Implementation science and effectiveness research: a symbiotic relationship

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Structure of this presentation

1. Introduction & definitions
2. A comprehensive strategy around implementation and effectiveness
3. The policy environment - national and international trends
4. Concluding remarks
The problem

Less than $1 out of every $100 of government spending is backed by even the most basic evidence that the money is being spent wisely.

- Bridgeland and Orszag, 2013
It matters

In the US in 2010, 5.9 million children were reported as abused or neglected.

The US has the world’s largest prison population, estimated at 2.2 million.
A comprehensive strategy around implementation and effectiveness

- Acknowledge the problem
- Create a system to identify promising programs
- Create a system to encourage uptake of EBPs
- Create a system to keep monitoring what is happening
A system to identify promising programs

The United States and other modern nations should be ready for an experimental approach to social reform, an approach in which we try out new programs designed to cure specific problems, in which we learn whether or not these programs are effective, and in which we retain, imitate, modify or discard them on the basis of their effectiveness on the multiple imperfect criteria available.

- Donald T. Campbell, 1969
## The most downloaded Campbell reviews

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Searching for evidence-based programs

- SAMHSA National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices
- California evidence-based clearinghouse for Child Welfare
- Promising Practices Network
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Model Programs
- Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development
- Correctional Services Accreditation Panel, UK
A system to encourage uptake of EBPs

• Be prepared to change the existing system to support the effective innovation
• Try to resist changing the innovation to fit the existing system
Adding evidence to the Availability Cascade

How can we get a hearing for summarized research on effectiveness of interventions?

• Something bad happens
• The media report on the story
• Public concern is aroused
• Lawmakers are pressured to respond
• Those who counsel prudence and reflection may be sidelined
• The most available responses are not necessarily the best documented

Reference: Daniel Kahneman, Thinking Fast and Slow
A system to keep monitoring what is happening

• Advocate **experimental sequences** of reforms:
  • Reform A with Alternative B available to try next,
  • should an honest evaluation of A prove it worthless or harmful.

• If you commit yourself in advance to the efficacy of the reform, then you cannot afford honest evaluation; favorably biased analyses are recommended.
• Justify the reform on the basis of the importance of the problem, not the certainty of their answer
• Commit to going on to other potential solutions if the one first tried fails.
• Thus a hard-headed analysis of the reform is not a threat.

Reference: Donald Campbell, Reform and Experiment
The policy environment - national and international trends

The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works.

- Barack Obama, First inaugural address
Obstacles

- **Inertia**: resistance to change
- **Investment costs**: costs up front – dividend later
- **The consensus model**: Find a solution everyone can live with
- **Political calculus**: The art of the possible trumps the unpopular but effective correct choice
- **Silos**: resistance to information coming from outside the guild
- **Cynicism**: Acceptance of the herd mentality, against better judgement
- **Time pressure**: time for reflection is scarce in public administration
A comprehensive strategy around implementation and effectiveness

- Acknowledge the problem
- System to identify promising programs
- System to encourage uptake of EBPs
- System to keep monitoring what is happening
Symbiosis

- System to identify promising programs - PLAN
- System to encourage uptake of EBPs - DO
- System to keep monitoring what is happening - STUDY
- Acknowledge the problem - ACT
“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”
1 Thessalonians 5:21

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