

Exercise 1. Assessing your organisational context for evidence-informed policy-making: Key dimensions & guiding questions

1. Analysing strengths and weaknesses in evidence processes

Framing the issue and scoping the question. How are different groups of people involved in framing the issues and defining what evidence is needed to answer the policy questions? Who is 'on the inside' and who is currently being overlooked? Is the approach to defining evidence requirements more strategic or more reactive to short-term pressures? Are all four types of evidence considered, or is the emphasis on only one or two types?

Assembling and appraising existing and emerging evidence. Are policy teams able to conduct systematic searches for all four types of evidence? Once they find it, do they have the skills to appraise how robust it is? What types of expertise are available to help policy-makers?

Procuring new evidence. How strong are relationships with all the organisations that provide evidence, both inside and outside government? How do government procurement rules affect the types of evidence that are sought and used?

Reframing the issue. Interpreting the evidence and reframing the issue. How well is complex evidence communicated to policy teams and decision makers? Are there sufficient opportunities to jointly interpret the evidence and reframe the issues, or is evidence seen simply as a service to be provided to the department?

2. The sectoral politics of evidence

- Are there competing bodies of knowledge within the sector?
- What are the implications for how the policy questions are scoped and the evidence is assembled and interpreted?
- Is the department in question a spending or an influencing department? How does this affect how it sources and uses evidence?

3. Ongoing pressures to change*

- What budgetary pressures are departments facing? How do they influence the evidence base?
- How much, and how, do donors and international organisations influence the policy questions that government institutions are asking? What pressures do they exert to collect particular types of evidence?
- To what extent is policy delivery decentralised to subnational levels or delegated upward to regional and global institutions? How does this affect the search for evidence?

4. Shocks to the system

- How has the organisation responded to any shocks and crises it has faced? To what extent were those shocks caused by problems with how it used evidence?
- How stable has the institutional structure been over the previous five years? If there have been changes, what effects have they had?

5. Debates about evidence*

- Does any one type of evidence dominate debates? What are the implications of this? Does it give rise to any systemic strengths or weaknesses in debates?
- How inclusive are debates about the use of evidence? Who is involved? How? Are resources put into ensuring evidence can be debated in consultative or participatory forums, or are debates relatively closed?

6. Senior management and strategy*

- How engaged is senior management in the process of implementing an evidence-informed approach? How do they engage: do they encourage a hierarchical approach or one based on local experimentation?
- To what extent does the department have a strategic approach to ensuring it has the evidence it needs to meet its current and likely future policy priorities? What activities and relationships could be strengthened to implement this approach?

7. Structure and relationships*

- What are the formal relationships around evidence?
- What roles do different people play in relation to evidence? How do they relate to each other and to external stakeholders?
- Are there informal groups of people able to talk knowledgeably and inclusively about all forms of evidence? Do they broadly agree with each other? How much influence do they have and on whom?

8. Culture, incentives and capabilities*

- What are the different cultures of evidence within the department? How do they reinforce or work against each other?
- What is the general level of staff capability to source, assemble, procure and interpret evidence effectively? What could be done to improve individual and team skills?
- What performance management frameworks are in place (at departmental, team and individual level) and how might they offer incentives to improve the use of evidence?

9. Business planning and the evidence base

- What business planning processes are used in the department? How do they shape the way evidence is sourced and used? How well do business plans incorporate an understanding of evidence?

10. Evidence for reporting*

- How does the department report upward to senior institutions such as the Cabinet and Parliament? How might these processes shape what types of evidence are sought, how its quality is appraised and how it is interpreted?

11. Budgeting for evidence*

- Does the department know how much it spends on different types of evidence?
- How are budget allocations for evidence decided? Is there a clear prioritisation framework that informs budget decisions?

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