

Mpumalanga navigating the future effectively

**Working as a
knowledge broker –
influencing the supply,
demand and use of
MEL evidence**

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Middelburg,
23 July 2026



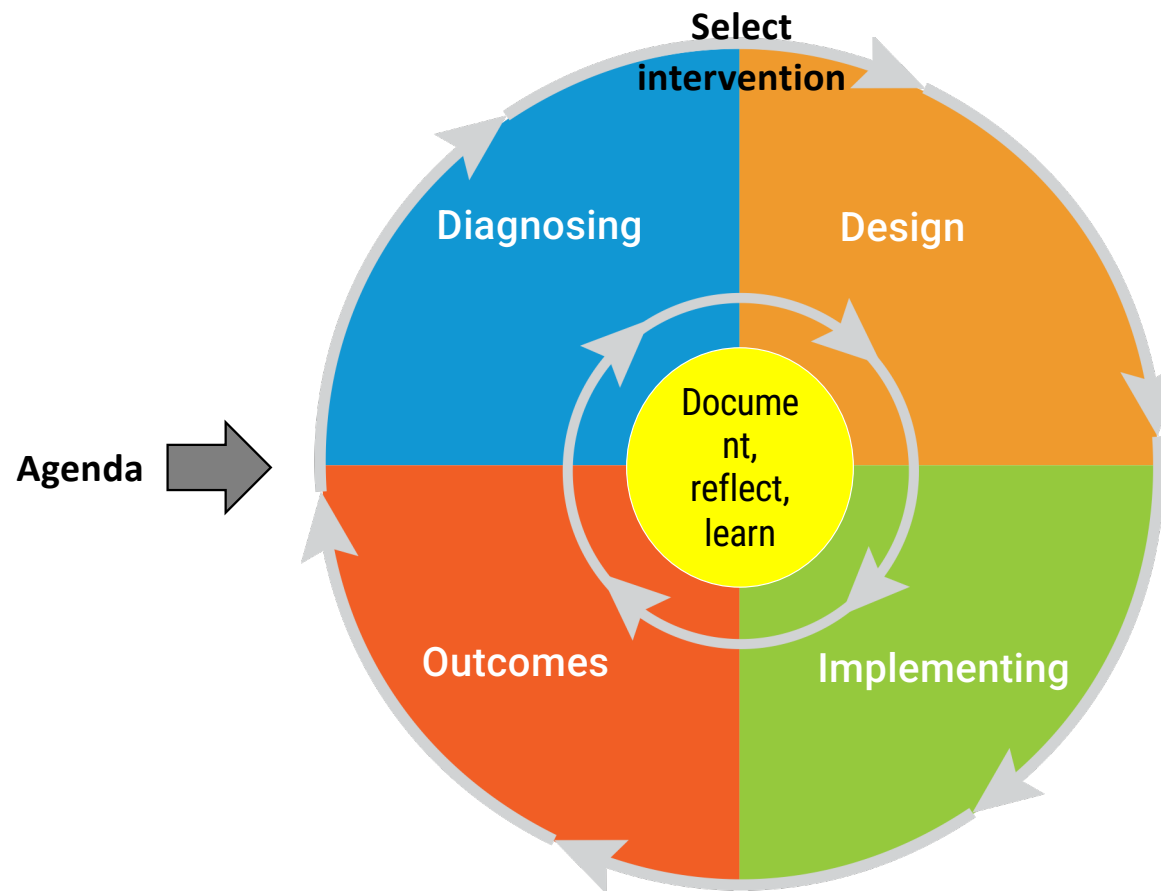
Summary

1. We make decisions all the time – based on what?
2. Consequences of not using evidence – the Iran War
3. How do we promote use of evidence – knowledge brokering
4. Working as a knowledge broker – influencing the supply, demand and use of MEL evidence at a time of crisis



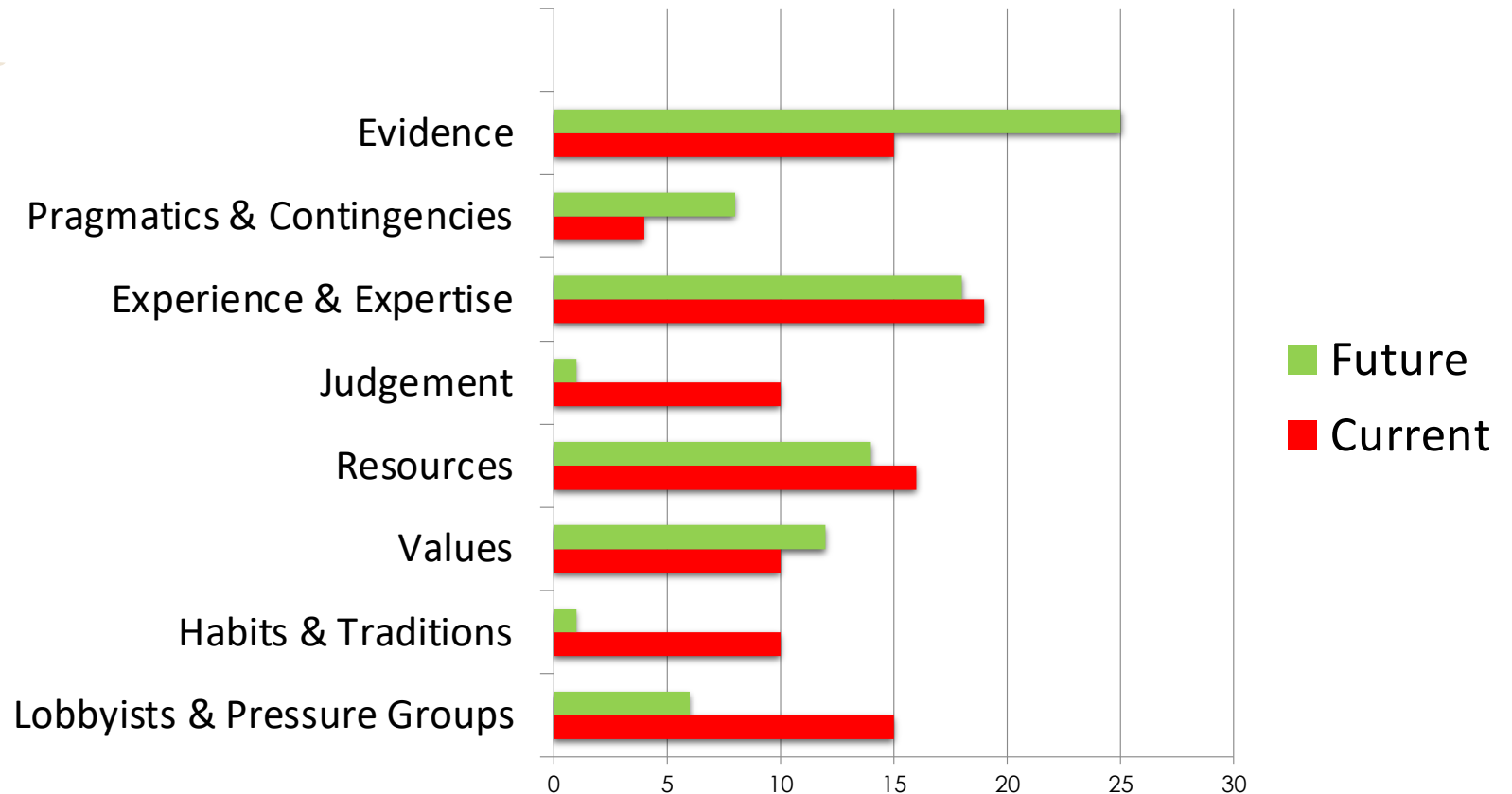
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**We make
decisions all the
time – based on
what?**

Using evidence through the policy/ programme cycle

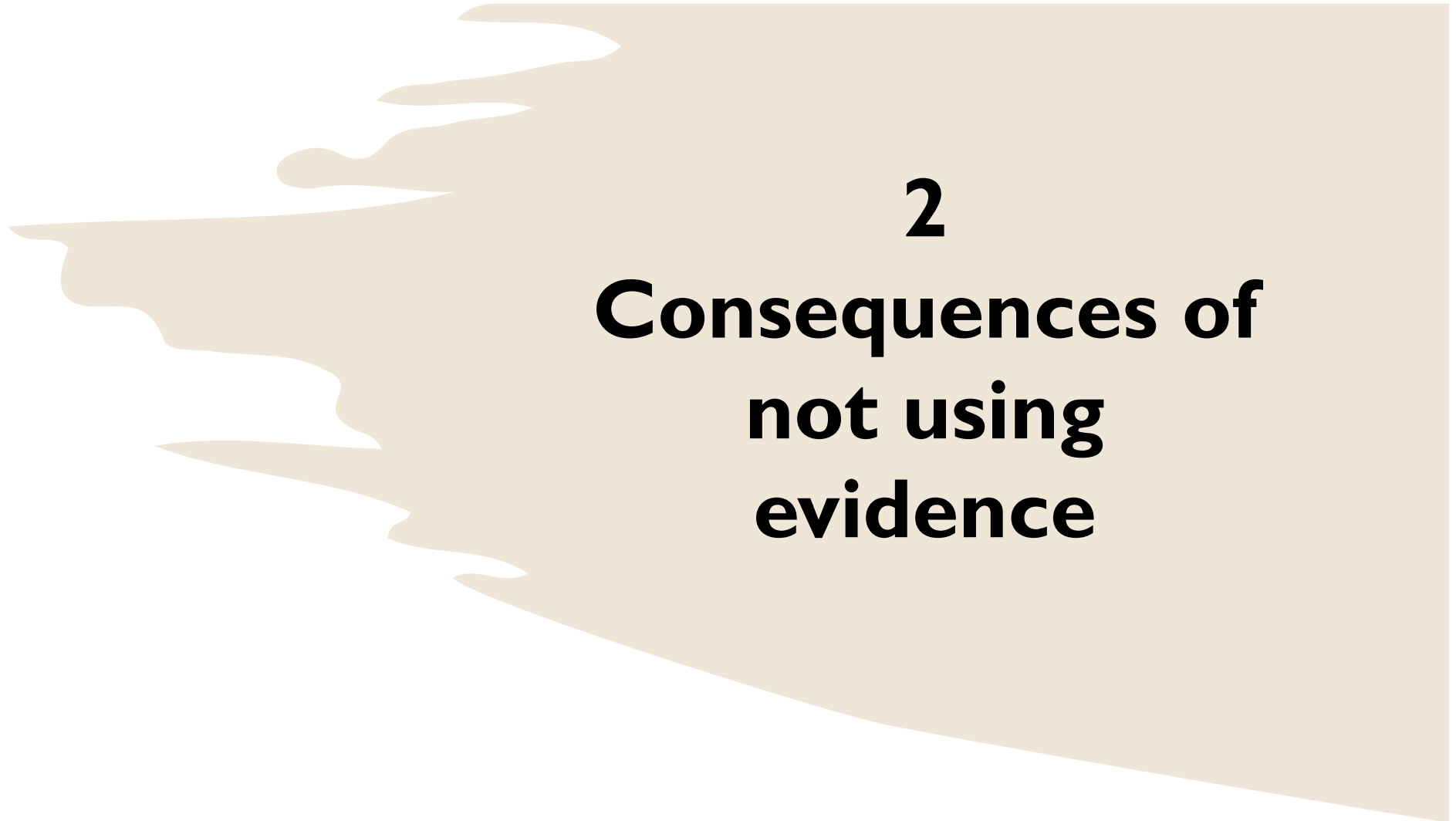


The main factors that influence policy

(interviews with 54 South African senior managers)



Paine Cronin and Sadan, African Evaluation Journal, 2015, *Adapted from: Hayes, W, 2002, The Policy Cycle*



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**Consequences of
not using
evidence**

Disatisfaction and danger - often a mismatch between:

- What citizens experience...
 - What frontline staff say problems are..
 - What eventual higher level reports say....
 - How do we see the outcomes and impact of our work?
-
- The Mpumalanga Budget was R68.2 billion for 2025/6 – it can have much more impact

Consequences - the Iran war



We don't want to
operate like that in SA,
but all too frequently
we do

- *Invented evidence* that Iran was about to have a nuclear weapon (politically wanted a war)
- *Disregarded advice* from intelligence and assumed Iranian government would fall
- Acted from *emotion* and a *belief* in US superiority – colonialism and imperialism
- *Didn't calculate* how many US missiles would be needed to stop Iranian drones – their Patriot missiles costing \$10m and drones \$10k – US are running out of missiles
- *Underestimated* the resilience of Iran and their ability to respond and their planning
- Did not *anticipate* that the war would extend to Gulf States with multiple US bases even though many pundits forecast this
- Did not *forecast/plan* for what the end would be like (except regime change, similar to Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, each costing trillions of dollars)
- With *catastrophic consequences* for the world economy and US/Israeli hegemony – and huge wasted moneys (China has 50 000km of high speed rail – the US zero, the funds could have funded zero hunger globally, 100% access to water, major CO2 mitigation investments.....)

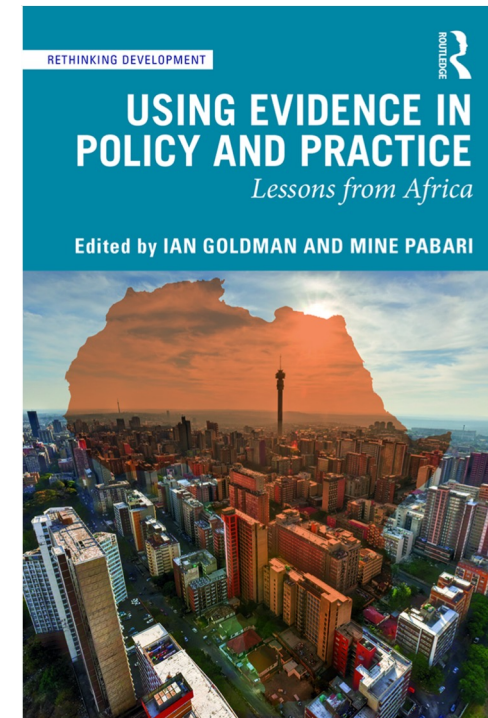
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**How do we
promote use of
evidence –
knowledge
brokering**



How do we promote use of strong evidence?

- Promote **motivation** in senior managers, **capability** and **opportunity** to use evidence
- Driven by 6 **mechanisms**
 - **Access** to the evidence (eg repository, jargon free, infographics)
 - **Awareness** of the evidence (eg briefing to managers)
 - **Agreement** with the evidence (time taken to understand)
 - **Relationship/trust** with the messenger
 - Opportunities **formalised** to use evidence (eg required in budget submissions)
 - **Ability** to use the evidence (exposure, learning by doing, recruitment...)



<https://www.routledge.com/Using-Evidence-in-Policy-and-Practice-Open-Access-Lessons-from-Africa/Goldman-Pabari/p/book/9780367440077>

Brokering supply and demand for evidence

What is needed from the evidence

Supply (monitoring, evaluation, research)

Accessible (both location and format)

Agreement

- Relevant to implementation reality, and policy process
- Topics important
- Credible (distinguishing false)
- Timely

Knowledge brokering

Addressing supply, demand and relational issues

Demand

From public, think tanks, Parliament

What is needed to use the evidence

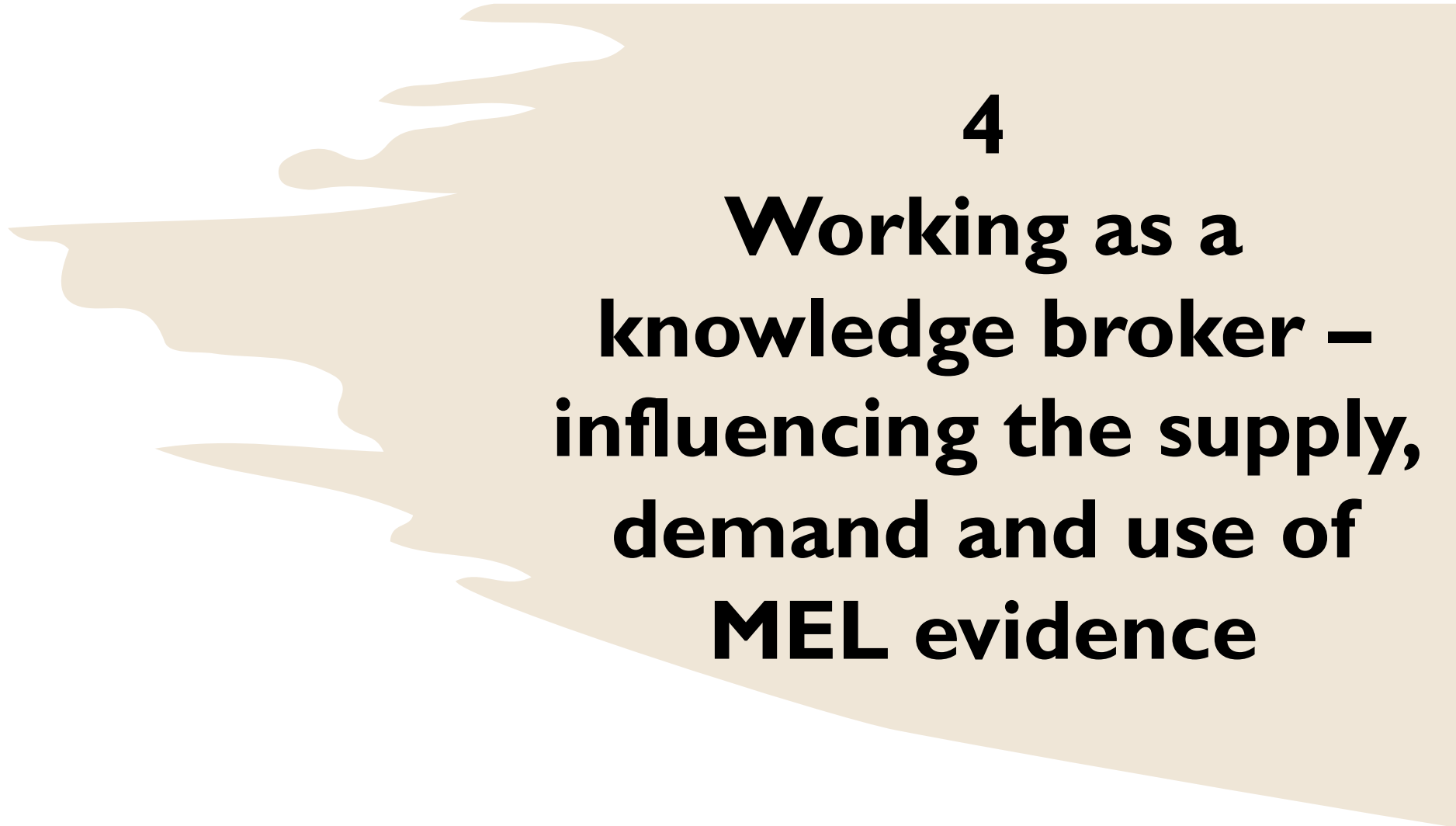
Ability to use evidence

- Analytical thinking
- Knowledge of the problem

Interaction and trust

Institutional aspects

- Require use of evidence
- Anticipating need
- Eval/research infra
- Effective networks eg of suppliers/ sources and with decision makers
- Knowledge management and sharing



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**Working as a
knowledge broker –
influencing the supply,
demand and use of
MEL evidence**

Values and culture barriers to the use of evidence in 5 national depts

(2017 research, Twende Mbele, 104 respondents)

Issue	% of responses saying always/often
• Resistance by management to transparent decision-making	27.9
• Little respect for the use of evidence	27.9
• Difficult to discuss performance objectively because of the hierarchy	38.5
• Senior managers fear admitting mistakes or problems	54.8
• Senior managers consider M&E as a means to control staff	44.2
• Problems not seen as an opportunity for learning and improvement	40.4

How
can
we
learn?

Knowledge broker roles (adapted from Martinuzzi (2016))

Facilitation of knowledge-based networks and processes, where knowledge brokers act as **facilitators and linkage agents**, managing the context and facilitation of the relationships and the process of the evidence journey, stimulating interaction, trust and commitment (building the motivation and opportunity to use evidence)

Development, transfer and translation of knowledge to make it easier to access and use, in which case knowledge brokers act as **knowledge managers**

Development of individual and institutional capability to produce and use policy-relevant knowledge, in which knowledge brokers act as **capacity builders** (building the capability and opportunity to use evidence).

Promoting demand

Facilitator and Linking Agent	Capacity Builder	Knowledge Managers
• Changing the narrative to learning not punitive • Convincing programme managers to evaluate their programmes • Marketing services of research/M&E unit to programme managers	• Initiate/support intersectoral discussion forums - important in widening awareness and ownership • Developing guidance for integration of evidence in policy e.g. regulatory impact assessment guide • Training senior officials on evidence use	• Anticipating and identifying evidence needs and developing evidence/evaluation agendas

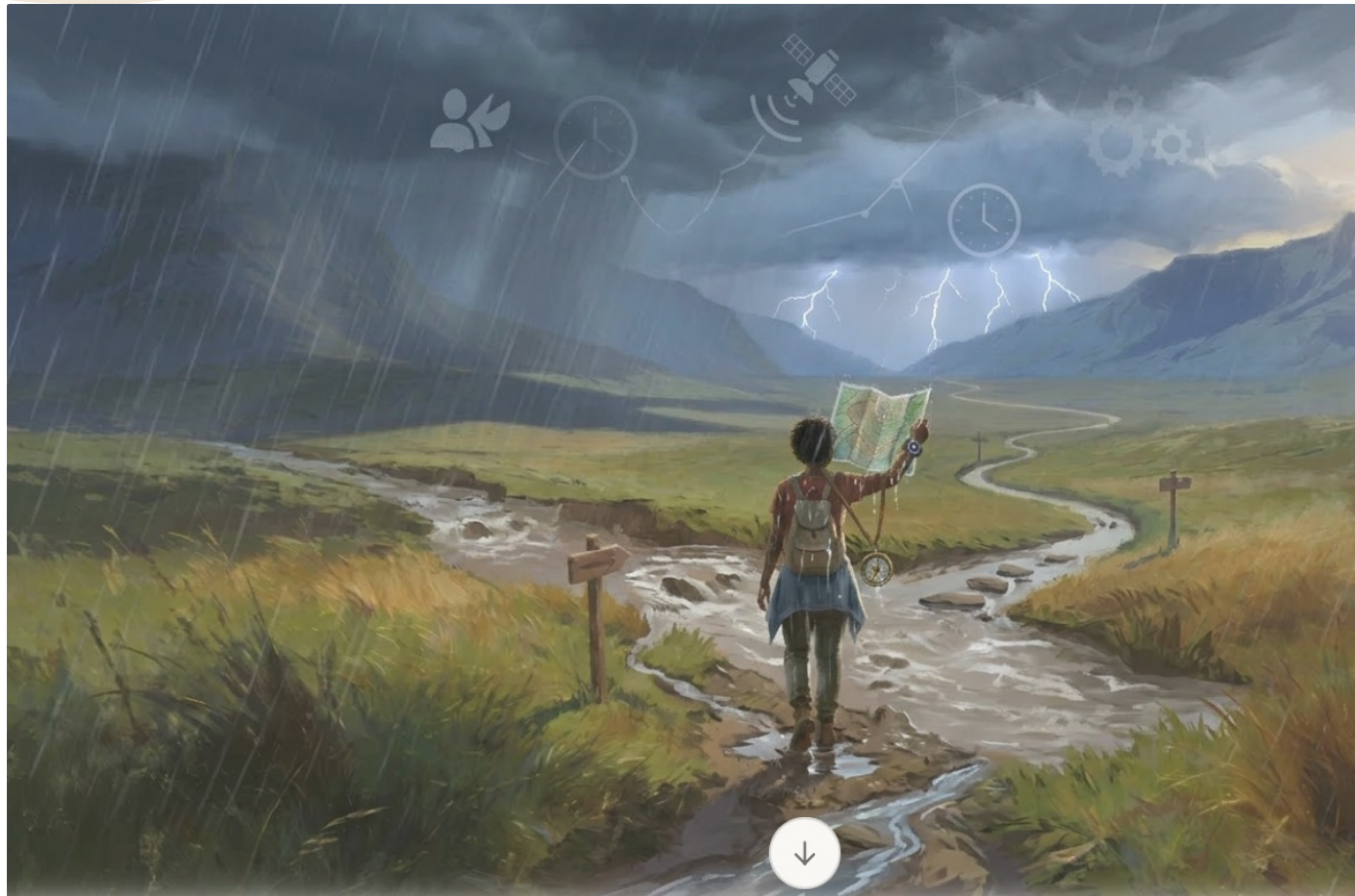
Supporting evidence generation (supply)

Facilitator and Linking Agent	Capacity Builder	Knowledge Managers
• Collaborative management of evidence generation (eg steercomms) • Facilitating meetings with stakeholders such as evaluation steering committees; participatory workshops eg theory of change workshop • Ongoing management of relationships	• Facilitation of participatory workshops and meetings (e.g. theory of change workshops etc) • Facilitate learning by stakeholders during an evaluation	• Analyses on policy relevant trends • Synthesising data from different stakeholders and interpreting for policy implications, publishing in bulletins, monthly reports etc • Outsourcing evidence generation at times to ensure impartiality and independence • Quality assurance systems to ensure credibility of evidence; steering committees, peer reviewers etc

Supporting follow-up and learning

Facilitator and Linking Agent	Capacity Builder	Knowledge Managers
• Presentation of findings to management, ministers, parliament, civil society • Facilitating ongoing dialogue process and campaigns based on the evidence	• Institutionalising use of evidence in M&E policies and systems e.g. management response, improvement planning	• Developing briefs and evidence summaries, using comms tools to make evidence accessible e.g. infographics, data visualisation.. • Structural mechanisms to make sure reports are discussed and decisions are made eg in EXCO • Evidence shared publicly e.g. websites.

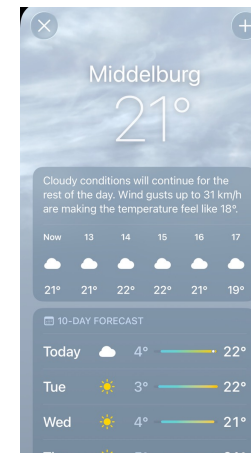
But we now have to contend with climate and ecosystems breakdown, technology disruption, rampant inequality... the polycrisis.



Rapid sources
of evidence

Better
forecasting

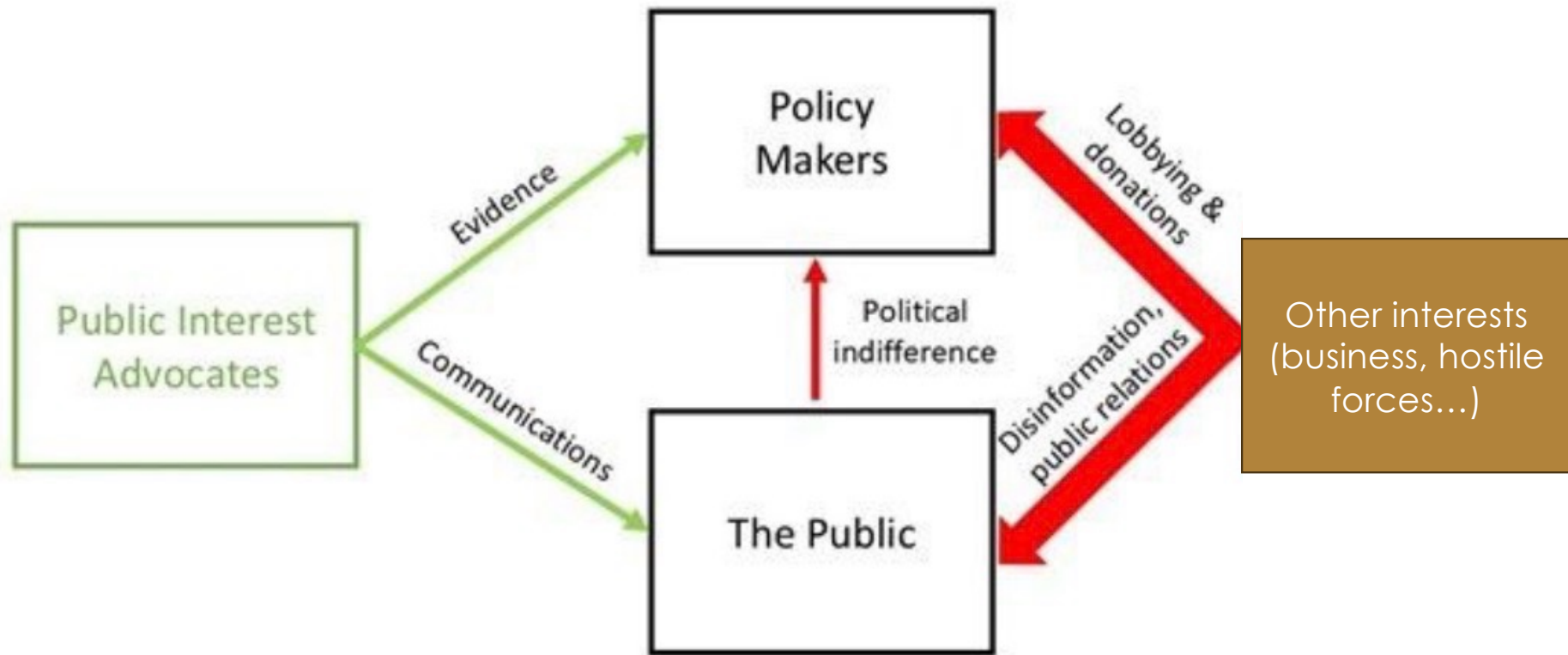
Look at the
underlying
system and
causes of the
crises, not just
projects and
programmes



**NATIONAL
EVALUATION
POLICY
FRAMEWORK
2025**

25 February 2026

Decision making a contested space



So need to embed evidence across the policy cycle to arrive at our desired destination – and make sure evidence is demanded, credible, timely and anticipatory



Ngiyabonga, thanks, dankie



For examples of how a job description can be amended to strengthen the knowledge brokering aspects, see Pabari, Mine, & Goldman, Ian. (2023). The role of monitoring, evaluation, and research units in an increasingly turbulent world. *Revista Brasileira de Avaliação*, 12(1), e120523. <https://doi.org/10.4322/rbaval202312005>

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