Evidently better

A guide to evidence-enabled policymaking

Introduction

On 23 March 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson ordered people to stay at home to save lives. The first, and subsequent, lockdowns in response to Coronavirus heralded a period of unprecedented disruption and transformation.

The pandemic's effects on our personal, economic and social lives have been painfully apparent and well documented. It has also had a huge impact on the way policies and decisions have been made by government and across public services and, to be even more parochial, it has remodelled the way we gather and use evidence to improve policymaking. Looking through a longer lens, the pandemic has not been the only disruptive influence on policymaking and the use of evidence.

These endeavours have been complicated by devolution and the pressing need to address intractable challenges which have made policymaking much messier. At the same time, technological transformation has spawned a proliferation of different data sources (and owners of these), creating new and exciting opportunities to generate insights.

What does this mean for policymakers and those taking decisions using evidence, and what should come next in the endemic phase? We use this report to identify several features of a productive, contemporary evidence initiative or system and share a new framework and two scorecards, designed to facilitate critical thinking and action.

These are relevant to any decision- and policymaker in the public sector, and we hope that they help clients and suppliers in the following ways:

- to set priorities and design **tactical** evidence initiatives/projects to gather evidence to support a policy decision or intervention
- to scope **improvement** and **navigate complexity** by organising evidence and policy so that they work **side-by-side**
- to conduct **strategic** appraisals of policy-orientated evidence systems

> "We use this report to identify several features of a productive, contemporary evidence initiative or system and share a new **framework** and **two scorecards.**"

Our framework reflects our strongly held conviction that high quality evidence adds value to policy- and decision-making, allied to a recognition that we need to continually study how policymaking is designed and conducted to optimise the 'fit' with evidence gathering and use (we titled an earlier draft of this report 'Policyology' as eager students of policymaking!).

There are already several helpful frameworks guiding the practice of policymaking. We think ours is different because it draws on the unrivalled, practical experience of Ipsos Public Affairs, gained from delivering over one hundred projects during the pandemic to support policy formulation, policy delivery (and communications) and evaluation. We have also benefited from numerous conversations with public sector clients while delivering projects, as well as a series of one-to-one interviews about these topics, taking stock of the pandemic and what needs to happen next.

We share our framework humbly and as a conversation-starter, inviting feedback, challenge and further development.

Our intention is to develop the framework further with practitioners and clients; please get in touch if you want to help shape what we are doing!

Key terms:

We conceive of **policy** in its broadest sense - goals and strategies, courses of action - and covering policy development, implementation and evaluation.

We often use two terms - evidence and social research - interchangeably but appreciate they are not the same. By **evidence**, we mean empirical facts and information. **Social research** offers methods of understanding people and societies, producing evidence of considerable use to policymakers.

An **evidence system** is a programme of projects and initiatives to collect, store and share evidence to support policymaking. An **evidence initiative** is a single project designed to gather evidence to support a policy decision or intervention.

The pandemic and evidence-enabled policymaking

One step back, two (rapid) steps forward

Before Coronavirus there was much talk of alt facts and post-truth. It seemed that evidence and the contribution it could make were being contested.

During the pandemic, however, we saw something of a renaissance for evidence; for example, an Ipsos survey for Kings College London in 2020 found that the scientific community's response to Covid had inspired trust among the public.

The UK's national statistician, Sir Iain Diamond, recently credited evidence released during the pandemic with helping to boost confidence in national statistics and an Office for Statistics Regulation review concluded that the crisis had sparked *"unprecedented public engagement with health and social care data"*, something echoed by Sense about Science's *What counts?* inquiry. Speaking in October 2021 and introducing the publication of Ipsos survey research for Sense about Science, its director Tracey Brown said:

"The past year has shown starkly the importance... of understanding evidence. COVID-19 is just one issue on an evidence-heavy agenda that sees MPs looking at conflicting models of hospital numbers in the morning and debating post-Brexit food safety rules in the afternoon."

The contribution of epidemiology and scientific expertise to decision-making was very evident during the pandemic. Crucial health surveillance was provided by the ONS' weekly infection survey and the REACT study which Ipsos helped to deliver for the Department of Health and Social Care in partnership with Imperial College London (REACT was so-called because it gave a Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission).

Scientists stood side-by-side with politicians at news conferences. *'Next slide please'*, *'exponential'* and *'unprecedented'* - all based on statistics - became commonplace in Britons' vernacular, well beyond Westminster and Whitehall.

Politicians said they were being *"led by the science"* and while this was subsequently softened to *"informed by the science"*, scientists were manifestly and necessarily involved. As well as SAGE, the expertise of behavioural scientists and social researchers was crucial at key points in decision-making.

Some of our clients told us how they experienced, for them, relatively heady (and undoubtedly stressful) days at the start of the pandemic when they were invited to meetings to shape policy in ways they hadn't been previously. While these developments helped to push social research into new territory, there were countervailing forces.

Most obviously, researchers working in both client- and agency-side settings faced the daunting prospect of having to meet unprecedented demand for evidence at a time when collecting it was harder than ever. Policy teams and decision-makers reached out for evidence in the absence of a policy playbook and useful precedents, encouraged by strong interest in *'what do we know?'* and *'what is going on?'*. This was a period frequently characterised at the time as 'a fast-paced policy environment'.

The pandemic and working from home made involving researchers and evaluators more practical than it had been previously; it was relatively easy to add another delegate or two to a virtual Zoom or MS Teams meeting, and someone with access to evidence, or the means to access it, was welcomed.

Our clients told us that the need for data and insight was factored into policy design from the outset (and in some cases existing provision of evidence was found wanting). Taskforces and groups of civil servants brought together to tackle Coronavirus, pooled evidence and policy, and combined efforts and insights across Whitehall departments.

Clients required speedier delivery of data and couldn't wait for slower-moving official surveys and sources, many of which were disrupted by the suspension of face-to-face in-home data collection. In their words, single-supplier call-off contracts *"came into their own"* during 2020-21, not just because they allowed for immediate evidence-gathering without time-consuming procurement, but also because of the much closer fit they facilitated between research demand and supply, collaboration built on established working relationships and familiarity.

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Towards transformation, risks and benefits

The pandemic catalysed change in the type and sources of data used and collected. Social research - quantitative and qualitative in nature - moved almost entirely online. This allowed research recruits to take part from home and delivered evidence at speed. It required researchers to use new platforms and develop new skills or adapt existing ones to an exclusively digital environment.

There was a spirit of experimentation and innovation in evidence-gathering and a pivot towards the use of sources previously considered niche. Government tracked data collected by mobile phones including mobility data as well as data derived from contactless payments and job vacancies. Such sources provided a quick reading of things that seemed self-evident during lockdown but needed proving all the same e.g. that people were compliant and were observing lockdown, that the economy had suffered, and that there was considerable variation in the pandemic's impacts (there were, though, several areas that remained outside the reach of existing data provision and were, consequently, very difficult to understand).

The pandemic put an onus on timely evidence. In November 2021, Sir David Norgrove, chair of the UK Statistics Authority, reflecting on the pandemic, said *"data were needed fast, in days not weeks."* He drew comparison with the 2008 economic downturn and the absence of useful, more timely statistics which could have informed speedier action and saved *"billions of pounds".*

These were necessary moves but had pre-dated the pandemic. Several years previously, the Government started investing in building capacity, recruiting more data scientists, social researchers and behavioural scientists, and establishing user experience and policy labs.

The use of new sources and 'big data' in policymaking was not new either, but the pandemic, for a while, brought this to the fore. This was not unique to Britain – for example, Columbia University developed a monthly measure of child poverty to monitor a new child allowance policy, a much speedier snapshot of the policy's progress than that provided by official, annual data.

Ipsos had also been undertaking multi-mode social research studies and transitioning to online data collection for years before Coronavirus, motivated by technological opportunities, and an interest in securing cost efficiencies for clients. These initiatives were a response to declining response rates and the need for research methods to meet participants' expectations as well as improving their experience of participation.

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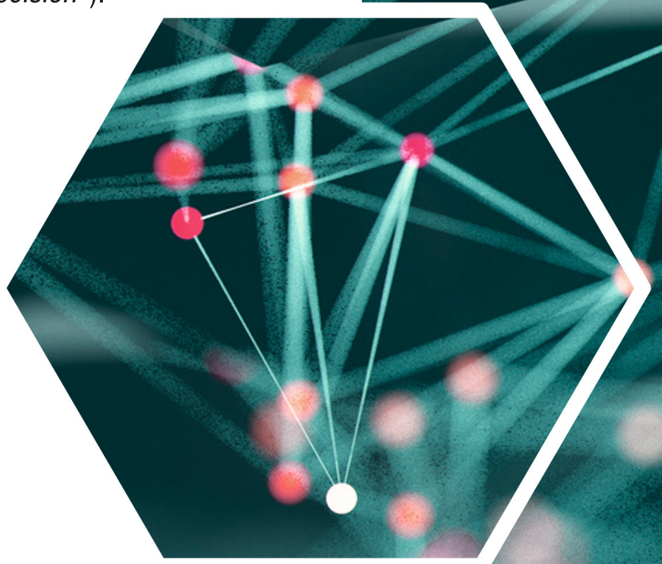
The adoption of new methods and sources of evidence was not without risks. Some of the weaknesses inherent in hastily constructed indicators and synthetic estimates may yet be brought to light by more forensic interrogation and the resumption of conventional, 'official' data collection methodologies (it is estimated that, globally, 96% of this was stopped in May 2020 and many censuses were postponed).

A good example of this has been the 'experimental' use of PAYE data to measure levels of active employment in the absence of the Labour Force Survey. Similarly, while online social research has allowed the industry to keep the show on the road during the pandemic and has delivered substantial benefits, it is not a methodology without important limitations. For example, not everyone is able to participate and engage online easily, and platforms have required adaptation to be make them fit for social research.

Two trends: outward-facing and evaluative

To those of us who could remember it, the pandemic did not feel like a return to the Blair Government's period of 'evidence-based policymaking' (arguably more a mantra than a prescribed method of policymaking) but, instead, a confident stride forwards from its pre-pandemic version - what became known as 'evidence-informed policymaking' (the World Health Organisation used this term out of recognition that *"research evidence is only one input into a policy decision"*).



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These developments were reinforced by two trends which had pre-dated the pandemic;

- an apparent desire to construct and deliver better policy by reducing the gap between politics and people; and
- a push towards a more systematic understanding of ‘what works’.

Several years before Coronavirus, Anthony King and Ivor Crewe identified cultural disconnect as one of the structural causes of Blunders of Our Governments, a catalogue of policy failures during the post-War period (for the record, the authors listed numerous policy successes). Similarly, James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State* described the gap between policymakers and the *“society they are charged with governing”* while Jonathan Slater - a permanent secretary of the Department for Education from 2016 to 2020, and former head of the civil service policy profession - has recently drawn on his experience in Whitehall (and local government) to describe a situation of:

“…remoteness from the public and frontline resulting in policymaking which is fundamentally inadequate to address the challenges we face.”

The importance of culture, staying close to social change, and understanding lived experiences ‘beyond the bubble’, became very evident with the surprising EU referendum result in 2016 which prompted a subsequent focus on ‘left behind’ areas and communities.

During the pandemic, public opinion and behaviour appeared to lead Government policy at key moments - particularly in terms of the calling of lockdowns. Slater describes an *“ultimate cultural disconnect”*:

“There was quite a lot of commentary at the beginning of the pandemic to the effect that the British people couldn’t be expected to accept authoritarian demands from their government to stay home. But that was to miss the point – the ultimate cultural disconnect – that people would take action to save themselves from catching a potentially fatal illness by staying away from others wherever possible, whether the government told them to or not.”

Our clients wanted to stay in touch with public perspectives and priorities during the pandemic and were particularly interested in Ipsos’ proprietary and published tracking studies (domestic and international) which measured behaviours and attitudes. Some produced weekly digests of polling

to share internally with policy teams, others funded their own tracking surveys using omnibus surveys and longitudinal studies to track changes in attitudes and behaviours.

This was not a new development. The trend towards more outward-facing policymaking had been evident before the pandemic with increasing client interest in more deliberative engagement with the public as well as dialogues which brought together public and expert perspectives particularly on more complex or ethically challenging issues and technologies. Before and during the pandemic, we delivered numerous citizens assemblies, juries and deliberative forums, giving people a voice on many of the issues policymakers were grappling with.

The creation of the What Works Network in 2013 and a growing focus in policy circles on evaluation represented important endeavours to professionalise policymaking. In his Ditchley Foundation Annual Lecture in summer 2020, Michael Gove described the need for *“Government to be rigorous and fearless in its evaluation of policy and projects”*. With some (softer) echoes of Dominic Cummings’ appeal for ‘weirdos’, Gove called for more multi-disciplinarity in policymaking. He welcomed *“proper challenge from qualified outsiders”* and referenced a risk of *“cultural condescension”* and misunderstanding.

Also pre-dating the pandemic, the Treasury updated its guidance on policymaking and evaluation, particularly its Magenta Book. This involved setting out a broad-based position on evaluation approaches and methods - looking beyond numbers - and then reflecting a more regional and local focus in policy, most obviously with Levelling-up.

Government Departments are working towards Outcome Delivery Plans with performance targets written into Spending Review settlements, requiring evaluation of policies and their impacts. And in partnership with the Cabinet Office, the Treasury set up an Evaluation Taskforce and an Evaluation Accelerator Fund was announced by the Chancellor at the Autumn 2021 Budget. The intention is to *“transform our understanding of the impact of activity in priority policy areas”*.

Endemic evidence and policymaking: what next?

There is a long way to go. For example, just a small proportion of new government program-related expenditure is subject to meaningful impact evaluations according to The National Audit Office.

More generally, there is an ambition to improve policymaking with the Declaration on Government Reform listing an initial 30 actions to make the process more *"open"*, *"collaborative"* and *"non-hierarchical"*. Progress remains in its early stages and will need kick-starting as the machinery of Government moves fully away from Coronavirus and into delivery mode.

Culture, capacity and systems

One of the main themes grouping some of the Declaration's reforms came under the headline of 'People'. Its focus was not social research and reaching out to the public as citizens and consumers but, instead, a drive to diversify the civil service and to increase its skillset. Relocation outside of London is seen as having important benefits for Levelling-up but also in terms of broader policy outcomes, and in his Ditchley Annual Lecture in 2020 Michael Gove said he expected that civil servants *"walk[ing] the streets"* of Britain's towns and cities would *"literally reduce the distance between Government and people"*.

Systems matter too. The Global Commission on Evidence recently summarised the global evidence 'system' and made numerous recommendations including an eye-catching benchmark of at least 1% of spend on R&D through experimentation, evaluation, and strengthening evidence-building/using system. The Commission's report included a wake-up call for governments across the world:

"Decision-makers, evidence intermediaries and impact-oriented evidence producers should recognize the scale and nature of the problem. Evidence... is not being systematically used by government policymakers, organizational leaders, professionals and citizens to equitably address societal challenges. Instead, decision-makers too often rely on inefficient (and sometimes harmful) informal feedback systems.

The result is poor decisions that lead to failures to improve lives, avoidable harm to citizens, and wasted resources."

The Commission's recommendations were directed globally rather than specifically at the UK but included aims which ring true in this country. For example, the Declaration on Government Reform included an objective to provide transparency to inform citizens, to build a more diversified evidence base, to review the existing *"evidence-support system"*, and to report publicly on progress. The Commission's work suggested a need to change the culture and infrastructure around the use of evidence.

> **"There is value in mapping areas of interest in evidence ('demand') alongside strategies and sources ('supply')."**

Evidence and policy – early and often

Our own experience of scoping the types of evidence required to improve future health resilience shows the value of mapping areas of interest in evidence ('demand') alongside strategies and sources ('supply'). This should mean a holistic appraisal of the organizations, policies, processes, systems and technologies involved in the collection, storage, management, oversight, distribution and use of data - also evident, for example, in the UN's Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery.

With echoes of the pandemic and how evidence has been used, the Roadmap identifies *"rapid learning systems"* which use the best available evidence and local data to inform decisions, and suggests committing to learning from experience as quickly as possible.

Continuous improvement extends to learning about the value of different types of evidence as well as policy outcomes, and the Roadmap emphasises the importance of 'mobilising' evidence as well as collecting it; we should plan for its use as well as its collection.

Our clients identified several elements of the way policymaking was conducted during the pandemic that they would like to

retain, particularly the foundational role that evidence played in terms of policy formation as well as consideration of what will work and how to evaluate what has worked, building this into policymaking from the start.

The pandemic created new advocates for evidence - a positive development - but also a larger group of stakeholders and interested parties. This requires careful management and creates an imperative to present insights to sometimes non-technical audiences.

The need for speed

The spirit of innovation and a 'can do/get it done' mentality in terms of gathering evidence and conducting social research was also something clients told us they wanted to see normalised. More moot was the highly kinetic nature of policymaking and evidence-gathering during the pandemic, particularly as greater fluidity and a shortened timeline, increased uncertainty and made planning evidence collection and use much harder.

The need for speed could create a move towards more evaluative analytics which give an early sense of the effects of policies and might push client-side social researchers to embrace DIY 'self-service' options, allowing them to fast-track evidence-gathering.

But how fast is appropriate? This will be an important question for policymakers and evidence-users. Interestingly, Ipsos surveys in 2021 found a difference in opinion between MPs and the public about whether it is better to wait until all of the evidence is available before acting in times of 'crisis'; 62% of MPs thought that it is better to act quickly, even if all the evidence is not yet available, whereas the public were evenly divided.

We found another important difference; where 43% of MPs were more likely to agree that a change in course makes the public lose rather than gain confidence in the way the government uses evidence, just a third of the public agree that this applies to them, while the same proportion say it makes them more confident. Perhaps as Silicon Valley has edged away from Mark Zuckerberg's now-famous motto, *"Move fast and break things"*, policymaking has begun to embrace it more? Certainly, for our clients, the speed of turn-around times in evidence-gathering is recognised as important going forwards. Evidence and its provision needs to be in step with the faster rhythm of policymaking if it is to contribute and make a difference.

A mixed economy of evidence

While improved speed may be seen as part of a new normal, we also find strong signals of a desire among clients for a *"mixed economy"* in evidence. This would balance instant 'snapshot' insights with those collected through a longer quantitative and qualitative lens, allowing sense to be made of *'why?'* as well as *'how many?'*. Meeting these twin aims was described as a "sweet spot" by Dr. Andrea Siodmok in a pre-pandemic blog, something which she identified as obtainable through the use of 'big data' and 'thick data'.

The mixed economy is likely to involve traditional methods of collecting evidence and ways of inputting into policymaking alongside investment in more experimental, innovative approaches. This ought to improve the resilience of evidence programmes as well as maximising the opportunities provided by new technologies and tools.

Based on our conversations with clients, we think policy teams will expect policy researchers and suppliers to deliver multi-method, multi-source programmes of social research (often at pace). The value of more pluralism in approaches to gathering and using evidence and in policy teams working with primary and secondary data - incorporating the data matching clients tell us they want to see more of - was also evident in the expectations of National Statistician Sir Iain Diamond last year:

"What we know for certain is that we will continue to source and work with new forms of reusable data from across government and beyond, combining traditional survey data with the likes of de-identified admin and industry data to ensure we can produce more of the robust, close-to-real time information that we've come to rely on in recent years."

Policymaking became more joined-up in response to Coronavirus with taskforces and groups working across Government Department. This meant that clients valued the curation of multi-source and multi-thematic evidence, something that will continue to be important in terms of the big policy challenges facing government including the Net Zero and Levelling-up agendas.

> **"The mixed economy is likely to involve traditional methods of collecting evidence and ways of inputting into policymaking alongside investment in more experimental, innovative approaches. "**

Something else will matter too - thinking pragmatically about what to do next in the short-term while also building visibility on a longer-term horizon. Which disruptions will lead to continued change, and which changes will fade away? Our clients are showing more interest in analytical lenses which look at the future so that they can take action on their strategies for the next few years.

Better, deeper engagement

Among several policy challenges, Net Zero will require particularly transformational behaviour change for many years to come while rapid technological advancements will continue to create ethical as well as operational issues. Finding answers to questions such as *'what will the public find acceptable?'* and '*how will they respond?'* will be integral to policymaking. While the time available for dialogue and deliberation about policy was squeezed during the pandemic, there was plenty of experimentation and innovation in running rapid variations, and such methods will surely become more important as we face complicated policymaking territory.

Is Government ready? A resounding 'no' was the conclusion reached by the Institute for Government and Involve last year. Their joint paper said there was limited government capability and expertise in terms of public engagement and that engaging the public is simply *"not prioritised as a part of policymaking"* in many departments.

Diversity, inclusion and PX

The pandemic increased sensitivity to vulnerability and inequality of impacts plus an interest in the lived experience of particular groups. This was also witnessed recently when the ONS, under pressure from activist Jack Monroe, said it accepted that every person had their own inflation rate and committed to doing more to capture the impact of price increases on different income groups.

One of our clients described a *"location fetish"* in policy circles and the Levelling-up White Paper outlined 49 metrics to track its progress towards achieving its 12 missions.

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The interest in demography and geography presents a challenge for policymakers and those generating evidence to support it. More than ever, there is an imperative to formulate and evaluate policy in a spatial way and at multiple levels too – national, regional, local, neighbourhood - while being sensitive to the costs and benefits of policies to different groups within the population.

This has become even more complicated and will need a sophisticated response. In 2021 the ONS published findings from the work of its inclusive data taskforce which included adoption of an intersectional approach to exploring and representing equalities data to mitigate the risk of misleading single-characteristic analyses.

The taskforce also highlighted gaps within the current practice of constructing nationally representative samples and called for more inclusivity (including offline and seldom heard groups).

As well as a push to improve inclusivity within evidence-gathering, there are calls for improvements to 'PX' or participant experience (PX mirroring marketing terms - CX for customer experience and UX for user experience). The pandemic put greater demands on online panellists to complete more surveys, often longer ones. For example, for as long as we can remember, it has been challenging to reach people under 25 years of age, particularly men. Poor participant experiences and increased wariness make this group, among others, disinclined to share their opinions and experiences, and even harder to reach today.

Improving inclusivity and accessibility to ensure all voices are heard matters because government policies and campaigns frequently target vulnerable and seldom heard groups. Segments of society on the margins require engagement, often on sensitive matters, as a way of trying to make their lives better.

Our framework for evidence-enabled policymaking

The learnings we have taken from the pandemic allied to the needs and requirements of our clients, highlight the need to work with the grain of complexity, and to take multiple factors into account when collecting and using evidence. This is the thread running through our framework which lists 22 potential contributions to a new phase of evidence-enabled policymaking.

We have developed the framework to aid critical thinking with two main applications in mind and two scorecards to support each one:

A how best to design **tactical** policymaking and evidence collection and use through social research and evidence projects and initiatives to collect, store and share evidence

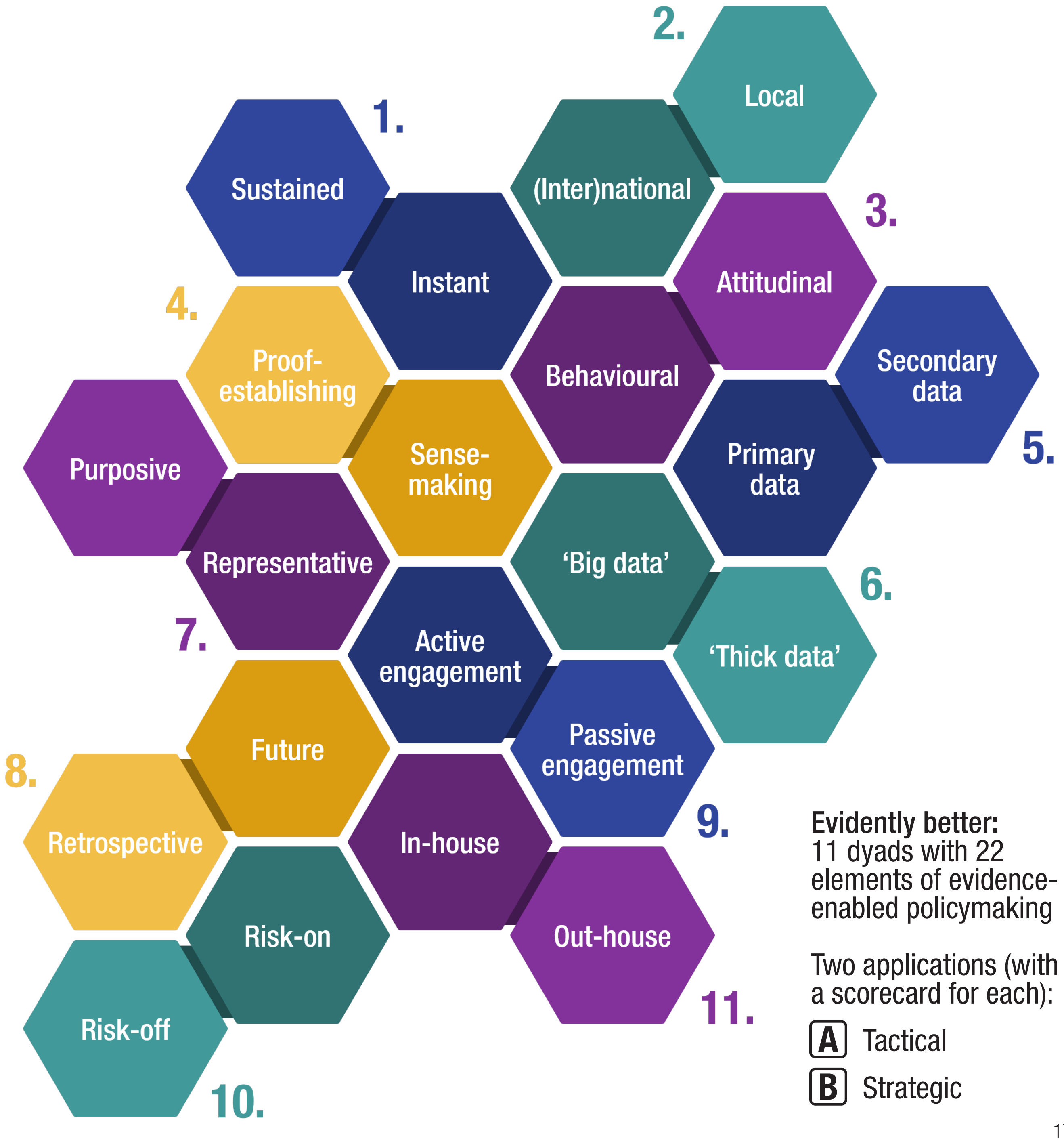
B **strategic** improvement of policy and associated evidence systems i.e. programmes of projects and initiatives

Our framework borrows from the Strategy Unit's high-level framework for health policy analysis and is built on a set of dyads, or related pairs. The dyads we present are not necessarily new - in fact, most pre-dated the pandemic and are long-running trends in policymaking and the use of evidence - but some have become more prominent in recent years. Nor are they mutually exclusive - in fact, several dyads overlap - and while the first three focus more on policy than evidence, they all relate to policy and evidence.

As well as presenting the eleven dyads, our framework offers advice about how best to achieve a blend of each dyad's two elements - labelled as a '**blended best**' way of organising evidence and policy design so that they work side-by-side. This is because we share the perspective of Natalie Smith at market research agency Hall & Partners who said last year *"Clients want two things – quality and speed, and they don't want to choose, and I think that's fair."*

We also recognise the likelihood that there will be a spectrum or range in-between some dyads – for example, Sherry Arnstein described a ladder of citizen participation ranging from passive to active engagement (dyad 9) while risk-taking and innovation (dyad 10) can be dialled-up and down and might not be as binary as on/off.

Some of the dyads and their elements presented here are simplifications – for example, 'behavioural' covers several disciplines and needs, including insight-generation, intervention design, and evaluation. Behaviour can shape, and be shaped by, attitudes which underlines the value of a blended best approach.



1.

Instant

Does policymaking have a short-term objective and is there a requirement for speedy/short-term delivery of evidence? What is 'mission-critical' and when/how soon is this required? What are the implications of faster provision of evidence for the value it can add?

Sustained

Do policymakers have more enduring/longer-term objectives for the policy and are evidence needs similarly long-term in their focus. What and when is evidence required? What are the implications of a slower pace to the provision of evidence?

Blended best

- Integrate planning of evidence collection and policy development/implementation
- Pursue a mix of 'first look' and 'further look' methods of evidence collection/reporting
- Scope interim outputs and deliverables for slower-paced evidence-gathering exercises
- Develop evidence/knowledge-management systems for ease of access to secondary data

2.

(Inter)national

Are policymakers focused on achieving outcomes across the UK or a specific nation or internationally? How important is geographical granularity in terms of progressing the policy?

Local

Are policymakers focused on achieving outcomes at a local or regional level – if so, how is this defined, what evidence is already available and how practical is it to collect new evidence at this level?

Blended best

- Be clear about the key geographic 'units' of interest in terms of policy/evidence needs (consider typologies/types of places e.g. towns, rural vs urban, densely populated etc.)
- Be realistic - consider the feasibility of collecting spatially-granular evidence
- Consider the use of alternative approaches e.g. small area estimation to develop estimates and data analytics to understand the influence of geography vs demography

3.

Behavioural

Does the success of the policy hinge on the behaviours of intended beneficiaries, the wider public or stakeholders (including those delivering the policy) and does it need evidence to understand these?

Attitudinal

Does the policy have an attitudinal focus which needs evidencing such as 'customer' satisfaction or experience, public/stakeholder awareness and interest, support for policy development/implementation?

Blended best

- Include attitudinal components within behavioural studies and vice-versa
- Consider the use of passive measurement, observational and neurological research ('research without questions') as well as conventional social research methods
- Use frameworks and models to structure evidence collection and analysis (e.g. COM-B and Ipsos' MAPPS for behavioural inquiry)
- Avoid overlooking the behaviour and attitudes of those implementing policy/frontline workers

4.

Sense-making

Do policymakers need evidence to help make sense of a situation or to better understand barriers/facilitators to success?

Proof-establishing

Do they need evidence to test or validate the case for the introduction or continuation of a policy, its feasibility, or the impacts it has had or will have?

Blended best

- Identify evidence needs at different policy stages incl. formulation, implementation, evaluation (e.g. formative and summative evaluation) etc.
- Collect quantitative and qualitative evidence to measure and explore the context and culture a policy is operating in/might operate in
- Be clear on what good policy 'looks like' and develop a theory of change

5.

Primary data

Does the policy necessitate the collection of new or different types of evidence given the existing evidence base and the decisions to be made?

Secondary data

Can insights be found through synthesising/ analysing existing data and insights including routine administrative data, academic/grey literature and other sources?

Blended best

- Develop a 'both by default' culture and consider opportunities to use data matching and data fusion
- Start evidence projects with secondary data analysis informing hypotheses to be tested via primary research (or vice-versa!)
- Work iteratively and use reporting outputs to identify evidence gaps and options for further primary/secondary research

6.

'Big data'

Would the policy benefit from mining large datasets including administrative data? Is it possible to source and structure datasets to achieve measurements of *how many?* and maybe *who?*

'Thick data'

Can we generate useful diagnostic *why?* evidence and deeper insights into *what matters?* via data analytics and/ or qualitative inquiry, observational research, UX (user experience to inform design) etc.?

Blended best

- Adopt a 'side-by-side' mindset, scoping opportunities for these to work in tandem
- Conduct thorough and periodic reviews of existing datasets and sources of evidence
- Embrace the (huge) potential for statistical data analytics to add value to inquiry and interpretation
- Consider opportunities for 'large qual' and/or more sophisticated analyses of larger data sets e.g. using machine learning and text analytics to identify key themes and meaning from unstructured datasets

7.

Representative

Does the policy require evidence based on census or inclusive samples collected in a statistically representative manner to allow for robust extrapolation and quantification?

Purposive

Does the policy require evidence which prioritises depth rather than breadth, perhaps deliberately focusing on specific groups or geographies with certain characteristics, attitudes or behaviours?

Blended best

- Avoid neglecting to consider what evidence is needed when thinking about who and how (these are inextricably linked)
- Use multiple methods, playing to their respective strengths in terms of breadth/depth and inclusivity for different groups
- Consider new methods of recruitment including social media etc. and reaching recruits offline, supporting them to take part online and/or via other means

8.

Retrospective

Does the policy need evidence of what is happening or has happened over time?

Future

Does the policy need 'foresight' to prepare it for the complex challenges of the future?

Blended best

- Use formative evaluations of what is happening and evaluative analytics to inform future policy/ interventions
- Plan periodic, dedicated foresight pieces (scenario planning, horizon scanning, trend spotting and trend framework building)
- Run post-project reviews, thinking through the implications of 'now' insights for 'next', identifying any learnings in terms of methods and management

9.

Active engagement

Is there a need to proactively engage, involve and listen to the public when reaching key decisions about the design of a policy, putting policy experts and people on an equal footing?

Passive engagement

Is there a need to collect insights about attitudes and behaviours in respect of a policy by asking the public to take part as research participants but not as co-creators?

Blended best

- Consider the Arnstein 'ladder of citizen participation' and deliberative/dialogue techniques to ensure active engagement or, at least, to reduce passive engagement
- Use passive evidence to help inform and stimulate active engagement and to better understand the impact of deliberation on public understanding and sentiment
- Consider user-centred design and the use of UX research alongside expert and frontline opinion when designing how to implement policy involving interaction with users/intended beneficiaries

10.

Risk-on

Is there scope to collect evidence using new methods, or to trial/shadow new methods alongside existing ones to add value to the evidence base and learn something methodologically?

Risk-off

Is there a preference for careful replication of methods which have previously collected time-series evidence and/or to mitigate risk by using tried-and-tested methods?

Blended best

- Develop knowledge management systems to stay close to the latest and best practice in methods and techniques
- Consider establishing a R&D budget focused on evidence to ensure that innovation has a 'safe space' and happens
- Capture adequate technical details for all evidence collecting projects to assess methods and their merits, and to allow replication

11.

In-house

Is the evidence best collected in-house because of proximity to sources and the required expertise to collect, interpret and use it?

Out-house

Does the independence and resources of a supplier add value to the collection, interpretation and use of evidence required for a policy?

Blended best

- Conduct an evidence 'skills audit' to better understand in-house capabilities as a precursor to building the necessary capacity
- Identify and manage a supply chain involving 'full service' and 'specific service' suppliers
- Use 'shadow' days and secondments to build familiarity and reduce in-/out-house gaps
- Be outcome-driven (and not exclusively cost-driven); what are the implications of in-house/out-house approaches for meeting evidence and policy objectives?

How to use our framework and scorecards

A Tactical application

We suggest using the framework and its dyads to set priorities for policy and evidence initiatives and projects, using Scorecard A.

Conducting this exercise can usefully inform and shape discussions and decisions involving client-side policy and evidence teams, helping to frame a conversation with an external supplier, or assist with the development of a brief to issue to suppliers as part of a procurement exercise. At the very least, using the framework as a checklist will ensure that important factors have been considered, thereby maximising the chances of evidence-enabled policymaking.

A productive, efficient evidence initiative will likely exhibit many of the dyads – for example, it might necessarily be instant, local and representative – but in some cases a dyad might not be relevant at all. Moreover, it might not be possible, or desirable, to settle one way or the other between them. In this case, the '**blended best**' suggestions, outlined earlier, ought to come into play.

While the framework guides design, it is a starting point. Of course, it will also be important to take practical constraints into account, particularly the investment required - something which should also be considered from the outset. Delivery will be dependent on effective implementation and the ever-growing range of social research methods now available.

Ipsos Public Affairs' **Social Research Methods Toolkit** provides guidance to clients about the key strengths and considerations for established and emerging research methods and techniques, setting out which are the most suitable for varying needs.

B Strategic application

The same set of dyads can be used to appraise an evidence system - a programme of projects and initiatives to collect, store and share evidence to support policymaking.

This could be part of a strategic review of how a policy and its associated evidence base is faring (such a review might also be informed by use of Scorecard A if applied strategically to assess what matters). The conclusions drawn from this exercise might shape decisions about how to change approach, what to invest in and what to do next, providing focus for engagement with internal and external suppliers.

The starting position in this application of the framework is that there is value in appraising current provision by taking a 'big picture' view. Our view is that an optimal evidence system is akin to an ecosystem - an interconnected network of success factors. It will likely exhibit many, if not all, of the dyads – for example, it will be instant and sustained, providing evidence which helps sense-making and proof-establishing, while involving active and passive engagement and so on.

Reflecting this, the framework is applied towards identifying scope for improvement – is the way policy and evidence is currently organised effective at meeting needs in respect of each dyad? As before, it will be important to take practical constraints into account, particularly the investment required. There will be a role for '**blended best**' solutions where requirements for both elements of a dyad are not being met.

In addition, experience tells us that the best evidence systems are capable of change over time as policy and evidence needs evolve and new methodologies emerge. As the Market Research Society describe in *Intelligence Capital 2020: A practitioner's guide*, building and retaining intelligence capital - evidence for policy-making - is an *"ongoing process of improvement"*. Like ecosystems, evidence systems need to be protected and nurtured to grow. The framework and scorecards we have shared can be used to periodically review whether and how policymaking is evidence-enabled, which new blends are required and how these can be achieved.

The pandemic has demonstrated the immense value that evidence - in all its forms - can bring to policymaking. But those of us passionate about evidence, particularly evidence of what the public want and need, and 'what works' in policy terms, must stay close to the evolving needs of policymakers and seek out areas for improvement.

Our framework for evidence-enabled policymaking is a starting point, based on our practical experience and thinking as well as the input of several senior clients. We hope it proves useful as a planning tool for clients to design and assess the way they integrate evidence with policy from the outset of the policymaking process. Another hope is that the critical thinking it is designed to facilitate, will help to build robustness, responsiveness and resilience in evidence collection and use, and by extension, in policymaking itself.

Scorecard A – Tactical application

We suggest ranking the relative importance of each element of the dyads (as described in our framework) for an initiative or project.

Our scale runs from the left-hand element of the dyad being a great deal more important than the right-hand one (scored as a ‘2’) through to the opposite, the right-hand element being a great deal more important than its left-hand opposite (also a ‘2’).

			Both equally important		
	Instant > Sustained				Instant < **Sustained**
1	2	1	0	1	2
	(Inter)national > Local				(Inter)national < **Local**
2	2	1	0	1	2
	Behavioural > Attitudinal				Behavioural < **Attitudinal**
3	2	1	0	1	2
	Sense-making > Proof-establishing				Sense-making < **Proof-establishing**
4	2	1	0	1	2

			Both equally important		
	Primary data > Secondary data				Primary data < **Secondary data**
5	2	1	0	1	2
	‘Big’ data > ‘Thick’ data				‘Big’ data < **‘Thick’ data**
6	2	1	0	1	2
	Representative > Purposive				Representative < **Purposive**
7	2	1	0	1	2
	Retrospective > Future				Retrospective < **Future**
8	2	1	0	1	2
	Active engagement > Passive				Active < **Passive engagement**
9	2	1	0	1	2
	Risk-on > Risk-off				Risk-on < **Risk-off**
10	2	1	0	1	2
	In-house > Out-house				In-house < **Out-house**
11	2	1	0	1	2

Scorecard B – Strategic application

We suggest rating current performance of a programme or system in terms of each element of the dyads (as described in our framework).

Our scale for this scorecard is as follows:
3 – fully meeting needs
2 – partially meeting needs
1 – not meeting needs
0 – not needed

1	Instant ☐	Sustained ☐
2	(Inter)national ☐	Local ☐
3	Behavioural ☐	Attitudinal ☐
4	Sense-making ☐	Proof-establishing ☐
5	Primary data ☐	Secondary data ☐
6	'Big' data ☐	'Thick' data ☐
7	Representative ☐	Purposive ☐
8	Retrospective ☐	Future ☐
9	Active engagement ☐	Passive engagement ☐
10	Risk-on ☐	Risk-off ☐
11	In-house ☐	Out-house ☐

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the advice and thoughts of several Ipsos Public Affairs clients and colleagues. Special thanks go to Fraser Battye of The Strategy Unit for his input and inspiration!

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Our intention is to take this work further.

Please get in touch with the Ipsos Public Affairs team with feedback or if you want to help shape how we take this forward!

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