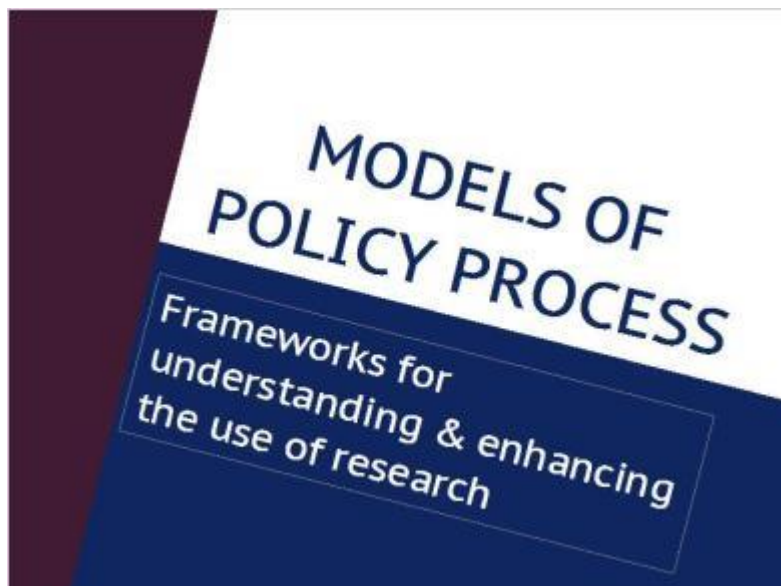
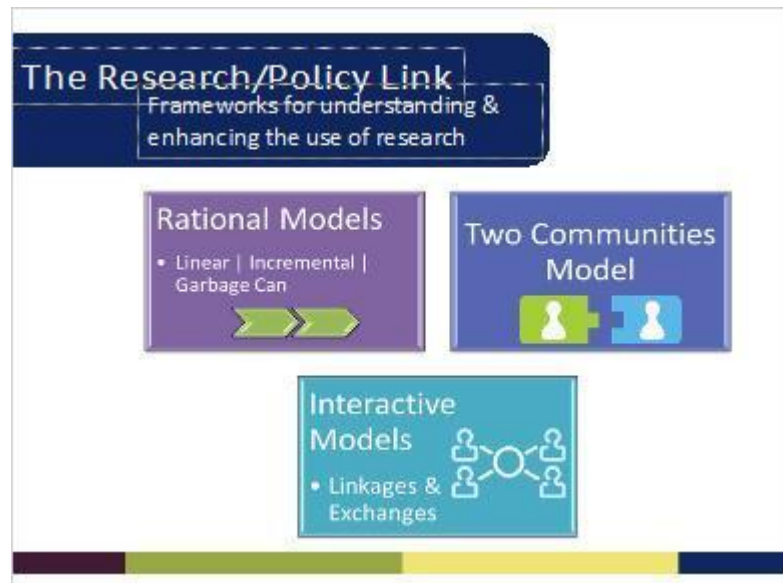


Models of Policy Process



How we think about evidence use rests on assumptions about the policy process and about how evidence enters the policy process.

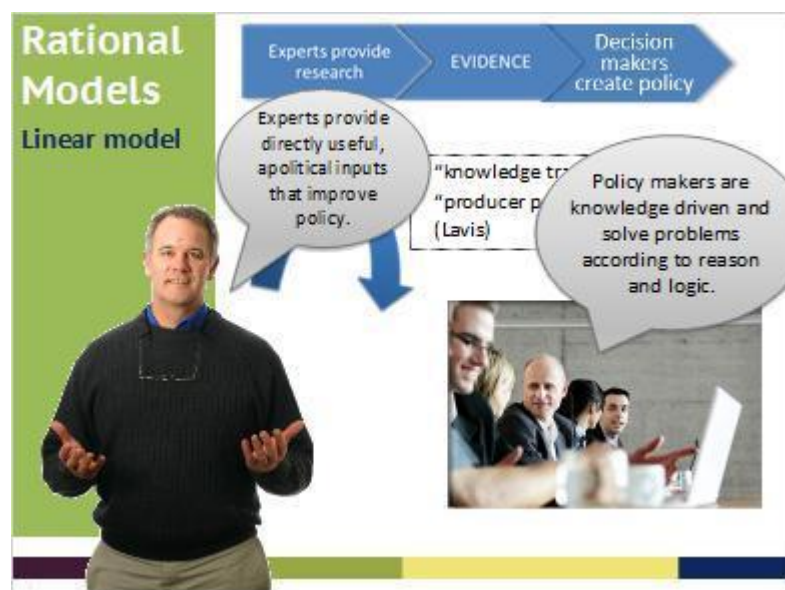
The Research Policy Link: Types of Models



In this section, we turn to several models of the policy process and what each model implies about how we might best promote the use of evidence in decision-making.

Each model suggests a different way in which research and policy are linked.

Linear Rational Model

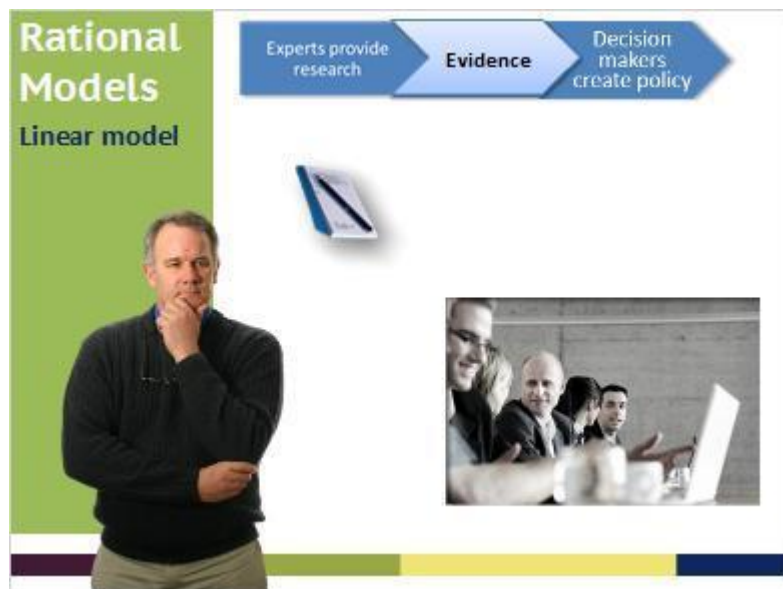


In this first model, policy makers solve problems according to reason and logic and seek out knowledge to help them in this task.

For their part, experts provide directly useful, objective and apolitical research that improves policy.

In such models, use of evidence is sometimes referred to as “knowledge transfer” where experts “transfer” their knowledge wholesale to decision makers... or you might hear about “producer push” where people who produce or package information “push” it out into the policy arena where it is taken up and used.

Linear Model

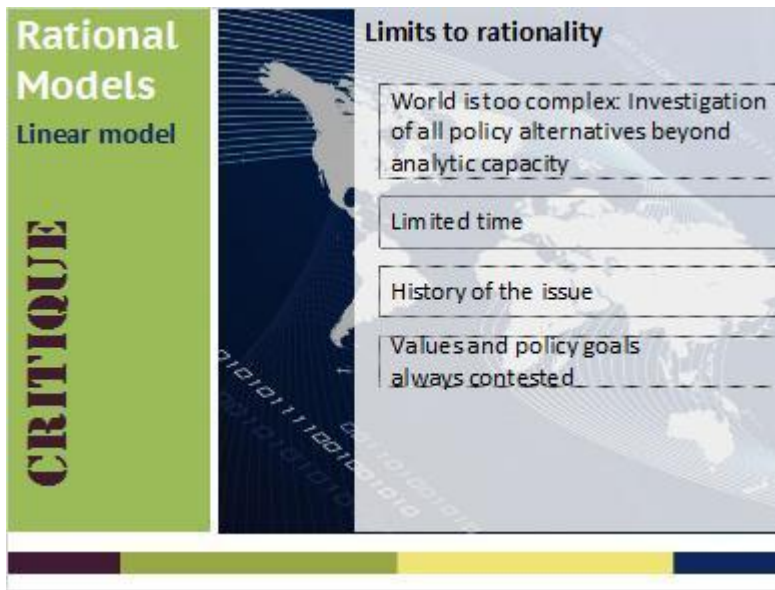


Either way, notice the one- directional and linear way in which evidence enters the process: from expert to policy maker.

Notice also that evidence itself takes center stage in this model. It is central to the political process. It is the important input that determines decisions.

This model is an example of the instrumental use of evidence.

Linear Critique



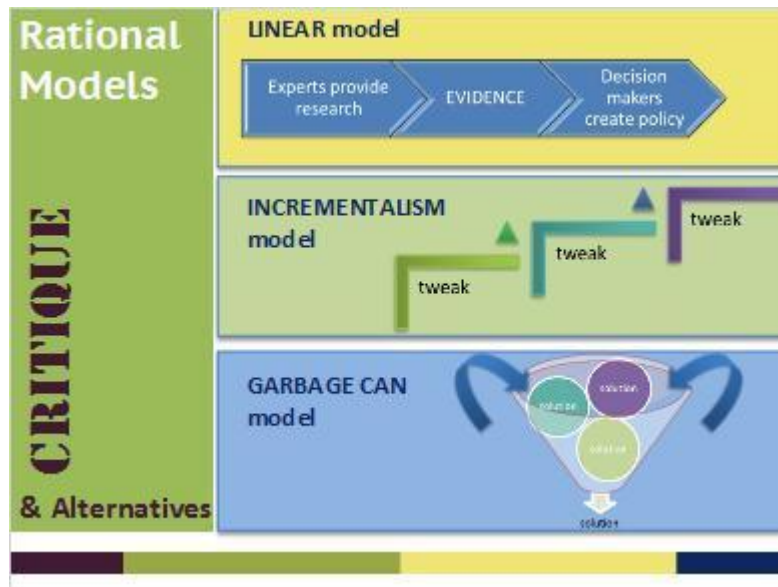
There are many substantial critiques of the linear rational model.

Most observers of the political process point out that in the real world politics doesn't happen the way the rational model says it does. The process is much more complex and far less linear.

Rationality has its limitations - in any human endeavor - and certainly in politics.

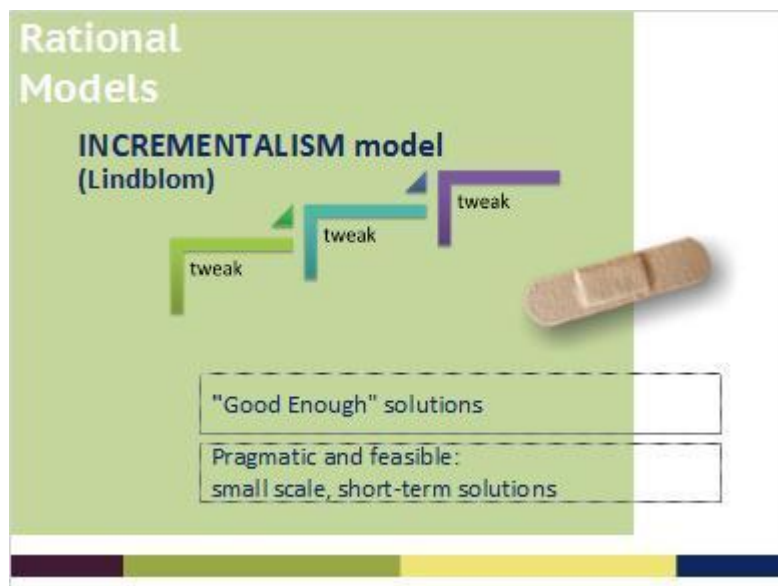
- First, the world is too complex and we as mere mortals aren't able to analyze and synthesize all possible outcomes to use evidence in this way.
- Decisions often must be made in a limited amount of time.
- Problems are seldom brand new and any new policies and programs must take into account the prior efforts to address the problems.
- Finally, the rational model leaves out political conflict. It also leaves out the fact that many policy decisions are value-based decisions. In fact, as we saw earlier, in the examples of irradiation or gun violence, a lot of political conflict is actually about differences in values. Evidence is not usually how such conflicts are settled.

Rational Models - Alternatives



Finally, political observers have pointed out that politics just doesn't work like this. Two alternative versions of the political process, incrementalism and the garbage can model, emerged both as critique of and alternative to the linear model.

Incrementalism Model



In a reworking of the rational model, the political scientist Charles Lindblom described a view of policy making he called "incrementalism."

In this view, policy makers don't take on big system changes, rather they "muddle through,"

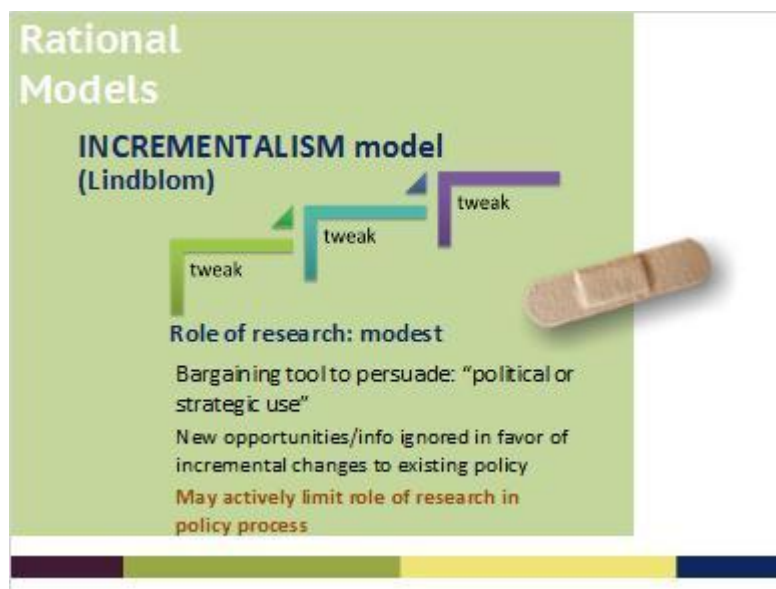
seeking “good enough” solutions. While such policy makers are still rational problem solvers, they are pragmatists who select the feasible option. They operate by focusing on small scale problems and their solutions tend toward the short-term.

Why? There are two main reasons:

- There is incomplete knowledge of cause and effect, so the desire to avoid negative unintended consequences, especially if they could be BIG consequences is pretty large.
- It is often difficult to reach a sufficient level of agreement to take big actions.

This is sometimes referred to as “bounded rationality.”

Incrementalism



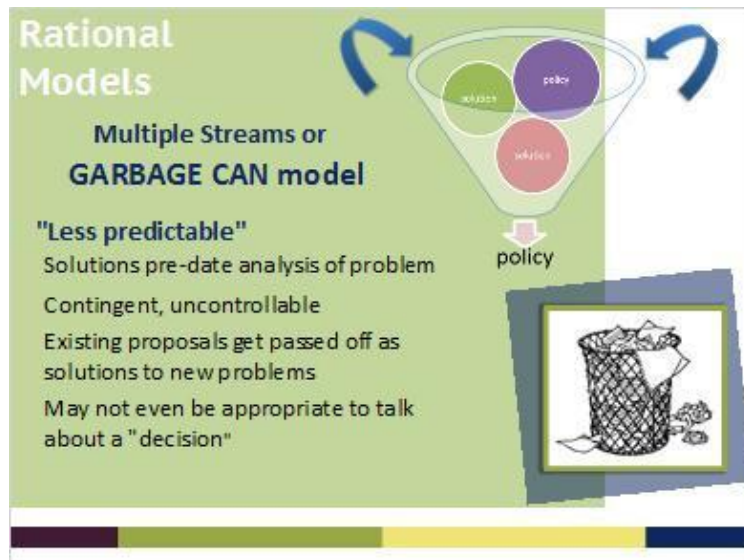
What is the role that evidence can play in such incrementalist politics?

Unlike the rational model in which evidence took center stage, here it would play a very modest role. At best, evidence could play a strategic or tactical role to persuade colleagues.

Some argue that where incremental politics is operating, new evidence or new opportunities that evidence suggests are ignored in favor of incremental change - policy makers don't really need a lot of information to just tweak what they are already doing.

Some go even farther, arguing that this type of policy making is actively hostile to the use of evidence in policy making, making its use extremely limited.

Multiple Streams or Garbage Can Model



Another alternative to the linear, rational model which goes farther than the concept of "incrementalism" is the Multiple Streams Model (sometimes this is referred to as the Garbage Can model.)

In some ways this model may portray politics as irrational. Any and all policy solutions get thrown into a can and when you need to do something you pull a pre-cooked policy out from the can. What emerges may not seem related to the problem at all. Policy making here seems very contingent and uncontrollable.

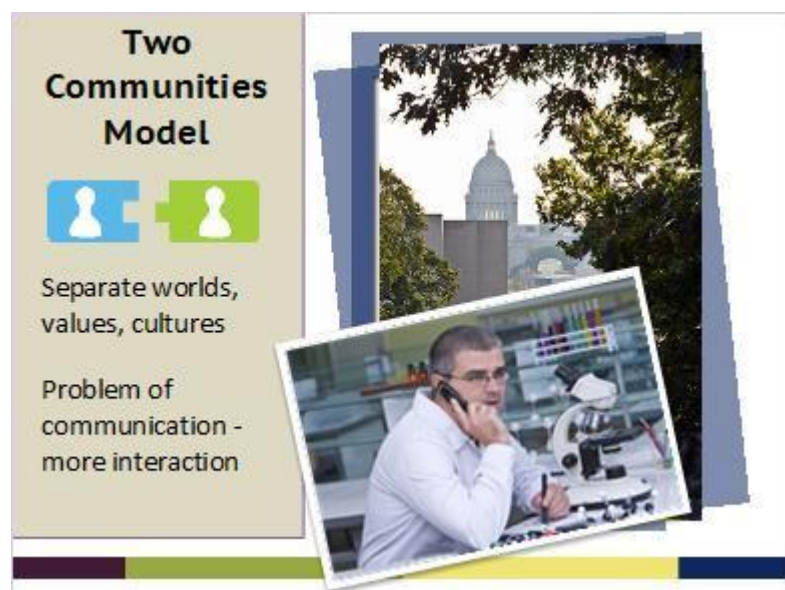
However, in another light, this can seem an entirely logical way of operating. Here are solutions to problems not yet analyzed or sometimes even articulated. These solutions sit on the shelf until the right opportunity presents itself or can be created.

Many provisions of the Affordable Care Act were included in just this process. Ideas like not paying hospitals for readmissions, expanding and strengthening the network of Community Health Centers, and the individual mandate were all policy ideas with histories (and even some basis in evidence) that predated the ACA. Passage of the ACA was an opportunity for these ideas to be brought together from their various streams and tried.

Another example of this process is the idea of Health Savings Accounts. This is an idea that has been around for a while and for many politicians, especially those critical of the approach to health coverage taken by the ACA, health savings accounts are the go-to policy answer to any health care problem.

Whether rational or irrational, there is not much role for evidence here.

Two Communities Model

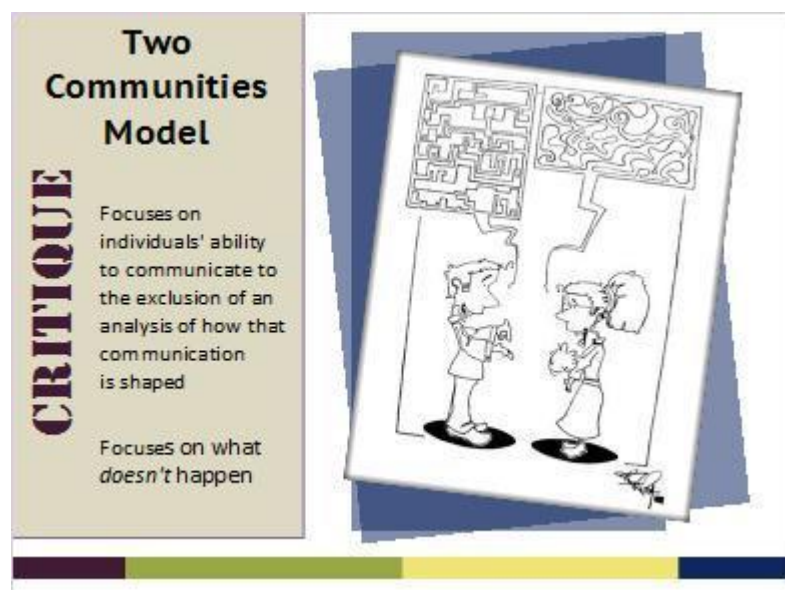


A completely different take on the political process and the role of evidence is that of the Two Communities thesis.

People who share this perspective say, "You know, the reason it's so hard to get evidence into policy is because academic researchers and public policy makers live in these entirely different worlds. They are alien to each other. They have different values, different cultures, they just can't communicate and so maybe we could improve communication between them."

In this view, the problem of communication can be solved by more interaction.

Two Communities Critique

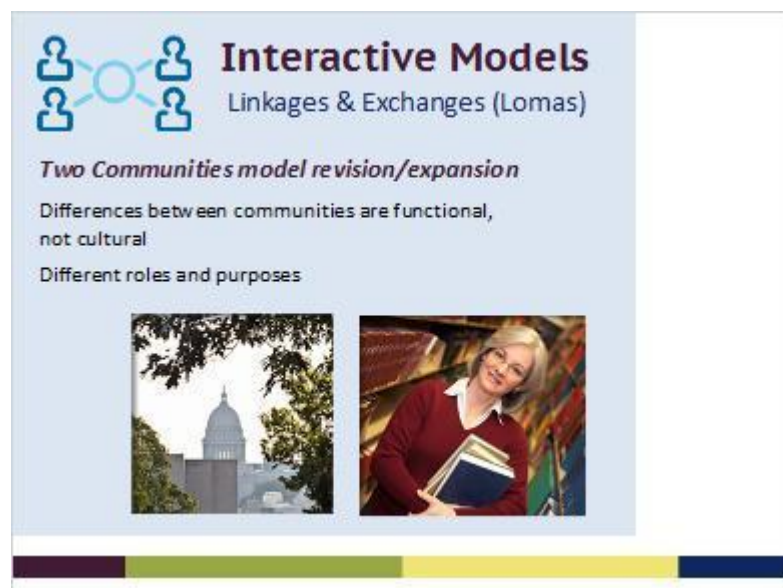


It isn't so much that this view is wrong, but that it has some significant limitations:

First: it focuses on individuals' ability to communicate to the exclusion of an analysis of how that communication is shaped by the larger political or organizational structures in which they are operating and that shapes and constrains them.

Second: as a literature which focuses on what doesn't happen, it isn't much of a guide for action.

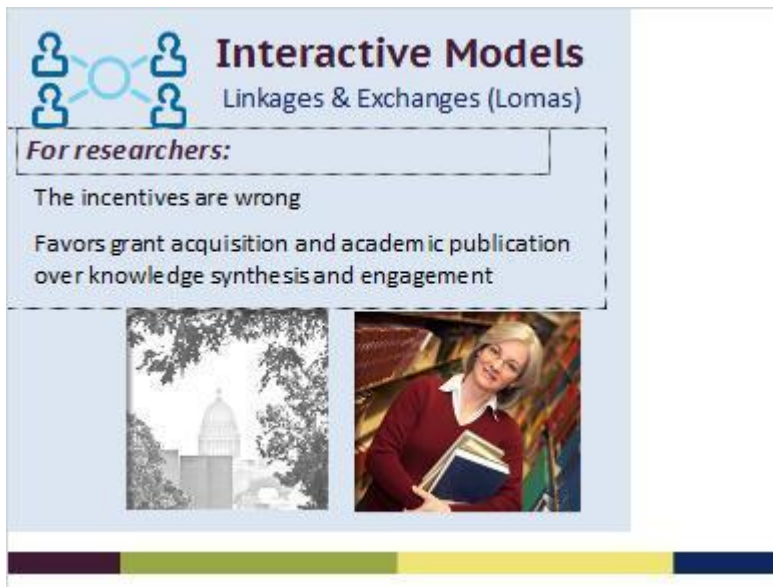
Interactive Models: Linkages & Exchanges



However, the two-communities model has been revised and expanded very effectively in this model, which is often associated with Jonathan Lomas, who is at the Canadian Health Research Foundation, where they do significant work on evidence and policy making.

Lomas created interactive models known as Linkages and Exchanges. This model accepts the idea of two communities but sees the differences between them not as cultural differences, but as functional ones. Both academics and policymakers have different purposes, and play different roles. This is what has to be understood to improve communication between them.



Interactive Models: Linkages & Exchanges



Interactive Models
Linkages & Exchanges (Lomas)


For researchers:

The incentives are wrong
Favors grant acquisition and academic publication
over knowledge synthesis and engagement

So, for researchers, the incentives to engage in applied research are just all wrong. Academics receive tenure for getting grants and for publishing in peer-review journals, not for synthesizing existing literature or for engaging in public policy.

Interactive Models: Linkages & Exchanges



Interactive Models
Linkages & Exchanges (Lomas)

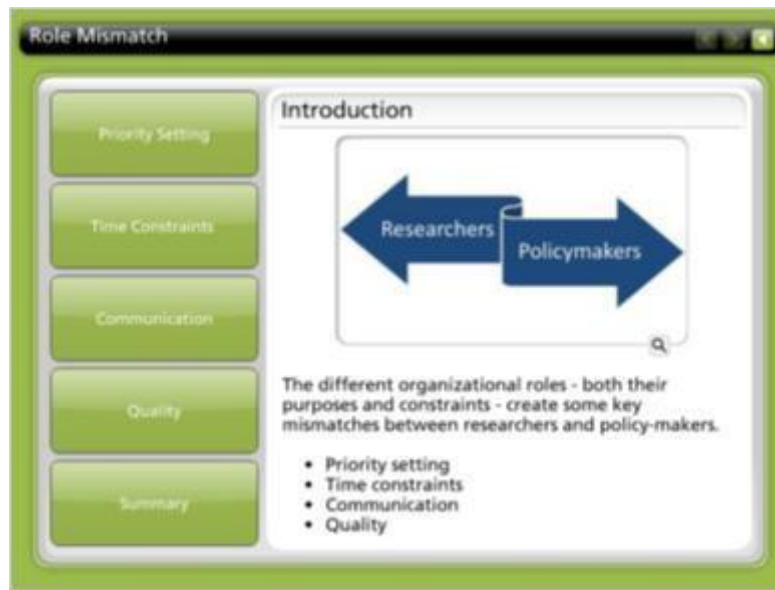
For decision-makers:

"Research is (seen as) a product they can purchase from the local knowledge store, but too often it is the wrong size, needs some assembly, is on back order, and comes from last year's fashion line" (Lomas, 2007)




On the other side of the equation, Lomas describes decision-makers' attitude toward evidence in this way: "Research is (seen as) a product they can purchase from the local knowledge store, but too often it is the wrong size, needs some assembly, is on back order, and comes from last year's fashion line." So, if they want evidence, they want something ready made for them to use. They may see the purpose of research, but can't find what they want or need.

Role Mismatch



Let's look more closely at how their different organizational roles - both their purposes and constraints - create some key mismatches between researchers and policy-makers.

Role Mismatch	(Interaction)
	<p>Priority Setting: First is the question of how each set priorities.</p> <p>What is interesting to a researcher is not necessarily what is important to a legislator. Researchers find a question interesting for its intellectual value, or because they have identified a gap in the research they want to fill.</p> <p>Policy makers find things important because it is important to their constituents - and those constituents are requesting action. Squeaky wheels get greased. Or, an issue is important when the legislator will be held accountable for the outcome.</p>

Role Mismatch (Interaction)

Time Constraints

Researchers
Academic research proceeds slowly; it takes a long time to procure a grant, conduct research, do validity testing, go through peer-review, get published.

Policymakers
A legislative session is very short - Legislators need

Time Constraints: Researchers and policymakers work under vastly different time constraints. In fact, this is one of the most frequently cited reasons for the difficulty of working together.

Academic research proceeds slowly; it takes a long time to procure a grant, conduct research, do validity testing, go through peer-review, and get published.

A legislative session is very short - Legislators need answers very quickly and their timeframe is often changeable.

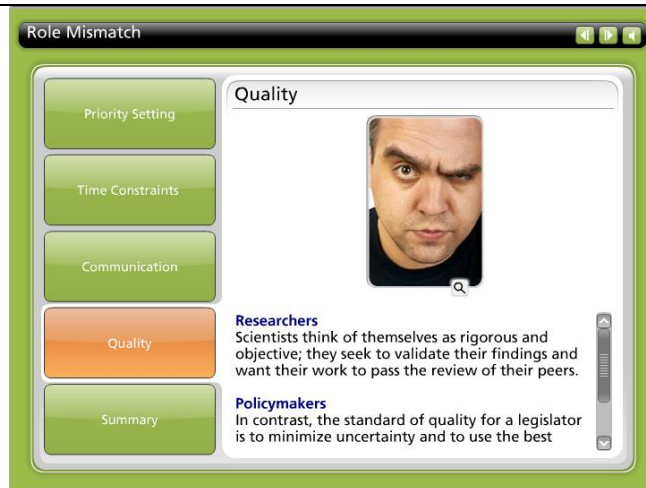
Communication

Researchers
Researchers like to talk a lot about their methodology. It is frequently the most intellectually interesting part of the project. But, no legislator wants to hear about it.

Policymakers
Legislators really need very clear and concise, real

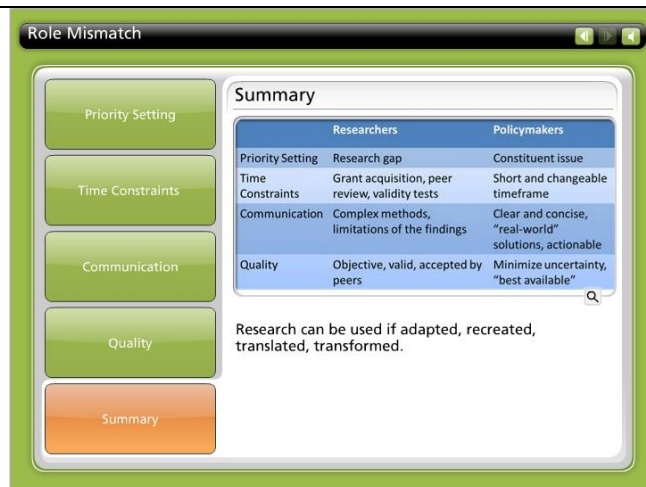
Communication styles are another obstacle. Researchers like to talk a lot about their methodology. It is frequently the most intellectually interesting part of the project. But, no legislator wants to hear about it. When I take academics with me to visit legislators, I always very gently say, "so, when we go in, let's not mention the methods. If they have questions about that, they can always ask. Let's just leave it alone."

Researchers also love to talk about the limitations of our findings; what the study *didn't look at* - or what the evidence *doesn't* say. No - don't do that. Legislators really need very clear and concise, real world solutions. They need actionable messages - messages that say, "here are the implications of the findings for policy." "This is what the evidence suggests you should do."

Role Mismatch (Interaction)

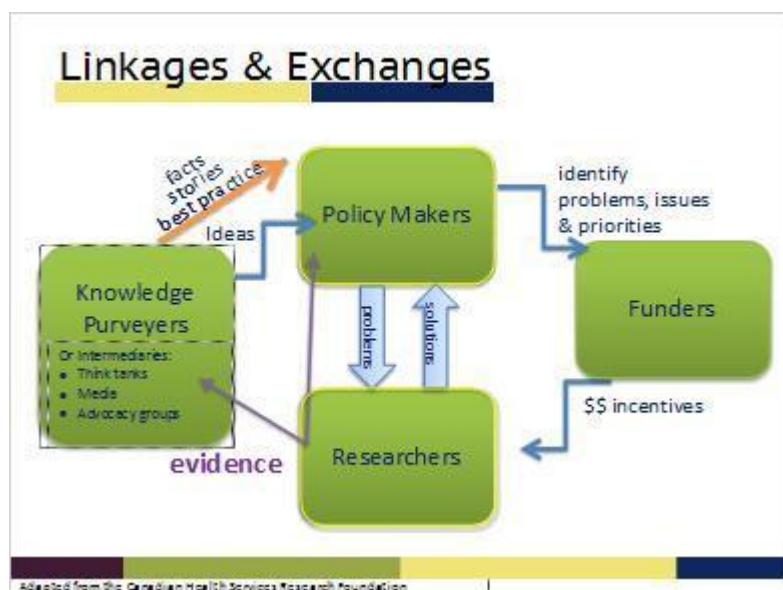
Quality: Finally, how researchers and policymakers measure quality is very different. Scientists think of themselves as rigorous and objective; they seek to validate their findings and want their work to pass the review of their peers.

In contrast, the standard of quality for a legislator is to minimize uncertainty and to use the best available data. An important question for a legislator is not, "is the data right" but, "what will happen - what are the consequences - if I make a decision and the data is wrong."



Summary: So, these are really very different approaches to evidence. These approaches emerge from the different roles and needs of both groups. "Nonetheless," as Lomas and others in this school say, "we can bridge these worlds and research can be used if it's adapted, recreated, translated, or transformed in some way."

Linkages & Exchanges



So, we turn to a radically simplified chart that I made from a much more complicated chart from the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation. In the center of the model you can see Policymakers and Researchers - the two groups we've been discussing so far. And the focus is again on communication and interaction. BUT there are some very important differences:

- First, there are many more players - not just researchers and decision makers, but funders and knowledge purveyors.
- Second, the focus is on their mutual interactions - as you will see by the arrows which link them -- not their lives in separate communities.

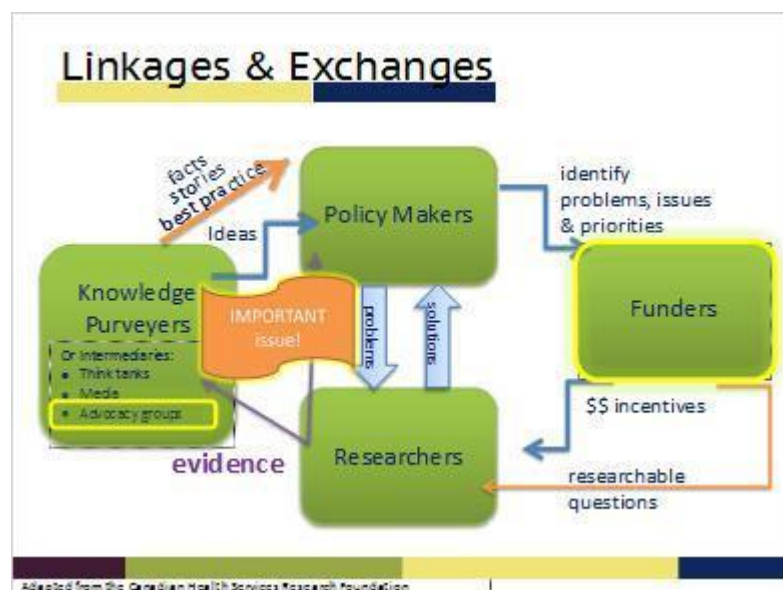
Let's look at the different players and how they interact. We can start the process with Policy Makers. Policy makers identify problems, issues and priorities.

Researchers may or may not want to seek solutions to those problems, but are incentivized to do so by Funders who align their funding priorities to support work in particular areas.

The evidence produced by Researchers may be directly communicated to Policymakers, but may also be taken up by Knowledge Purveyors. Think tanks, advocacy groups, and the media are also known as Intermediaries that act as funnels to shape messages to Policymakers. The information they provide can vary quite a bit depending upon the nature and mission of the organization.

Information can take the form of facts, or of stories, or anything in-between. It can be rigorous and complete (and much of the 'grey literature' produced by think tanks is of very high quality) or it can be partial, partisan, or agenda driven. The range is very wide.

Linkages & Exchanges



This is not the only way the process can run: The process can start at other points.

For instance, Funders might identify researchable questions they wish to pursue.

OR Advocacy Groups can provide enough public pressure on an issue to get a Policymakers' attention. The point is that this is an interactive - not a linear process.

What research shows is that the use of evidence in the policy process is high when the links among all four of these players is strong. This makes sense, when interactions are frequent, communication is good, and understanding of each others' needs and constraints is high, trust is created.

One implication is that anything that can be done to promote the regular, constructive interaction between these groups will foster the use of evidence. This is partially because it's not just researchers telling policy makers what the answers are. But issues of concern are coming from other places as well. This way, the very things that researchers work on is partially in answer to the pressing problems that policy makers confront.

We are a long way from the rational model of one-way knowledge transfer. We are now at a model of knowledge exchange.

Summary: Research Policy Link: Pluralism and Opportunism



Let's summarize what the various models and their critiques tell us up to this point.

Policy makers make pragmatic decisions in conditions of uncertainty, and the flow of knowledge in to policy is far from certain.

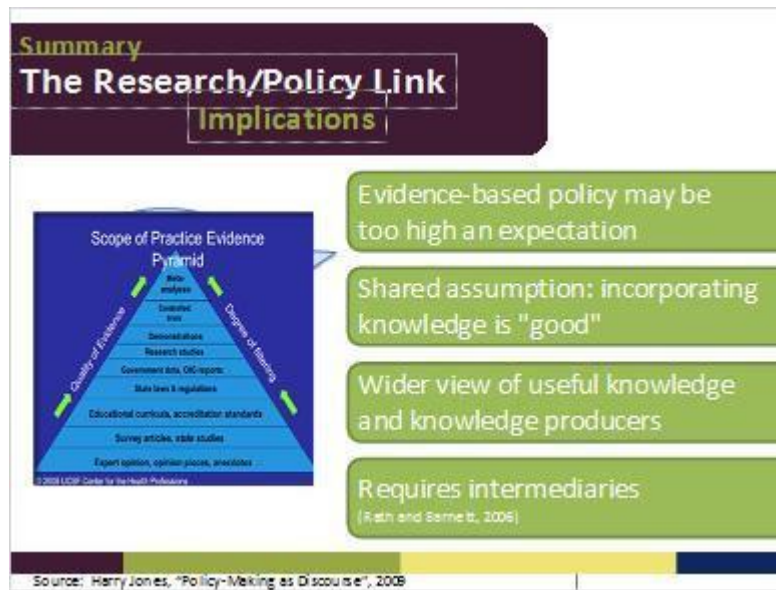
Evidence competes with many other influences. The most respectable things that it competes with are:

- constituent and stakeholder demands,
- political and campaigns constraints, and
- prevailing social values and ideology.

And, I think in many instances these are appropriate things to compete with. I suspect none of us want to live in a technocracy where decisions are made strictly on the basis of technical evidence. The way policies impact populations--constituent populations matter in a democracy.

Of course, large bags of cash are also in competition with evidence. And, we're living in a time when unlimited, vast amounts of cash can enter the process. So, this may be a new chapter.

Summary - Research Policy Implications



One critical implication is that evidence-based policy may be too high an expectation. What we really should be thinking about is evidence-influenced or evidence-aware or evidence-informed policy, and that may be a more realistic sort of goal for us.

There is an irony here... we are making this shared assumption that incorporating evidence is "good", but we really don't know that this results in either better decisions or in better outcomes. We are moving forward with the assumption that this is better than the alternative.

Academics use something called the evidence pyramid..... and consider the best knowledge to be those systematic reviews at the pinnacle, such as the Cochrane & Campbell reviews.

But if you actually ask the people who use evidence what they think is the best evidence, they will tell you they use evidence all the way down the pyramid. Legislators want to know what other states are doing and how things worked out there. They want to use state reports. They want to use case studies. They have a very different sense of what is useful for them. The systematic review may not be the best source of information to answer the types of questions that decision makers often have. If we want policymakers to use evidence, we must be sensitive to the type of evidence they need.

This should encourage us to widen our views on both evidence AND: also on who provides evidence. Within each category we should expect to use high quality evidence, but it isn't always the case that evidence at the top of the pyramid is the highest quality for a particular need.

Next Steps



In the next part of this course, we'll discuss ways to improve the use of evidence. You will hear about knowledge brokering as a solution, as well as the evidence about improving evidence use.