

What is policy-relevant research?

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PIPSC 2nd Science policy symposium

Ottawa, April 12-14 2010

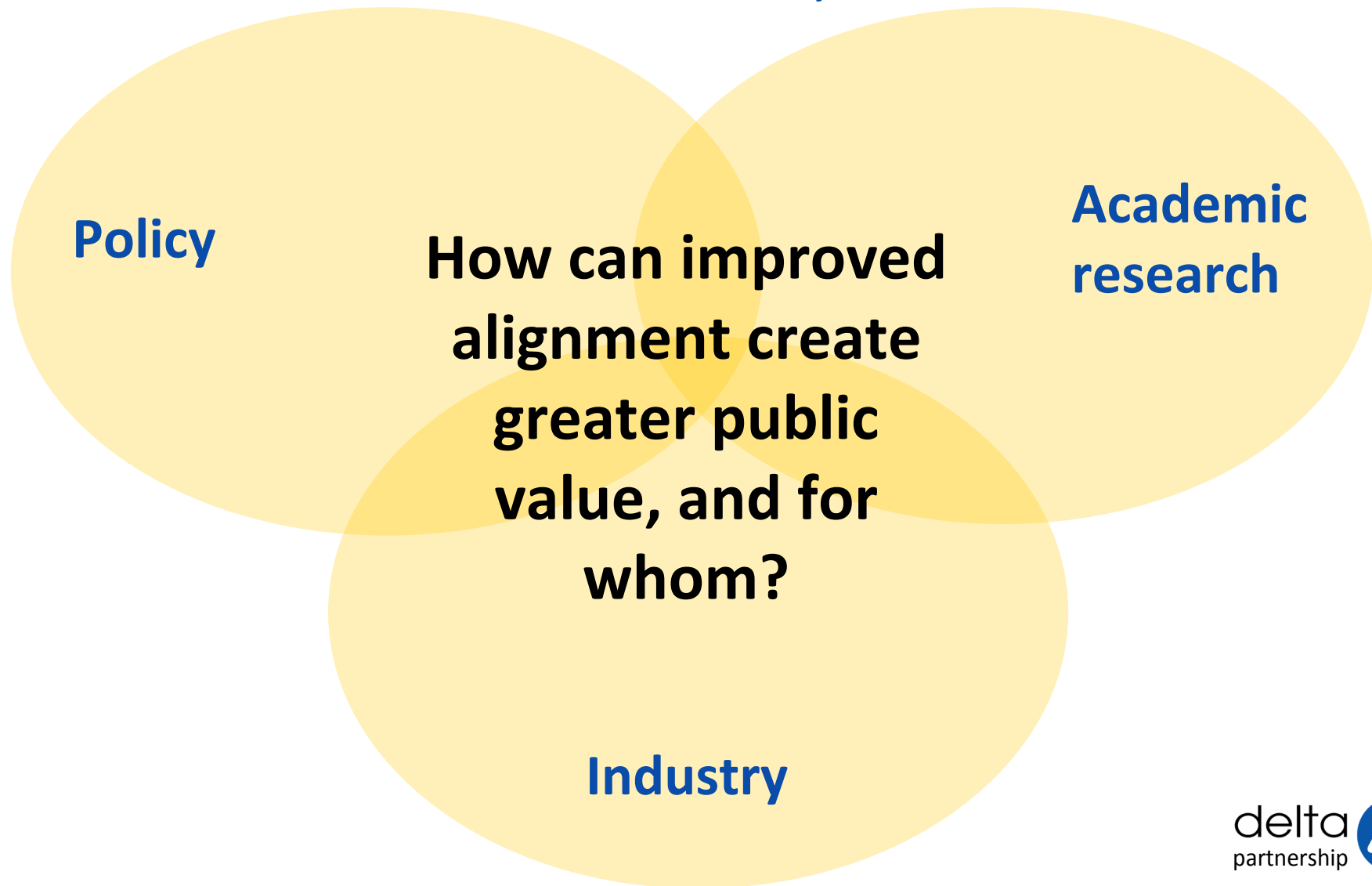
What is policy-relevant research?

- What is policy?
- What is relevant to policy?
- Different categories of policy relevance
- The importance of the science-policy *process*

Policy is about delivering outcomes for people

- ‘Policy’ is shorthand for the spectrum of activities from policy formulation through to delivery. It includes foresight, developing regulations, risk management, engaging with stakeholders and citizens, and monitoring and evaluating what’s been done before
- It’s about turning political vision into something concrete, manageable and achievable – for this and for future generations

Policy, academia and industry all create value, but..



How do policy, academia and industry use evidence to create value?

Policy

- Directed towards policy priorities
- Evidence applied in context of *current* priorities
- More immediate demand
- ‘Quality’ incorporates policy relevance

How do policy, academia and industry use evidence to create value?

Academic research

- Directed towards global public goods
- Curiosity-driven search for knowledge
- Longer-term supply
- Quality emphasises academic criteria, de-emphasises policy relevance

How do policy, academia and industry use evidence to create value?

Industry

- For commercial application
- Interplay between supply and demand
- Research (creation of new knowledge) & Development (application of results to commercial goals)

So what is 'policy relevance'?

- Analysing it for the policy-academia interface
- Recognising five categories of policy relevance
- To help organisations understand where they lie on the spectrum and – if policy relevance is important to their mandate – how to set about improving it

Categories of policy relevance

1. Non-aligned
2. Policy interest
3. High-level alignment
4. Explicit policy-relevance
5. Co-produced knowledge

Less immediately relevant to policy

1. Non-aligned

The research topic falls under the region of policy interest, but there is no further alignment with policy priorities or active dissemination to policymakers. Quality of research and monitoring is solely assessed on academic merit.

2. Policy interest

Research and monitoring activities broadly address topics of interest to policymakers, but the specific issues addressed by research are not aligned with policy's identified priorities and needs, and project dissemination is not targeted to policymakers. Research quality is assessed solely on academic merit, but there is sufficient corporate understanding of policy needs to frame calls for research.

More immediately relevant to policy

3. High-level alignment with policy

Research topics are aligned with policy at a thematic level. Reports contain evidence that is set in the broad policy context, but interaction with policymakers is limited to dissemination of project reports. Policy-relevance is increasingly important in assessing research quality, but interpreting the implications of research is done by researchers alone.

4. Explicit policy-relevance

The choice of topics for research and monitoring activities is explicitly driven by policy needs. Policymakers are closely involved in prioritising, in scoping the specific researchable questions, and in interpreting the resulting evidence for current policy-making processes.

Interdependency

5. Co-produced knowledge

Research, policy (and industry) collaborate on the production of knowledge in the context of specific, large-scale, interdisciplinary and participatory interventions. The quality of research is jointly defined by academics, policy and stakeholders/citizens.

Moving between the categories



Returning to the question: what is policy relevant research?

If it isn't relevant now, it may be in the future (eg lasers, methane emissions from cattle, Large Hadron Collider)

Policy relevance is not simply about the *topic* of research: it is as much about the *process* of engagement between research and policy. It includes building citizen trust in the science-policy process, across all categories.

Conclusions

- No two policy issues are alike - it's not a single science-policy interface
- Closer collaboration leads to a deeper understanding of the different rhythms of different policy issues
- Different rhythms demand different types of linkage and different processes
- Moving from independent advisor to honest broker demands that you accept the politics of policymaking
- None of the five categories is necessarily best for science or for policy. They simply deliver different aspects of public value, and we need all of them.

For further information:

The report on which this is based will be available shortly from:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/policy/natural-environ/research/programme.htm>

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