



SCHOOL for  
THINKTANKERS

On Think Tanks

# Evidence is not enough: what needs to be done to achieve impact

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Results for Development

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*My own journey, and a disclaimer.*

# Agenda for today

- Previous sessions and our discussion today
- Conversation: how do politics, fake news and lack of trust affect your work?
- Truth, facts: objective, subjective or political?
- Evidence is not enough. So, what is it?
- Evidence in a post-truth world, evidence and politics: a few resources
- Think Tanks/Change Hubs: More important than ever
- Q&A

## A few recommended resources

- Parkhurst, J. (2017). The politics of evidence: from evidence-based policymaking to the good governance of evidence.
- Cairney, Paul (2016). The politics of evidence-based policymaking
- Horton & Brown (2018). Integrating evidence, politics and society: a methodology for the science–policy interface, Palgrave Communications n.4, article 42

Take a look, be critical.



Previous discussions and  
our session

# Keep these in mind during our session

- The role of think tanks – information for incidence, influence of policymakers, but also civil society and public sector.
- Transparency, independence, credibility
- Policy outreach: tracking developments, making materials accessible, building allies
- Patience + Persistence + Consistency
- Strategies to increase your reach: consultations, CoPs, tools and capacity building.

# The challenges we face today

- The pandemic, and the debate on masks, Covid treatments, and vaccines
- Brexit, Trump and the “many of people are sayin’...”
- Credibility crisis, credulity challenge
- Polarization and the temptation of being “neutral”
- Trust in government, trust in institutions
- Manipulation by elected officials and special interests

The challenges were already there: a public health crises maybe made the consequences more striking



Open Question: What are the challenges you and your organization face when engaging different stakeholders so policy is informed by evidence?


Are those challenges...

- Technical
  - Political
  - Perception and biases
  - Ideological
- 
- Have you found ways to overcome those challenges successfully?

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First challenge: Truth defined by the way we see it.

I will propose you a phrase, and please raise your “Zoom” hand if you generally agree with it, use the “Open mouth” icon if you strongly disagree, and do nothing if not sure

*Every people has the government it deserves*

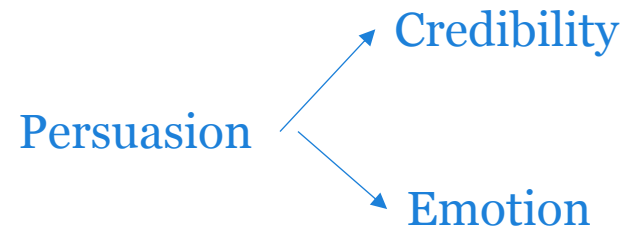
On the chat box, please write who said this, if known

# What is true?

- Should we look at *What is truth*, or how people see it?
  - Objective truth by verification and scientific methods
  - Personal truth by faith
  - Political truth by repetition
- ... think about 1) trickle down economics; 2) nationalism;
- ... then we choose the channel, the media, the source that agrees with us.
- See Leon Festinger's Theory of cognitive dissonance (1957!!!!).

# Can anything be done about it?

*“Facts are facts” – “That’s your opinion”*



- Building a compelling story for what evidence tells us, one that takes into consideration context, social movements
- Get out there, engage people, not only generate evidence, speak for evidence.
- Achieve and sustain that credibility based on transparency and integrity. Be prepared to resist being attacked or dismissed by those on the other side.

Building on this, what  
else can we do?





Second challenge: Selective use of evidence by policymakers, based on their beliefs or self-interest



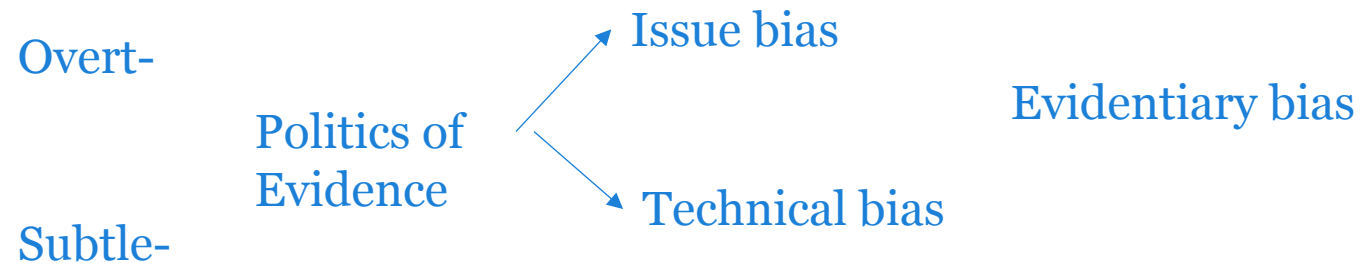
We have  
known for a  
while that  
evidence is  
not enough...

- Evidence-based vs evidence-informed policy: A recognition that research evidence is only one input into a policy decision.
- Typically: Political, social culture, financial concerns, timing, other priorities.
- We hear however very little about special interests, self-interest or corruption. But we know are there.

## A recent debate: mining revenue during Peru's runoff election

- Proposition by candidate K: 40% mining canon assigned to regions should be used for cash transfers to households in area where mine is located.
- K. Economic team points to evidence (cash transfers, cash-for-oil schemes, Alaska...)
- Twitter implodes. Ideological arguments mainly first, slowly voice of experts and researchers emerges.
- Selective use of evidence. But proposal is dismissed because see as populist, not because limited evidence-based.
- Candidate loses.
- Debate forgotten, missed opportunity for a much needed reform.

# Pankhurst framing of politics of evidence



# Can we do anything about it?

- Towards Good governance of evidence informed policymaking
- Frameworks for “appropriate evidence”, which “speaks to the multiple social concerns at stake in a policy decision, constructed in ways in which is most useful for policy goals, and is applicable in the local context.
- [Thinking and working politically]
- Good evidence for policy checks all this boxes and meets high quality standards.
- Legitimacy frameworks for good use of evidence.

## However....

- Most resources seem to assume a democratic environment with minimum conditions for civil society.
- Compare that to the closing of civic space around the world during covid and with governments urged to secure influx of capitals.



The role of Think Tanks in this environment.

# Think Tanks are arguably more important than ever

01

Using their legitimacy and reputation to convene actors around the issues

02

Working together, coordinating when possible

03

Building coalitions for change beyond the single issue they pursue

04

Taking a systems approach to the issues, making the ecosystem needed for proper use of evidence explicit.



Q&A



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