

Looking back, moving forward

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I will identify

- The type of research which will assist DES move forward in what often seems like a constantly changing policy environment;
- How academics can best support the sector in this endeavor.

Disciplinary based research

- Research which starts from particular theoretical propositions or hypotheses and aims to test these hypotheses, or allow the researcher to make some pertinent observations about the theoretical propositions.

Policy relevant research

- Research which aims to generate information which supports the discussions peak bodies have with government about current policy settings, and about future reforms.

Two ways of looking at the world

- Senior public servants see the world through the medium of statistics.
- Front-line staff experience the world as a narrative.
- Consequently, public servants often have difficulty in recognizing the stories that emerge from the front-line and knowing how best to respond to these stories.

How to bridge this gap?

- Policy relevant research can play an important role in helping senior public servants understand the narratives that emerge from the front line because it can:
 - identify patterns and causal linkages from collections of narratives;
 - assess the importance of emerging patterns; and
 - link these patterns to the international literature.

Policy relevant research must

- reflect the diversity of views within the sector;
- be focused on issues of concern to the sector;
- be timely:
 - if a research process takes four or five years, policy settings may have changed by the time research results emerge and findings are no longer relevant.

Two questions

- Are the new arrangements for DES actually working?
- How might you demonstrate or measure that?

Simple, quantifiable indicators

- work well in highly predictable activities but often result in goal displacement (output distortion) when applied to less predictable activities.
- tell you nothing about the nature of the interaction between worker and client – a vital part of service quality.

8 reasons to measure performance

- **Evaluate**
- *Control*
- *Budget*
- *Motivate*
- *Promote*
- *Celebrate*
- **Learn**
- **Improve**

Evaluate + Learn + Improve

- Evaluations have to find out what happened, or is happening, and why because the ultimate purpose of measuring performance is **Improve**.
- Learning is often triggered by the unexpected because an unexpected finding pushes people to ask, why did we get this unexpected result?

We need....

- Detailed, disaggregated data that reflects what service users want and what service providers need if they are to provide quality services, the collection of which does not markedly increase the administrative burden faced by service providers.

DEA could ask

- Under the new arrangements, is it harder/easier/ no different to find work for my clients?
- Under the new arrangements, is it harder/
- easier/no different to provide flexible, individualised services?
- More focused questions on specific issues that are of concern to providers.

Why collect this sort of information?

- The department already collects a lot of data, particularly about outcomes, but when the sector provides de-identified information about outcomes, researchers are able to investigate questions that the department would not necessarily ask.
- Results should be written up as a Policy Brief
 - a short report of no more than 10 pages focusing on a specific issue.

References

- Behn, Robert 2003, 'Why measure performance? Different purposes require different measures', *Public Administration Review*, vol. 63, no. 5, pp. 586-606.
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- Sturgess, Gary 2012, 'On the front line', *Australian Financial Review*, Friday 23 March.