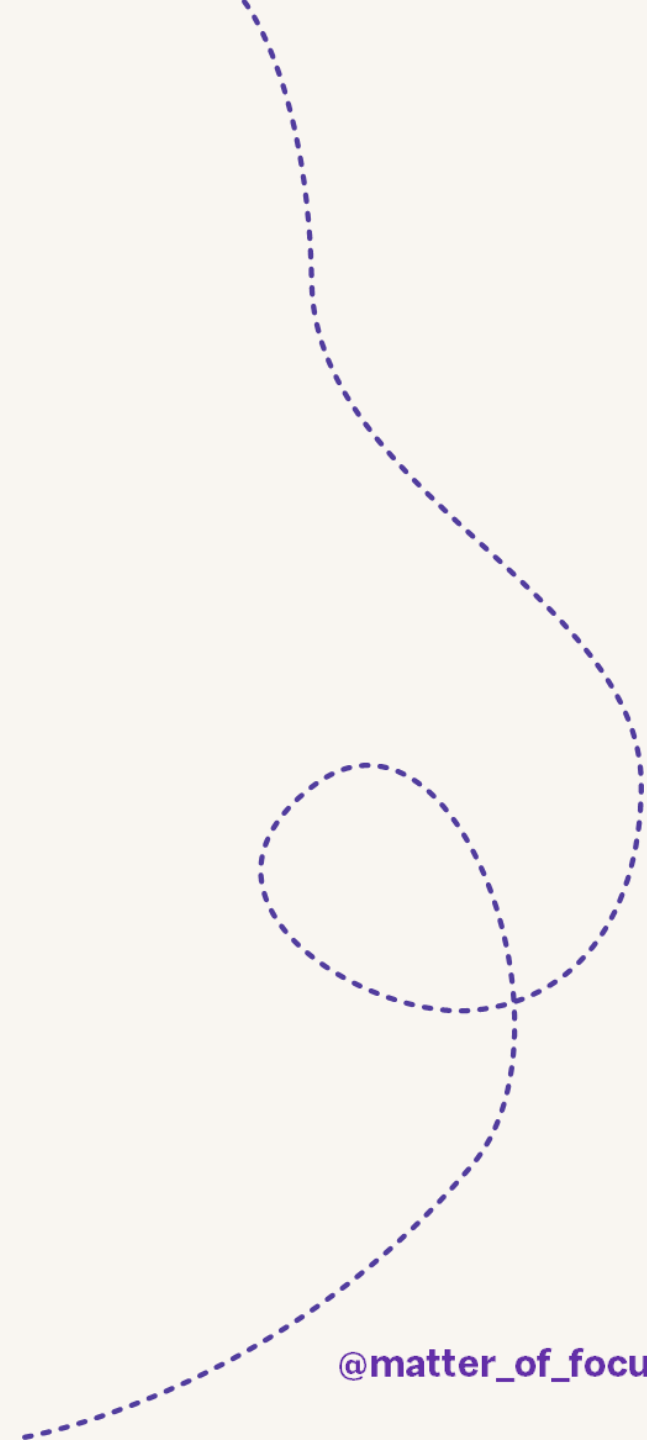
Research use: *people do something with the research, change their view, pass it on to someone else, 'apply it' to practice or policy*

Research impact: *a contribution to change as a result of research use*


Morton (2015)

A different view of impact?





Impact through the research cycle

- 
- 1. Potential/future impact**
(Pathways to Impact)
 - 2. Maximising impact of current research**
(Knowledge Exchange)
 - 3. Reporting on impact of previous research**
(Impact Assessment)



Research impact: where are we now?

- Many research organisations with an impact imperative (in and out of HE sector)
- Increasing use of outcomes (SDG's Government performance systems)
- REF in UK and EIF in Australia
- Shift towards impact:
 - Impact prizes (ESRC, ERC, etc..)
 - Researchers blogging, tweeting etc..
 - Funding: e.g.: ESRC impact accelerator account
 - Core competency of research staff

Why does research impact matter?

- Spending public money means demonstrating the benefits of that investment to society = **accountability**
- Research can be improved by engaging with a broad range of potential beneficiaries = **quality**
- Increasing the impact = **maximising benefits**
- It enhances universities' attractiveness for research and innovation investment = **reputation**.
- Policy and practice should be the best it can = **evidence for action**



**But research impact isn't
straight-forward...**

Two seminal papers

Research and policy- it's not straightforward!

Weiss, C., H (1979). "The many meanings of research utilisation."
Public Administration Review
39(5): 426-431.

Research and practice – people matter most!

Gabbay, J. and A. le May (2004).
"Evidence based guidelines or collectively constructed mindlines?". Ethnographic study of knowledge management in primary care. BMJ 329.
<https://www.bmj.com/content/329/7473/1013>

Discussion 1:

What definitions of research impact are currently used in your organisation/country/setting?

Is there clear expectation for impact? What is it?

What are the challenges of assessing research impact?

The foundations

Knowledge isn't taken up and used in a rational-linear way, rather **people interact with knowledge from their own perspective, experience and context**



Morton, S. (2015). "Progressing research impact assessment: A 'contributions' approach" Research Evaluation.
<http://rev.oxfordjournals.org/content/24/4/405.full>

Knowledge Mobilization



- is a **people-based process**
- doesn't directly cause change, - it **influences and contributes to change** in complex ways

So it is difficult to understand...

- did research or KMB activities contribute to change or was it something else?
- can we trace the effect of our work through different kinds and stages of change?
- what about the contribution of different partners?



Key impact assessment challenges ...

- What types of use/impact are of interest?
- Timing – impact occurs over different timeframes
- Context – important but difficult to assess
- Assessing actual or potential impacts?
- Dealing with attribution and additionality – how do we know KmB made a difference?
- Getting away from linear models research use/impact

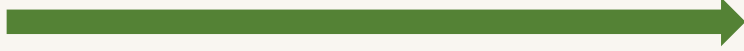
Discussion 2

What are the challenges and opportunities to embed research impact in your setting?

Groups of 4/5 – list challenges and opportunities

What tools and approaches can meet the challenge of assessing research impact?

Understanding change



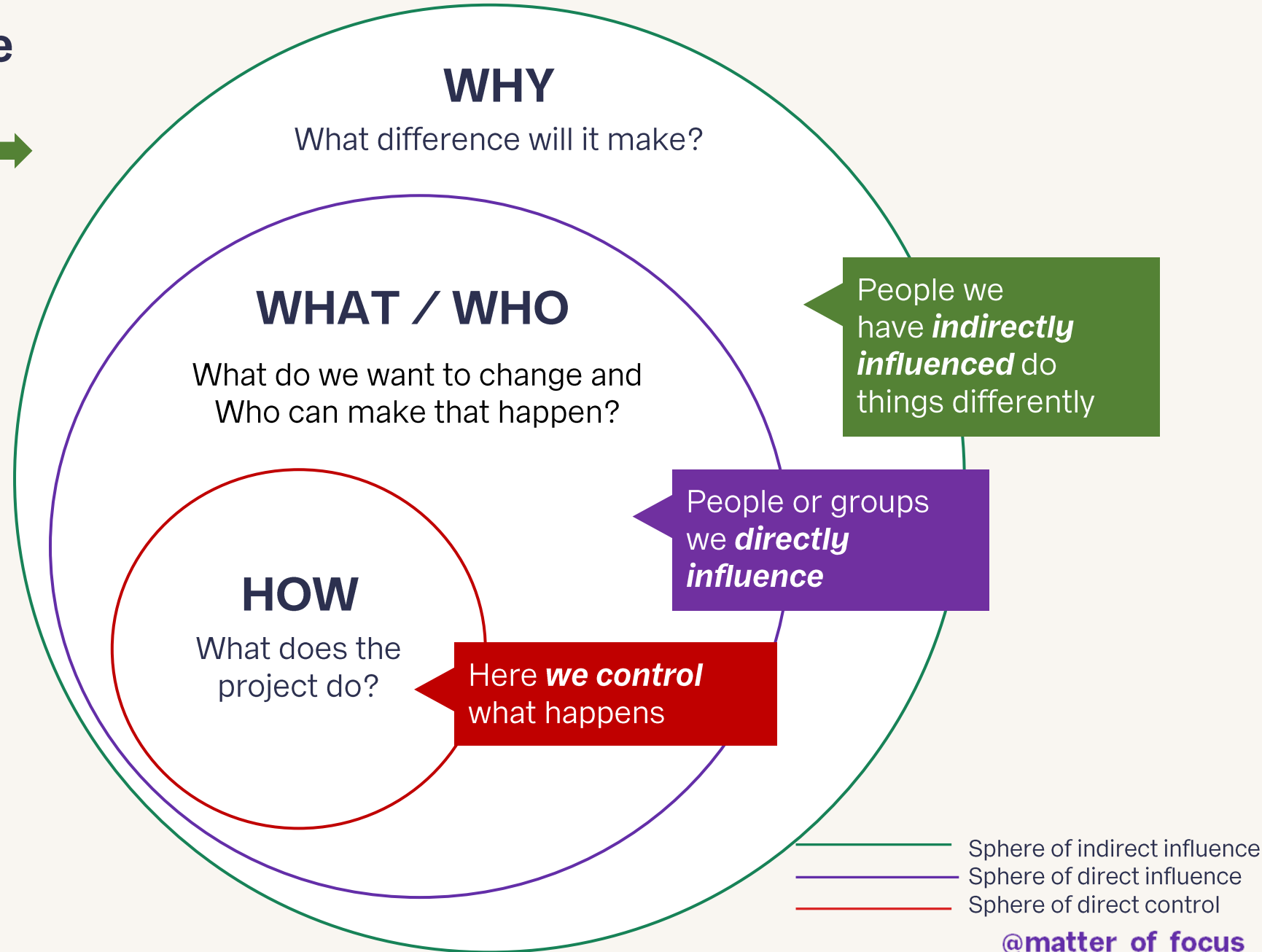
We need other policies and ways of doing things to be helping and things beyond our control might stop this happening




We need people to respond well and have the ability to change to make this happen



We make this happen if we have the right resources and activities

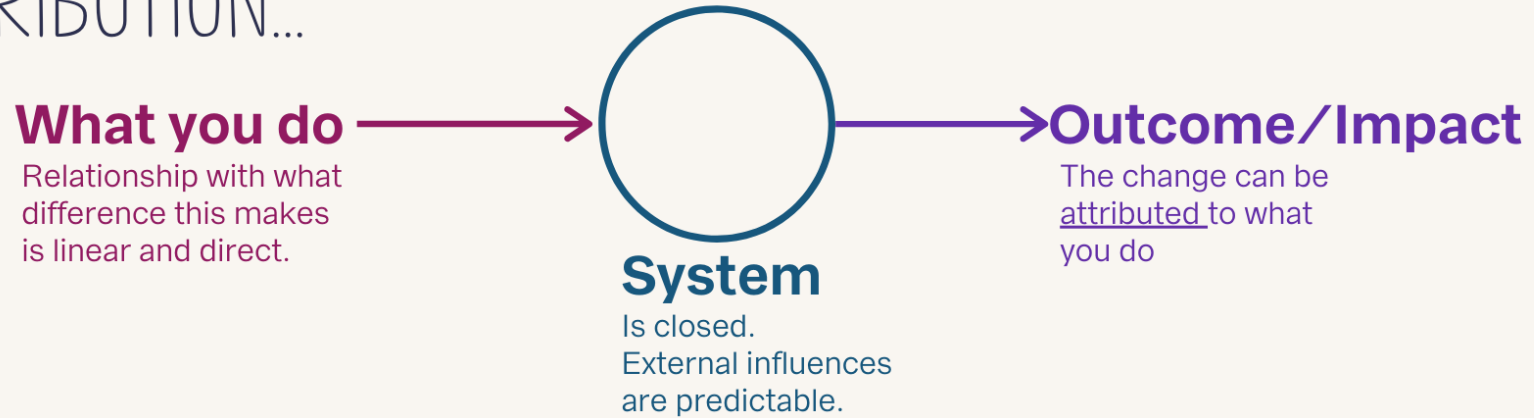


What does it mean to use research?

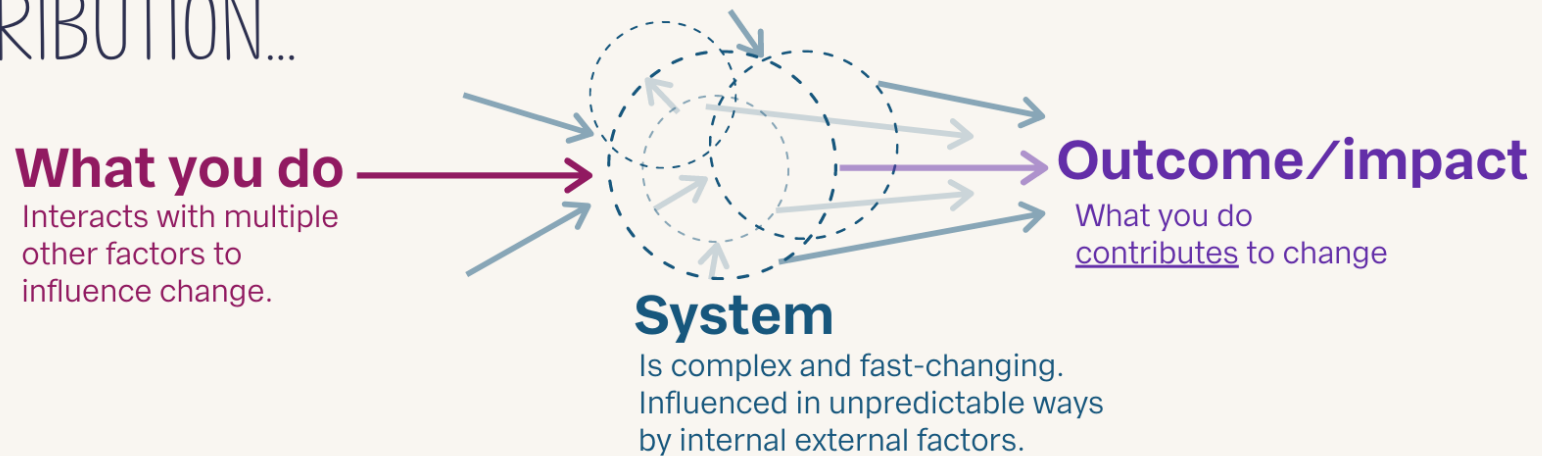
- 
- Research uptake:** *people are interested in research, read it, talk about it, come to a presentation etc.*
 - Research use:** *people do something with the research, change their view, pass it on to someone else, apply it to practice or policy*
 - Research impact:** *a contribution to change as a result of research use*

Understanding cause and effect

ATTRIBUTION...



CONTRIBUTION...



Research Contribution Framework

RESEARCH
IMPACT

FINAL OUTCOMES
AND CONTRIBUTION

Longer term consequences of
changes in behavior or policy

CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR,
POLICY AND PRACTICE

Changes showing policy,
practice or community outcomes
using research concepts

RESEARCH
USE

CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE,
SKILLS AND CAPACITIES

Learning and capacity-building
outcomes based on research and
KE activities

REACTIONS AND CHANGES
IN AWARENESS

Reactions to research concepts
by different research users

RESEARCH
UPTAKE

ENGAGEMENT
AND INVOLVEMENT

People engaged and involved
with research and KE activities

OUTPUTS/KE ACTIVITIES

Activities to engage research
users

Morton, S. (2015). Progressing research impact assessment: A ‘contributions’ approach *Research Evaluation*.

Research Contribution Framework

RESEARCH
IMPACT

FINAL OUTCOMES
AND CONTRIBUTION

CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR,
POLICY AND PRACTICE

RESEARCH
USE

CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE,
SKILLS AND CAPACITIES

REACTIONS AND CHANGES
IN AWARENESS

RESEARCH
UPTAKE

ENGAGEMENT
AND INVOLVEMENT

OUTPUTS/KEY ACTIVITIES

Matter of Focus Framework

WHAT DIFFERENCE
DOES THIS MAKE?

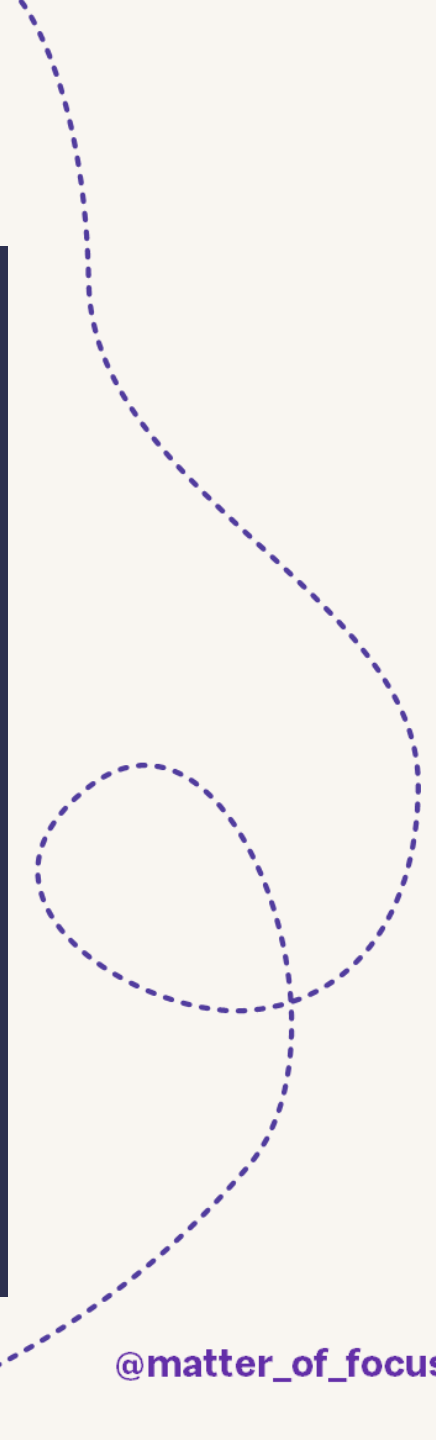
WHAT THEY DO
DIFFERENTLY

WHAT THEY LEARN
AND GAIN

HOW THEY FEEL

WHO WITH

WHAT WE DO



Case Study: Evaluating the impact of the Global Kids Online Programme



Children's rights in the digital age

Gathering global evidence on children's online rights, opportunities, and risks

Tools for researchers

Research results

Research updates

About the project

Participating countries

Contact

Tools for researchers

A multi-method toolkit for investigating children's online experiences around the world

Research results

Our research results and latest findings from around the world

<http://globalkidsonline.net/>

The process

Mapped
pathways to
impact

Collected
and collated
data



Three impact strategies



Key impacts

Policy

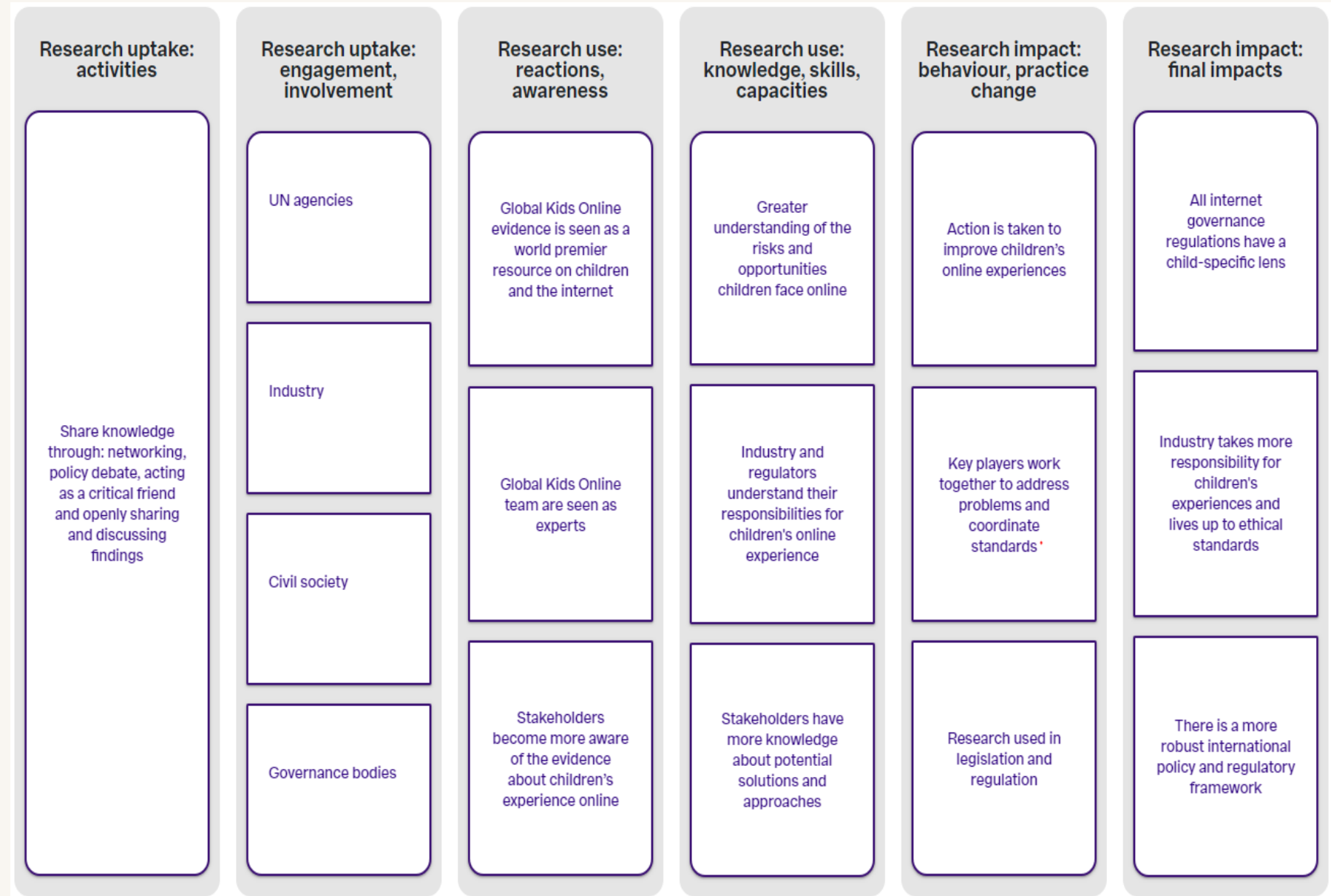
- In Montenegro, the Philippines and Bulgaria, research has influenced education policy, contributing to curriculum development and parental support.
- In Albania and Brazil, research has contributed to digital strategies for both child protection online and digital inclusion.
- In Argentina, a new law on telecommunications includes digital literacy based on the research findings.

Practice

- **For children and young people**
 - In Montenegro, Argentina, Ghana and Bulgaria, interventions for children and young people including apps, digital participation and training have been designed in line with the research findings.
- **For professionals**
 - In Argentina, Uruguay and Montenegro, teachers have been directly engaged with the findings, including through new training, co-producing resources and exploring their role in supporting parents.
- **For parents**
 - In Uruguay and Ghana, support for parents in keeping their children safe online has been developed and rolled out.
- **For the public**

<https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1065-childrens-experiences-online-building-global-understanding-and-action.html>

Systems influencing



Plotting pathways to impact (if done well)



- ✓ Helps to focus on potential impact
- ✓ Provides a way of planning for impact
- ✓ Communicates about what matters to the project or initiative
- ✓ Provides a structure for thinking and learning about impact
- ✓ Creates a framework for evaluating impact

Pathways to impact are best when

- Focus on the outcomes and impacts that matter
- Have an understanding of different levels of impacts
- Include a theory or model of impact (we believe...)
- Have taken account of the context in which any work sits
- Have buy-in from key stakeholders
- Are used as working documents



What we do

Develop a theory of change for the model

Create a research team

Create policies and infrastructure to support research

Engage a network of champions to promote research and methodology

Create conversations about the evidence base and methodology

Produce relevant outputs for different audiences to share evidence widely

Who with

Bromley by Bow community

Bromley by Bow staff

Bromley by Bow leadership

Academics

Third sector leaders

Local policy makers and NHS commissioners

How they feel

I trust the researches and process

This is robust

I believe I can make use of this research or process

This is new and innovative - I like it!

What they learn and gain

Clarification of assumptions about the BBB model and its pathway to change

Deeper understanding of the tensions in the model

An evidence bank to draw from to make the case about the value of this model

Relationships with leading academics who validate the model and its approach

A shared experience and consolidated view across people with lived experience, practice, leadership and research and policy making to

What they do differently

Exhibit a greater appetite for outcomes, doing research and learning

Make use of the evidence and tools for outcomes-thinking and monitoring

Work more honestly together - working with, rather than ignoring the tension

Change service delivery and strategy to reflect the core assumptions in the model

Find new research opportunities to continue to learn together

What difference does this make?

Better outcome reporting

Growing evidence base on the model

Greater community involvement in the governance of the model

Other community anchors and integrated models use the principles, outcome framework or evidence base to improve their work

Valenzuela pathfinder city to End Violence against children



How to understand impact

- Need to move from planning and doing, to collecting feedback
- Best if done from the start (not just at the end)
- Iterative feedback cycles help us *DO* knowledge to action better
- Collecting data, information and feedback the building blocks of a strong impact story or case study

Using the RCF

- Research Contribution Framework outlined in full in an article (Morton 2015*)
- Can be used in more light touch way – aimed at researchers or other wanting to keep track of impact, rather than a full impact assessment.

* Morton, S. (2015). “Progressing research impact assessment: A ‘contributions’ approach” Research Evaluation. 2015 October 1, 2015;24(4):405-19.

Assessing impact

- Need to develop ways of understanding uptake, use and impact
 - Evidence of engagement with research
 - Feedback from research users via web, email, interview, survey or other appropriate methods
 - Evidence of change based on research
- Pragmatic approach getting enough feedback to learn, improve and tell a good story of the impact achieved

Data, evidence and feedback

Collect impact data:

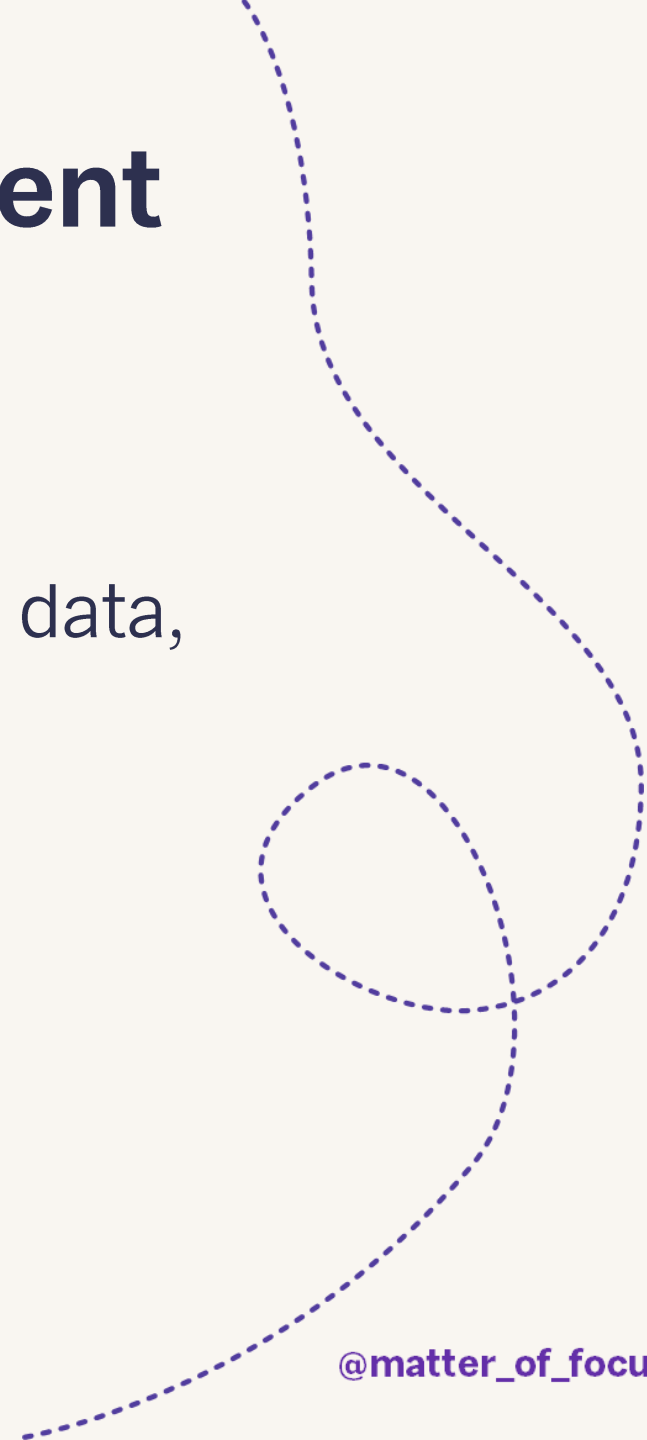
- in a thoughtful and purposeful way
- with clarity about what it will be used for
- according to your capacity to actually make use of this evidence, don't collect more than you need
- being mindful of the reporting requirements for funders or other stakeholders

Some potential types of data

Event feedback	Social media	Feedback about KE activities
Press coverage	Policy analysis	Focus groups/interviews
On-line surveys	Webstats	Creative feedback
Videos/photos	Observations	Evaluations

Research contribution assessment

- Set out 'pathway to impact'
- Identify appropriate measures
- Assemble existing data: research, monitoring data, feedback etc.
- Identify gaps and collect more data
- Adapt, review and analyse as you go



Assessing Uptake

Stakeholder engagement analysis:

- Who has been engaged?
- How many followers on twitter, web hits, downloads, press coverage etc?
- What do you know about these stakeholders?
- Can you demonstrate wide and targeted reach?

(some of these will meet the 'reach' criteria of UK REF)

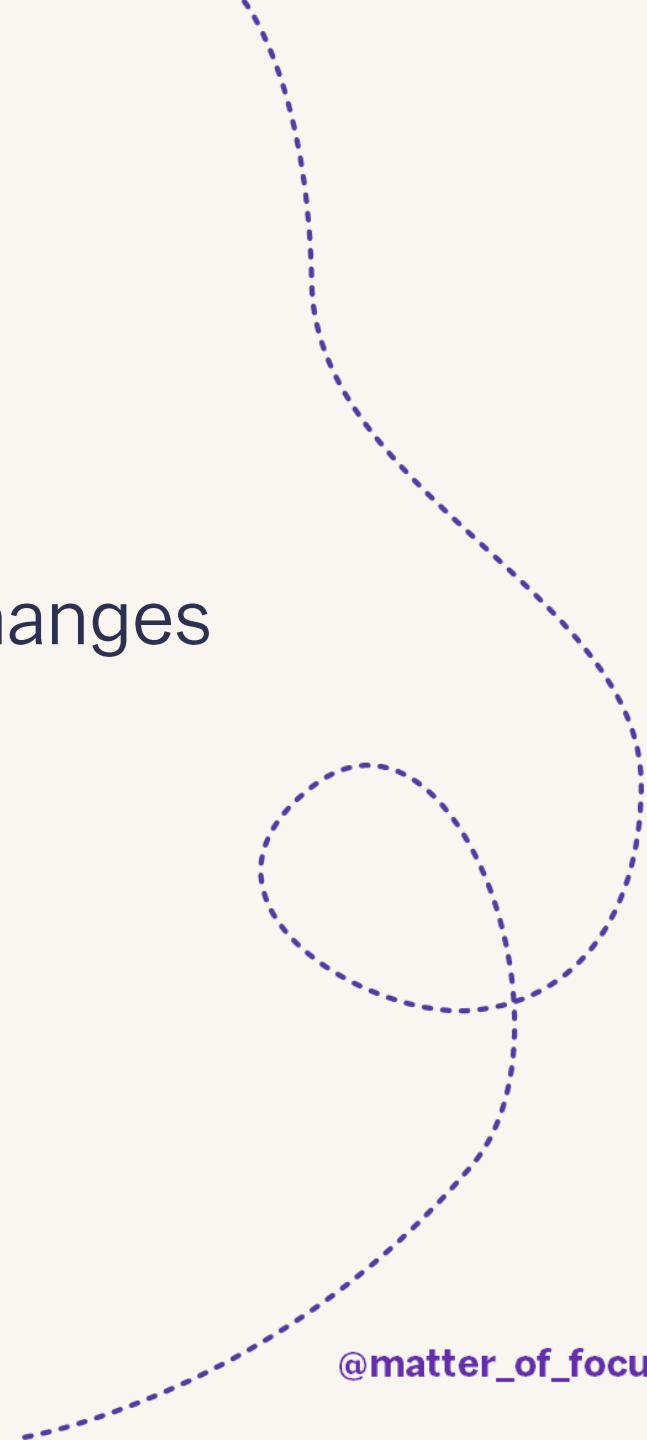
Assessing Uptake 2

- Evaluation of KE activities
- What feedback do you have from stakeholders that they are engaged?
- E.g. positive comments from events, re-tweets, comments on blogs, evidence of public debate

Assessing Use

Evidence that research has been used:

- Feedback from users that research is useful
- Demonstration/evaluation or self-report of changes in skills/knowledge or understanding
- Evaluation of policy showing use/application/discussion of research



Assessing Final Impacts

Evidence that research use led to impact:

- Research users testimony of the difference it made
- Evaluations of programmes or services related to the research
- National or local level indications of change in issues addressed.
- Observed or reported changes in areas of policy or practice
- Contextual analysis addressing other explanations of change

A couple of examples

<https://www.matter-of-focus.com/3-feedback-tools/>

Quick feedback form

WHAT YOU LIKED...	WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED:
WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED AND GAINED FROM TODAY?	IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WILL DO DIFFERENTLY AS A RESULT?

Matter of Focus

Reflective impact log

REFLECTIVE IMPACT LOG Matter of Focus

Project: _____

Date completed: _____

Contributors to this log: _____

ABOUT THE PROJECT

What are the intended outcomes or impacts for this project? (Refer to your outcome map, if you have one)

How are things going?

Are you getting the engagement you planned for?

How are people reacting to this project? Are you getting the reaction you hoped for? How do you know?

Are there any learning points for the future?

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Why this approach?

- Method of evaluation which allows for analysis of process and outcomes
- Acknowledging that there are many factors influencing change
- Provides evidence to demonstrate the outcomes from research and KE
- Can help with planning KE activities
- Good basis for partnership discussion
- Adaptable to different time-frames, - can assess immediate or intermediate impact

Recent reflections from impact studies

- Have a vision and intention for impact
- Involve research users throughout
- Take the time and make the effort
- Be honest about failure
- Collect data and feedback as you go

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/08/27/assessing-research-impact-a-tale-of-7-impact-studies/>

Discussion 3:

**What are the current expectations for research impact assessment?
What support do researchers and research organisations need?**

Plenary and questions

Further resources

- Use our headings. (download here <https://www.matter-of-focus.com/using-our-headings/>)
- OutNav – a tool for tracking pathways to impact and rating confidence in evidence. <https://www.matter-of-focus.com/outnav/>
- Research Impact School Module <https://www.matter-of-focus.com/the-matter-of-focus-research-impact-school-module1/>

Thank you!

Let's keep the conversation going:

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LinkedIn: [.../company/matter-of-focus](https://www.linkedin.com/company/matter-of-focus)