

DECI-2

Developing Evaluation Capacity & Communication in Information Society

*Summary of 3 recent papers on
RESEARCH COMMUNICATION*



A field in quick evolution

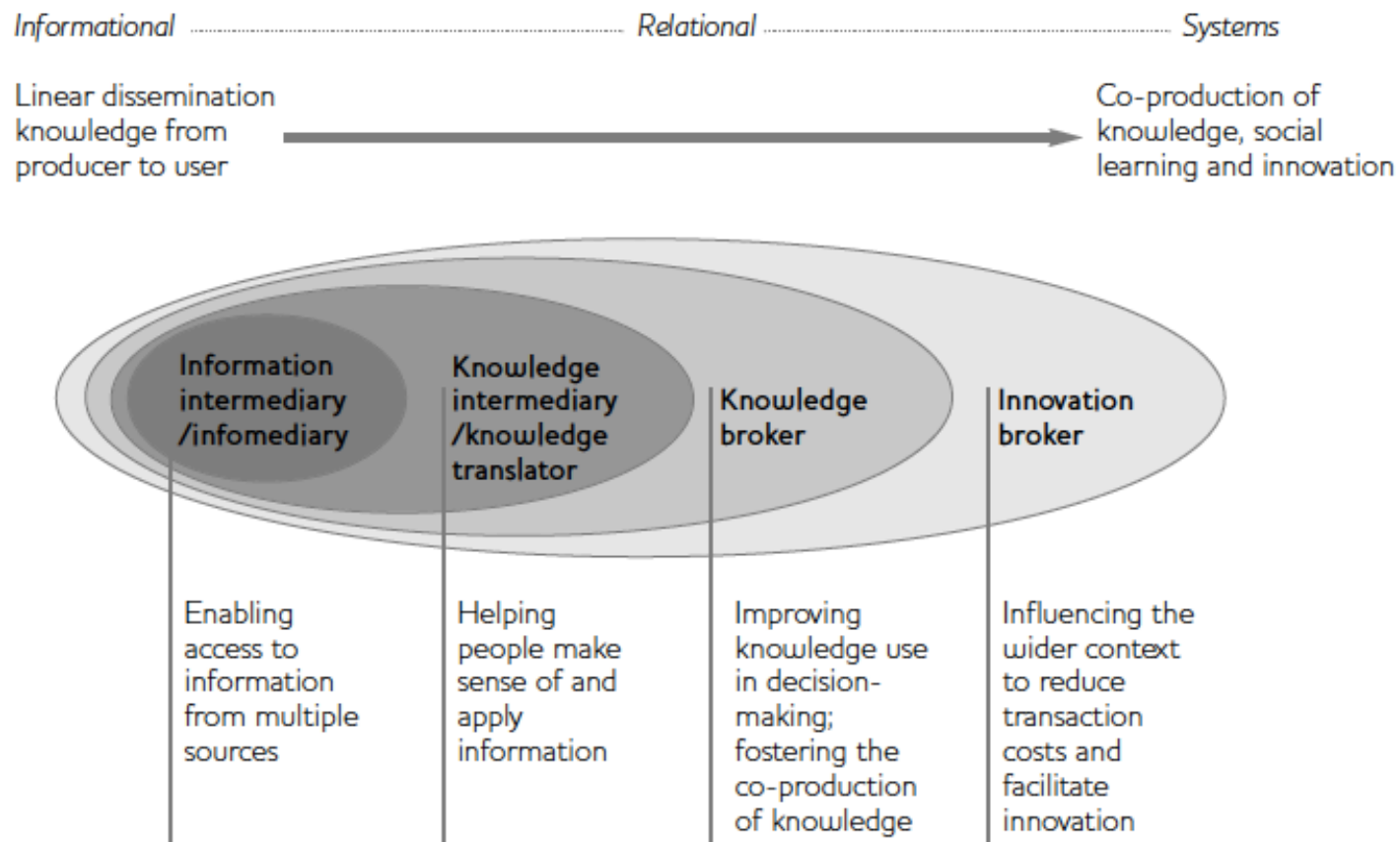
1. Research communications in quick evolution
2. New actors, relationships, networks
3. Communication technologies: nature of the transformation?

1) Research communications in quick evolution

- *Pluralization of what constitutes 'expert knowledge'*
- *Growing emphasis on process in development research (Vs product)*
- *New understanding of what drives social change and policy influence*

2) New actors, relationships, networks

Figure 1 The spectrum of intermediary and brokering functions



Source Adapted from Fisher (2011).

3) Communication technologies: nature of the transformation?

- *Tech determinism: danger of overemphasizing the agency of technologies*
- *Unexplored assumptions about the relationship between information and action*
- *It is not about the technologies but how about they are being used*
- *Reinforcement of hierarchies or disruption?*

Challenge: Interpreting research

- Evidence is not merely attached to the user's store of knowledge like barnacles are to clams
- It is a formative process in which evidence is acted on by the user
- It is sorted, sifted and interpreted
- It is transformed into implications and translated into inferences.

Kennedy (1984: 225) cited in Tsang, 2012

Challenge: Using research

- Instrumental use: linear cause and effect
- Political use: to justify an existing position (tactical use)
- Conceptual use: enlightens and contextualizes
- Imposed use: funding tied to adoption of evidence-based programs
- Process use: practitioners learning from participating in the production of research, Vs how they apply the findings

Tsang, 2012

Unwrapping 'evidence-based policy-making'

- A technocratic approach (implies no value-laden decisions; non-contentious purposes or ends; best practices exist; that it is the 'experts' who collect the evidence)

du Toit, 2012

Unwrapping 'evidence-based policy-making'

“Pro-poor policy interventions take place in complex, dynamic, open social systems; not only are many of the key variables not easily controllable; but many of the relationships and dynamics are non-linear, dynamic and unpredictable. More pertinently, poverty levels and the specific indicators associated with them co-vary in a social system with many other kinds of change.”

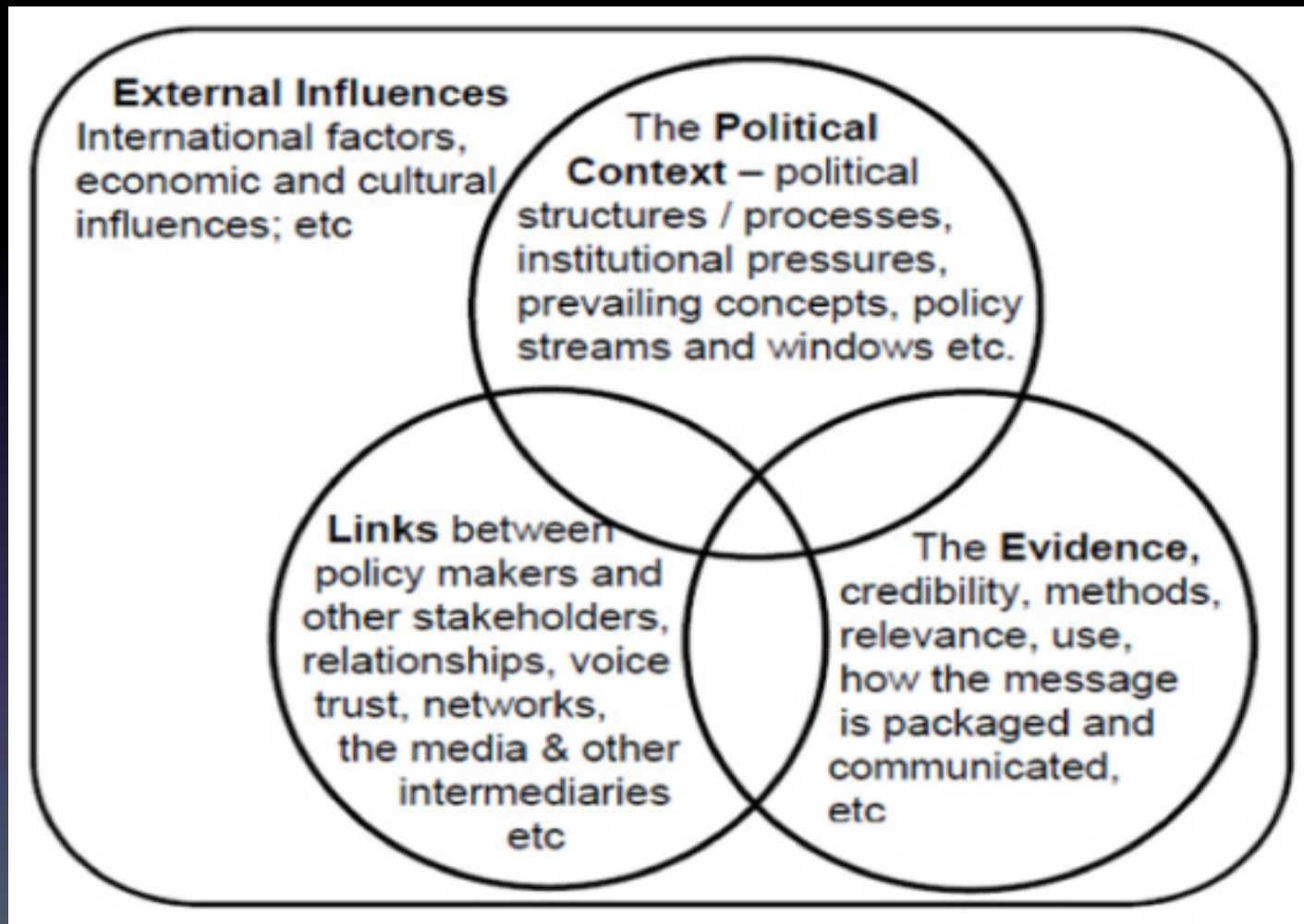
du Toit, 2012: 3

Unwrapping 'evidence-based policy-making'

- 'Evidence' never speaks for itself
- Theoretical approaches and explanatory frameworks allow evidence to be re-framed and re-interpreted
- Policy narratives: battles of ideologically and politically compelling stories about what needs to be done
- Evidence itself (what it means, what it is) is often a complex and politically contested matter

"The most successful policy narratives often depend on slippages of meaning, carefully constructed areas of ambiguity, artful redefinition and judicious silences that allow trade-offs to be hidden, divergent interests to be reconciled, and so on." (p.5)

ODI's RAPID Framework



Sources

Du Toit, T. 2012. **Making sense of 'evidence': Notes on the discursive politics of research and pro-poor policy making.** *PLAAS Working Paper 21*. Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, University of Western Cape.

Harvey, B.; Lewin, T. & Fisher, C. 2012. **Introduction: Is development communication coming of age?** *IDS Bulletin* 43(5): 1-8

Tseng, V, 2012. **The uses of research in policy and practice.** *Social Policy Report* 26(2): 1-23.