

Evidence, Evaluation and Criminal Justice

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- Different kinds of research activities; different kinds of researchers
- Strategic versus opportunistic commissioning
 - Resources, time, expense, opportunity costs
 - Robustness
 - Independence
- Attribution of outcomes in complex systems (e.g. partnerships)
- Why and how (and replication)[**theory of change**]
- Clarity of purposes (e.g. process, outcome, action research)
- Research as validation... marketing... survival
- Ethical issues
- Aims and objectives; outputs and outcomes; practicalities; dissemination (internal and external)

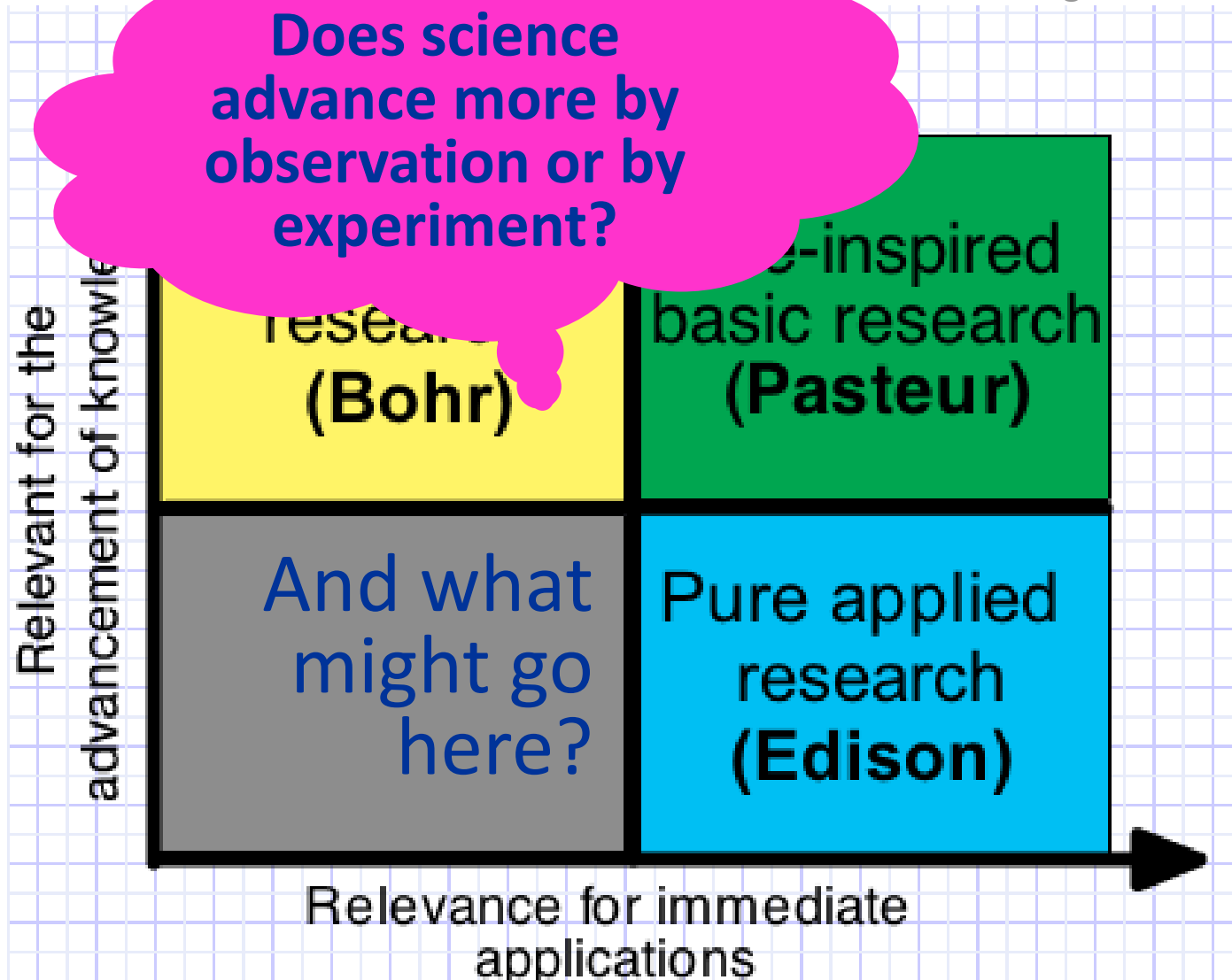
- **Evidencing what works**
 - Problematic in all sectors
- Desistance and problems of individuality, linear causation
- Is the bar getting ever higher?
 - Intermediate outcomes... and quantitative methodologies
 - Gold standard and the Maryland scale
- Anxieties for a sector with limited capacity and funding
- What is proportionate?

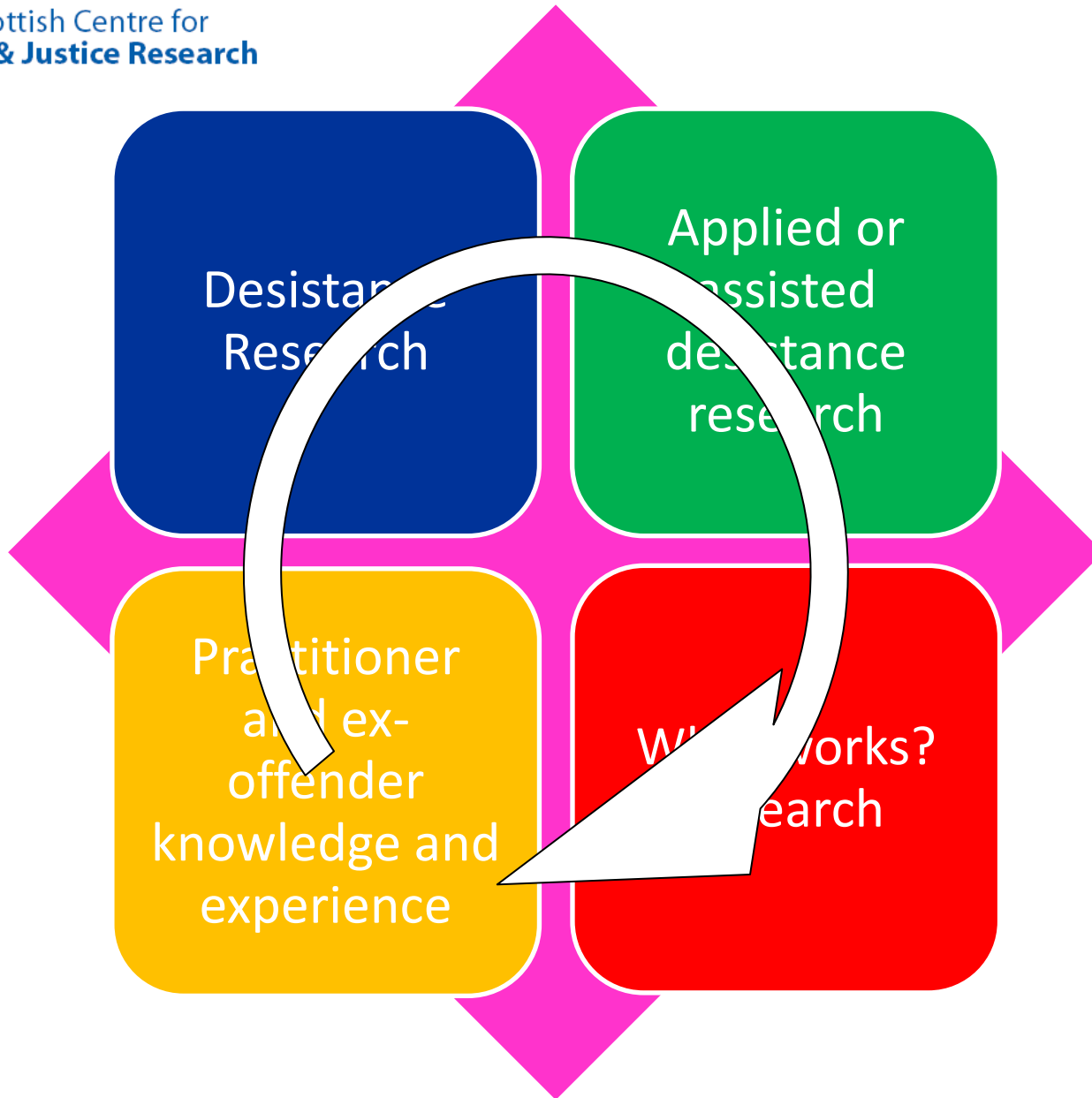
- Years of practice experience... but need for independent validation/verification
- Attribution problems – multiple types of interventions made meaningful to participants
- Range of funders; range of different evidence requirements
 - Mental health (Outcomes star)
 - Criminal justice (NOMS: distance travelled on pathways)
 - Multiple monitoring frameworks (pressures on staff)
- Intervention focus; monitoring focus
 - Problems involving participants in evaluation (processes meaningful to them; burdens imposed on them)
- Objective and subjective; hard and soft; co-production
- **What makes sense to participants and what makes sense to funders**

- **Those things which constitute the value of the VCS are the very things which lead them to take a different view on research and evaluation**
- CJS context
 - Cases not people
 - Competing interests... public accountabilities
 - Resisting demand not welcoming it
- NAO
 - Efficiency and transparency
 - Cost-effective delivery
 - Decisions based on sound intelligence (comprehensive, comparable, hence quantitative)
- VCS
 - Understand users and communities (closer)... individualised/flexible services
 - Delivers outcomes (for people or cases?)
 - Scope for innovation
 - Funding for services, not organisations
- Outcomes, proof... the 'how and why' becomes commercially sensitive
- **VCS/Researchers – Collaborative approach to appropriate comparability?**

- Funders', providers', researchers' expectations
 - Different cultures, values, understandings
 - Knowing what you want (and what you can afford); purposes and limits
- Process, outputs, 'outcomes'
 - Knowing what to value in evaluation
- Evidence criteria and their skewing effects
 - Questions of design and questions of interpretation
 - Risks of over-generalisation (aggregation); neglect of subtleties
- **Criminalisation of social policy**
 - **What is the superordinate objective?**
- **The context of outcomes (difficult vs. easy 'cases')**
 - **Replicability (of what form?) vs. incremental learning**
- VCS distinctiveness vs. cloning
 - The isomorphic disciplines of commissioning

Forms of Research	Key Questions	Disciplines
Critical and Comparative Research (on CJS)	What is the field of CJ? How and why is it constituted as it is are? What purposes does/should it serve?	Sociology, Penology, Socio-legal studies, Philosophy, Politics, Social Policy, Social Work
Evaluative Research (of CJS practices and innovations)	What works for whom in which circumstances? Who works? Why and how?	A wide range of ‘medical’ and social sciences methods
Explanatory Research (for CJS policy and practice)	How can we best account for crime and criminalisation? How can we best understand desistance from crime? What is successful social reintegration?	Sociology, Psychology, Criminology





- Which purposes/outcomes?
- Which evidence?
 - Measuring outcomes (Sellin's dictum)?
 - Producing outcomes or supporting processes?
- Whose evidence?
- See:
<http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/discoveringdesistance/files/2012/09/McNeill-et-al-Final.pdf>

- Reducing Reoffending/Reconviction
 - 'Intermediate' outcomes
- Primary and secondary desistance
 - Behaviour change (but by which compliance mechanism?)
 - Identity (and normative/habitual compliance)
- The end of desistance?
 - The positive goods at which the CJS aims?
 - Integration, inclusion, citizenship?
 - Nothing 'intermediate' about these?
- What about quality-based commissioning?

T1-T2 progress attribution



Non-
contributing,
'failed citizen'

Support services

Contributing
citizen
(socially and
economically)

- Hello. Saw your comment above, that “the word ‘works’ does not ‘work’ when talking about human lives. What does it even mean?” While I know a rhetorical question when I see one, I must answer nonetheless that I can agree with the first but not the second point of the question, and for essentially the same reason. The word ‘works’ certainly means something, and what that is is not hard to discover. Simply: what will have a reliable result? What government expenditure ‘y’ will produce result ‘z’? ‘What set of inputs will produce a consistent set of outputs?’

- Explicating the question this way teases at the larger problem inherent in the research enterprise ‘what works?,’ which is that impersonal forces and persons remain definitionally different, that sociology is not physics – or at least not Newtonian physics, to predict the discrete behavior of objects under stress – because the human is a subject which only violence can reduce to an object. To Martinson’s surprise, his generation decided that violence (mass incarceration) was the only reliable tool to get Newtonian results in a world of stubbornly quantum human individuality.

They solved the non-scientific problem of human choice and freedom by refusing individuals both en masse. They answered his question definitively, at least for his generation. But the question was not meaningless, it was loaded” (Michael Martinson, February 2012)

- Moments of discovery
- Institutional critical moments
- Normative moments?
- Social science research as re-framing social problems, rather than developing ‘fixes’
- [But who funds that stuff...]

- For more information, contact:
 - Fergus.McNeill@glasgow.ac.uk
- Follow the Desistance Knowledge Exchange blog:
 - <http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/discoveringdesistance>