

**PATHWAYS TO IMPACT:
IRISS THROUGH THE LENS
OF CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS**

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SUMMARY: IRISS' PATHWAY TO IMPACT

IRISS is an intermediary organisation with a multi-disciplinary team of 18 core staff and 6 associates. Its work covers a spectrum of activity ranging from the creation and dissemination of resources and the translation of evidence to the co-production of evidence and innovation. These activities are united by IRISS' aspiration to act as a catalyst for change and its long-term goal to support culture change in the design, delivery and experience of social services.

IRISS adopts three approaches in its work: IRISS informs, facilitates/translates, and creates. Other intermediaries in the sector may adopt similar kinds of activity, but at IRISS this work is enabled by its particular modes of engagement. IRISS aims to be open, accessible and responsive to the sector. It seeks to ensure its work is grounded in policy and practice needs and relevant to its audience and collaborators. IRISS uses a design approach in much of its work to co-create new knowledge and innovation (see logic model on p16).

These modes of engagement are pathways to different kinds of change in the sector. Some of IRISS' work contributes to increased capacity in the sector by improving the range of accessible knowledge about policy and practice issues in the social services sector. Through this work, IRISS contributes to an 'enlightenment' model of knowledge into action by adding evidence, insight and practice-based processes and tools which can improve services and support. At the other end of the spectrum, IRISS' work contributes to concrete changes in services and support through the co-design or co-production of new ways of working. In this way IRISS contributes to an 'interactive' model of knowledge into action by collaborating with people, organisations and communities to collectively address issues in their services and support. In the middle of this spectrum, IRISS responds to current issues in policy and practice in the sector and provides responses in the form of practice-relevant tools and resources. In this way, IRISS contributes to a 'translational' model of knowledge into action.

Engagement within these three models can reasonably be assumed to create three kinds of outcomes. In an enlightenment model, IRISS is contributing to widespread increases in the availability of knowledge, evidence and resources in the sector, prompting people to think differently and increase their confidence — but direct links to practice changes are more tenuous. In a translation model, IRISS is contributing to more targeted interventions and supporting practitioners, policy makers and people accessing support with tools to improve services — but long-term embedding of these changes may prove challenging in some environments. In an interactive model, IRISS is contributing to small-scale changes with the potential for long-term embedding and scaling-up — but these interventions take time and have a relatively small reach.

Changes in capacity, knowledge and skills often lead to changes in practice or behaviour. IRISS increases capacity in the sector by making more practice-relevant evidence and information available. IRISS supports individuals to increase their own knowledge and skills through targeted interventions and resources. IRISS also works to reduce the theory to practice gap through more intense, co-produced, projects which seek to test out, embed and scale-up useful changes to policy and practice.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

IRISS is an intermediary organisation and this report reflects an evaluation of ‘intermediary’ activity. As such it deviates substantially from other kinds of evaluation that seek to understand the impact of policy initiatives or service delivery. IRISS’ work is neither policy work - though it is derived and drives policy change, nor is it a service delivery organisation — though it works in partnership with organisations that design and delivery services in Scotland. The term ‘intermediary’ is fitting here since it seeks to bridge the worlds of policy, practice and people accessing support, as well as the worlds of evidence and innovation.

To capture this work, and give an account of its impact, we have had to ‘think outside the box’ in terms of evaluation. For example, I have adapted theoretical frameworks of intermediary work to reflect the breadth of IRISS’ approach. I also modified the logic modelling process to reflect IRISS’ role as an intermediary, a substantial shift from the more traditional ‘research output and reach’ model used in other evaluations. During this evaluation, I was an ‘embedded’ evaluator using observation and participatory approaches to theory-building and data collection.

As the author, it seems appropriate to point out that I have approached this evaluation as a ‘knowledge exchange practitioner’. I have a background in care work, a PhD in policy translation and practical experience in the study of knowledge brokerage, practitioner-led inquiry and evidence-use in the social services in Scotland. This evaluation was conducted through a practitioner-lens. It provides evidence of IRISS’ activities and outcomes so that others in the field can replicate/adapt these approaches. As a practitioner myself, it has been a privilege to discover the many layers of IRISS’ activity.

ABOUT THE EVIDENCE IN THIS REPORT

Evidence in this report is primarily based on 45 interviews and 18 months of observation and participatory evaluation work with IRISS. Some focus groups and questionnaires were also used to generate data. As part of this work IRISS also commissioned a survey of the Scottish social services sector about its reach and impact. This report adopts a broad definition of evidence, echoing IRISS’ own approach, which suggests that there are three kinds of evidence: research evidence, the experience of people accessing support and practitioner wisdom. Following suit, this report makes claims based on three kinds of evidence: (1) the theoretical concepts and empirical findings from IRISS’ expertise in evidence-informed practice, innovation and knowledge media (2) the experience of people accessing IRISS’ resources and (3) the experience of IRISS itself, as practitioners and promoters of evidence-use, innovation and clear, accessible, communication.

In evidencing IRISS impact, the majority of data used in this report has been generated from participants who have worked directly with IRISS. IRISS’ theory of change suggests that it has two kinds of reach. This sample provides robust data on the immediate impacts of IRISS work, but is limited in terms of the intermediate and long-term impact, which is likely to rely on local people, organisations and communities taking the lead in embedding and scaling any useful changes they have made.

CONCEPTUALISING IMPACT

The term 'impact' lacks a clear definition. Within the realm of 'intermediary' organisations, there is no clear understanding of the term and no consensus on the indicators with which to measure it. In a recent evaluation, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) defined impact as: "a positive effect, change or benefit to policy and practice, as well as to wider culture and society, which may include a change in awareness, activity, attitude, behaviour, process or understanding" (2014, p23). Here the JRF draws inspiration from the [2014 Research Excellence Framework](#) (REF) for higher education institutions. There are, however, some limitations to the REF framework, particularly in terms of its application to an intermediary organisation like IRISS.

The concept of 'impact', as articulated in the 2014 REF refers to 'research' impact. Although the definition of impact is wide-reaching, the measurement of impact tends to focus on the 'reach' of an 'output' rather than the outcomes that have been generated. As a result, impact can too often be viewed as an end-stage process, resulting from the transmission of information from one context to another rather than a dynamic, and co-produced, process that has multiple outcomes. For example, the recently completed Research Excellence Framework evaluated the impact of university-led research in terms of the "reach and significance" of peer-reviewed publications in subscription-based journals (see [REF assessment criteria](#)).

The REF's definition of 'impact' has come to dominate theoretical conversations about evidence into action and the impact of knowledge on practice. 154 universities were evaluated under the 2014 REF, which goes some way to explaining the dominance of its terms. In using this definition, universities were asked to value the reach of their work and their engagement with research 'users'. As a result, impact case studies tend to account for 'who' engaged with the research with little analysis of what may have changed, how that change was supported and any risks that may have occurred in using that research. Unlike universities, social services have moved away from 'outputs' to focus on 'outcomes'. By focussing on outcomes for individuals, we shift the focus away from the inputs that make up service delivery and pay attention to the individual experience of the user. This understanding of outcomes supports an ethical principle of empowerment which focuses on engaging and enabling individual citizens over institutionalised processes of welfare provision (Miller 2012).

Social service providers often use an 'outcomes' focus to evaluate their impact (see case studies at [Evaluation Support Scotland](#)). But, there are fewer examples where organisations as a whole, rather than individual services or programmes, have been evaluated (see [Young Scot](#) and [Includem](#) for two notable exceptions). And fewer still, where 'intermediary' organisations have been evaluated for their impact. An examination of the intermediaries with a similar profile to IRISS (CRFR, JIT, NES, Nesta, RiP, RiPfA, SCIE, the Young Foundation) reveals a range of project or programme evaluations, but no organisation-wide articulation of impact. For example, a substantial evaluation was conducted in 2005 of Nesta's Learning Programme (see [evaluation report](#) by the Tavistock Institute). The JRF recently conducted an evaluation of the policy impact

of its Education and Poverty Programme (see [evaluation report](#) at JRF). Given the relative scarcity of alternatives, it is easy to see why the REF definition of impact would become popular.

In this evaluation, I have used Contribution Analysis (CA) as a framework for analysis. Not only does CA focus on outcomes, it pays particular attention to the process through which these outcomes were achieved. This approach addresses the current limits in the conceptualisation of impact by moving beyond the 'output' and 'reach' paradigm. Impact is not viewed as a linear activity with a clear line of attribution from output to impact. Instead, contributions to an outcome are analysed and the mechanisms which lead to that outcome explored. IRISS' own work attempts to develop and advance outcomes-focused ways of working (for example IRISS' [Leading for Outcomes Guides](#)). It is fitting, then, that this approach to evaluation uses an outcomes lens.

CA uses a six-step model to understand the implementation and outcomes of an intervention:

1. Determine the cause-effect issue to be addressed
2. Develop a theory of change and risks/enablers for its success
3. Generate evidence in response to the theory of change
4. Assemble the contribution story, and outline the challenges to it
5. Seek out additional evidence
6. Revise and strengthen the contribution story

Developing a theory of change is a common evaluation tool and there are several models available from which to draw inspiration. At IRISS, we have used a six-step theory of change (or logic modelling) tool which tracks the impact journey from inputs through activities, engagement, reaction, to changes in awareness, skills and practice. At IRISS, [we've used this logic modelling process](#) in project planning, monitoring and final project evaluation in order to understand the rationale for a programme of work, the complexity of activities undertaken and the outcomes that this work aims to achieve.

The CA process is proving successful at IRISS for two reasons. First, it prompts participants to be explicit about the 'why' and the 'how' and helps ensure these are effectively linked to the outcomes we aim to achieve. When working through the CA model, participants are prompted to think of the risks and enablers which might accompany the transition from inputs to outcomes. These prompts help to ensure that the planning and delivery of IRISS's work is robust. When using CA to reflect back on completed projects, these prompts create a space to talk openly about what did and didn't work. Similarly, partners in a project are prompted to talk openly about what works and doesn't work for them. These open and reflective discussions are key to the success of CA.

‘INTERMEDIARY’ ORGANISATIONS

There are a range of organisations in Scotland, the UK and internationally which consider themselves ‘intermediary’ organisations (or a range of terms to suit). [SCIE](#) refers to itself as a ‘knowledge broker organisation’; [JIT](#) uses the term ‘improvement organisation’; the [ALLIANCE](#) is a ‘third sector intermediary’ and there are a range of other terms which float around this field such as ‘purveyor organisation’ ([PART Canada](#)) and ‘i-team’ ([Nesta](#))

IRISS shares harmonies with all of these organisations. Its three core programmes embrace evidence-informed practice, innovation and improvement and knowledge media — but it is unusual for combining these three approaches in one organisation. IRISS bridges the worlds of evidence and innovation. There is a range of organisations, for example SCIE and [CELICIS](#) that seek to make research and evidence more accessible to practice. Similarly, there are organisations like [Nesta](#) and the [Young Foundation](#) which work to support innovation and social change. Each will work to produce knowledge media — videos, interactive websites, easy to read publications. But none of these organisations work across these three domains.

There is a growing interest in the intermediary, and some have tried to create typologies to reflect the kinds of work these organisations undertake. For example, intermediaries with an interest in evidence use have been conceptualised along a spectrum from pushers, brokers to evidence creators. Similarly, intermediaries that focus on innovation, and use design methodologies, have been organised into four categories from provocateurs who prompt to architects who create system-wide change. These typologies are outlined below.

Evidence-use intermediaries:

A – Pushers

- Develop products and portals

B – Brokering Agency

- Translate ‘own’ research – focus on linkage and exchange

C – Brokering Agency

- Translate ‘other’ research – focus on linkage and exchange

D – Evidence Advocates

- Strive to create attitudes, appetites and conditions for evidence use

E – Research ‘into’ practice

- Work collaboratively to facilitate uptake of research evidence

F – Research ‘in’ practice

- Focus on the creation of evidence in practice

G – Fostering networks

- Create and sustain networks in which research evidence is accessed and interpreted

H – Advancing K* strategies

- Build an evidence base for KM through evaluation

([Davies, Powell, and Nutley 2014](#))

Innovation intermediaries

Educators

- Grow innovation capacity in the public sector + act as educators, providing the insights and knowledge needed to empower others inside government to innovate

Enablers

- Engage citizens/partners + act as enablers and work to create conditions for innovation

Developers

- Generate specific solutions to policy and practice 'problems' - act as developers to create innovation

Architects

- Encourage system level change + act as architects, creating the designs and blueprints that others can follow

([Nesta i-teams](#))

To date, there has been no theorisation of the knowledge media role, or the spectrum of activity it might involve. Based on the work of the KM team at IRISS, the following typology reflects the range of ways information, resources and tools are made available for people to use. Sometimes these materials are produced under strict intellectual property rights and are closed to anyone outside of the creators/organisations that developed them. In a similar vein, resources are made available for use — but only to paid subscribers. Resources may be developed for free and disseminated for people to use. As we move across the spectrum, users themselves are encouraged to seek out materials and work to produce the content. Finally, in an open and adaptable model, all material is produced with the intention that it can be bent, broken and re-made according to the user's needs.

Knowledge media intermediaries:

Closed

- Resources/projects only available to a small group of members, e.g. academic journals

Push

- Resources are disseminated through networks with hope that they are useful and used

Pull

- Relationships are developed to encourage the partners to seek out useful resources and organisations develop work collaboratively with partners

Open/Adaptable

- Partners are encouraged to customize resources, all work is user-focused, and perhaps co-produced with partners, support is offered to improve skills

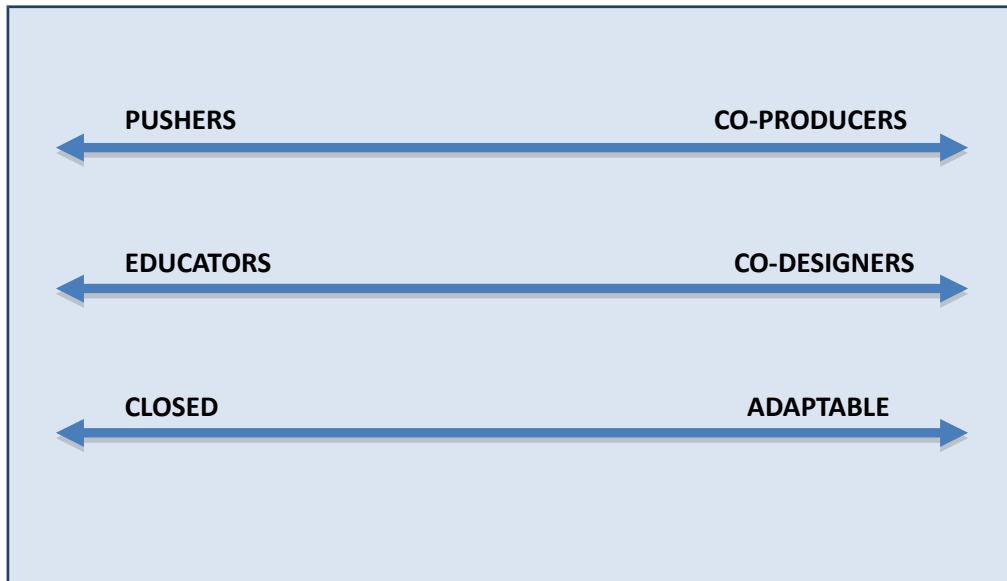
(Stocks-Rankin 2014)

These typologies are, in fact, a re-imagining of some historic work on evidence use produced by Carol Weiss in the 1970s. Weiss conducted ethnographic work with policy makers and practitioners to understand ‘how’ research was used and ‘why’. Her paper ‘the many meanings of research utilization’ suggests that people use research in six typical ways.

1. Evidence use is driven by knowledge itself — new ideas are generated and they lead directly to uptake in policy and practice. Weiss called this the ‘knowledge-driven model’.
2. Second, a ‘problem-solving model’ assumes that people are driven by their need to answer a particular question and seek out answers from research in response.
3. People, researchers, policy makers, and any other people with a stake in the issue, work interactively to frame the issue and produce research together. Weiss called this the ‘interactive model’.
4. The political model in which politicians and other government actors will use evidence that suits their own ideological purpose. In this case research often becomes “ammunition” in a political debate.
5. Research is used to serve tactical purposes — to delay action or provide a smokescreen for policy and practice issues. This is called the ‘tactical model’.
6. The ‘enlightenment model’ — Weiss suggests that this is the most common kind of research utilisation and it reflects the cumulative contribution of a range of studies on a topic as well as the theoretical perspectives that have been advanced.

Key parts of Weiss’ analysis are reflected in the typologies above. For example, the enlightenment model is reflected in the push of dissemination and educator. The problem-solving model of research use is exemplified by the translation-focused brokerage and enabler roles. Likewise, Weiss’ interest in the interactive production of new knowledge and evidence is reflected in the ‘research-in-practice’, developing and architecture models described above.

Three additions to this research are necessary in order to understand IRISS as an intermediary. First, a conceptualisation of the role of knowledge media has been created. Second, the spectrum of evidence-use created by Davies and colleagues has been extended to include a role for co-production and co-design. A considerable limitation of the evidence-use and innovation typologies is their failure to include co-production or co-design. We have remedied that oversight here. Third, the three functions (evidence use, innovation and knowledge media) have been combined. A model of that spectrum might look like the following:



EVIDENCE-USE, INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE MEDIA

IRISS contributes to the transformation of social services through a diverse programme of work that seeks to improve the use of evidence, innovation and knowledge media. In responding to these particular needs for improvement, IRISS seeks to tackle some of the issues associated with translating evidence into practice, innovating and sustaining innovative practices as well as reducing the barriers to digital literacy and participation. The following provides an overview of these particular aspirations and challenges as a way of framing IRISS' work and its contribution.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND PARTICIPATION

Globally, our societies are thought to be moving towards a “knowledge society” ([Unesco 2014](#)), enabled by development of the internet and the accessibility of mobile technologies. According to Unesco, the vision of the “knowledge society” includes the following competencies:

- Conceptual competencies: innovative thinking and problem solving and critical thinking
- Practical competencies: media and information literacy
- Human competencies: social networking skills, virtual collaboration, self management and digital citizenship

There are several barriers to participation, including:

- Motivation
- Confidence
- Affordability of training
- Cost

EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE

The Scottish Government's [Strategy and Action Plan for Embedding Knowledge in Practice in Scotland's Social Services](#) suggests that IRISS and other intermediaries like NES and Social Work Scotland have an important role in connecting “the world of research and knowledge on the one

hand, and the world of day to day practice on the other so that we continue to improve the way we do things” (section 2.3). A recent literature review of evidence and innovation (Pennacchia 2013) suggests that evidence is used in four ways:

- Instrumental - evidence is used in a ‘what works’ approach that aims to provide definitive answers for improving efficiency and accountability
- Conceptual - evidence is used to reframe issues and prompt new ideas
- Interactive - evidence and action are interlinked
- Mixed forms of evidence - a ‘magpie’ approach to evidence in which people draw from different sources, experts and methodological approaches

There are several barriers to evidence use, including:

- Lack of resources, including time
- Culture/attitudes
- Lack of skills/knowledge
- Lack of access

INNOVATION

The [Strategy and Action Plan for Embedding Knowledge in Practice in Scotland’s Social Services](#) also suggests that the “transformation of services” will require social services to build “the capacity for innovation and improvement, moving on from ‘doing what we have always done’ (section 2.2). According to Pennacchia (2013), innovation is used in practice in four ways:

- Radical - a transformational change with clear, measurable, impact
- Moderate - the introduction of something new to a particular context
- Incremental - an evolution of an idea or process within a particular context
- Narrowly defined as positive - innovation is sometimes limited to positive definitions which fails to recognise failure or learning from failure

There are several barriers to innovation, including:

- Resistance to change
- Vested interests
- Lack of engagement
- Risk adverse culture
- Lack of documentation or evidence of the innovation process
- Threat to professional identity or power imbalances

IRISS seeks to address the barriers throughout its work. The following section of the report gives details on IRISS’ theory of change — the way it seeks to improve services, support and outcomes for people in Scotland’s social services.

POLICY AND PRACTICE CONTEXT

As an intermediary, IRISS works with national policy objectives, local policy implementation, statutory, third sector and independent sector services providers and people accessing support. The following section provides an overview of some of the key issues facing those different communities.

NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The social services sector is undergoing a period of radical transformation. New policies in children's services (GIRFEC), older people's services (ReShaping Care for Older People) are occurring alongside wholesale shifts in the way social services are organised (Self-Directed Support and the Integration of Health and Social Care in Scotland). The 2011 Christie Commission looked to these shifts and argued that "unless Scotland embraces a radical, new, collaborative culture throughout our public services, both budgets and provision will buckle under the strain" (pviii). In particular, the report suggests that "addressing these systematic defects will require a fundamental overhaul of the relationships with and between those institutions and agencies – public, third sector and private – responsible for designing and delivering public services" (pviii).

There is now a greater emphasis on collaboration and relationships, particularly between providers of services and people accessing support. The Social Care (Self-Directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 and the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 are just the most recent additions to a wave of policy initiatives that seek to re-imagine the relationship that people have with the State. For example, the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 refashioned some of the oversight of public services to make the planning and delivery of support more effective. It also created new avenues for creativity in social services with the support of Creative Scotland. Similarly, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2014, seeks to support the self-determination of local communities and increase the participation of people in government.

In order to achieve the vision of the Christie Commission and increased collaboration between statutory agencies, service providers and people accessing support, IRISS focuses on three particular areas of improvement:

1. Increasing digital literacy and participation
2. Embedding of evidence in practice
3. Innovative approaches to re-shape services and support.

This approach echoes current Scottish Government policy, such as the [Strategy and Action Plan for Embedding Knowledge in Practice in Scotland's Social Services](#) (2012) which suggests that embedding evidence in practice can be achieved through encouraging staff, de-mystifying technology and supporting continuous learning. Scotland's [Digital Participation action plan](#) echoes the value of encouraging people to learn about the value of technology, with the

aspiration that “all sections of Scottish society are able to make confident use of digital technologies and the internet”.

LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

Interviews with Chief Social Workers in Scotland (CSWO) highlighted a series of challenges facing local policy across the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland. The four most commonly referenced challenges were:

1. Growth in demand for services
2. Reduced budgets and reduction of services
3. Shifting the balance of care into more personalised and community-based services
4. Tectonic shifts of national policy changes such as Self-Directed Support (SDS) and the Integration of Health and Social Care.

These were often followed by examples of specific local challenges, such as low grades in recent Care Inspectorate evaluations or the “ruralness” of their particular regions. Beginning with the most commonly discussed challenges, one CSWO noted that:

“The obvious [challenges] are just growth in demand combined with expectation of more and more care at home combined with the issue basically of our ability to recruit in terms of staffing capacity - when you combine those three factors it means that community-based services are really being stretched quite significantly in terms of both capacity to respond - in particular [our rural geography] also creates a budget pressure - because effectively you’re putting out a service that in terms of unit costing etc isn’t necessarily that efficient - and the big challenge is how you deploy your staff more efficiently” (CSWO/5).

Another CSWO sums up the challenges as follows:

“I certainly think that the challenges that we experience will be the same ones that you’ll be hearing about across the country - the demographic pressures, growing demand on services, general societal pressures leading to upturn welfare-related interventions - people struggling to cope with their circumstances, therefore tipping into behaviours that can require interventions” (CSWO/3).

Most CSWOs noted that the real challenge lies in trying to deal with several larger policy and practice shifts at once:

“So we’ve got financial challenges, and retraction of services, I think a key challenge for us just now is all the change we’re going through. I mean there is a huge number of challenges all happening at the same time. So, for example within adult care there is health and social care integration at the same time as

SDS is being implemented. Either of those is big enough on it's own without throwing in the other one. In children's services you've got the children and young people's bill, you've got GIRFEC, you've got SDS, all of that all happening at the same time as well" (CSWO/8).

Despite these challenges, CSWOs also talked about the assets of their area — often noting the value of their local social services workforce. For example, one CSWO described their local assets as follows: "In terms of assets - I suppose first of all we have an enthusiastic, committed workforce, a relatively well-trained workforce and I suppose linked to that - a committed workforce" (CSWO/8).

But CSWOs also noted that that workforce needs support to transform the service so that it focuses on personal outcomes of people. Confidence and innovation are clear needs for this particular CSWO:

"With every big change, there'll be lots of folk who see the opportunities — which is what you hope for. I think some of the work of innovation can make a big difference and that requires a confidence from the public as well as practitioners. And that approach we're seeing through SDS — going back to listening and engaging and understanding the individual again will make a huge difference in the longer term. So, that ability genuinely to personalise — we just need to get to that practice and be consistent and for staff feeling knowledgeable and skilled to carry it out" (CSWO/4).

IRISS' work is designed to support innovation, increase confidence in evidence-use and enable on-going learning and development (particularly in terms of digital literacy). But practitioners in the sector face particular challenges and often struggle to engage with IRISS in these activities. These challenges are explored in more detail in the next section.

PRACTICE CONTEXT

A recent survey of the Scottish social services reports that 78% of respondents said that a "lack of time in the working week" prevented them from accessing IRISS resources, projects or events.

The most frequently listed challenges facing the sector were:

1. Austerity, budget cuts and lack of resources
2. Cutbacks to services
3. Lack of time
4. Increased workload
5. Addressing integration

Interview participants echo these concerns, providing a more nuanced insight into the inter-relationship between time pressures and austerity/budget cuts. For IRISS, these concerns have particular relevance, since it is within this context that it seeks to create change.

First, within social services, there seems to be a discomfort with taking time away from frontline practice. For example, one of IRISS' Champions notes: "there is a sense that it's not real work unless it's working with people who access support" (IRISS Champion / 2). Another suggests that "your service's needs always take priority" (IRISS Champion / 9). This statement was echoed (almost verbatim) by another Champion: "there is a sense that anything that isn't front-line work isn't 'real work', so it's about making it easy for people to take time out — it needs to fit within their regular work. Practical assurances are what people are looking for" (IRISS Champion / 15).

Second, many practitioners suggest that they face an "information overload". As one Champion notes: "People are caught up in the day-to-day of their practice — they will switch off if they receive stuff that isn't relevant" (IRISS Champion / 6). Similarly another IRISS Champion describes her role in "filtering" IRISS resources to her colleagues: "People don't have time to do that filter themselves" (IRISS Champion / 4). Most Champions described the "volume" of email traffic and the need to focus attention on those with more immediate practice implications. As a result, IRISS' mailing list, project updates and resources all come second to the day-to-day demands of practice.

Third, IRISS Champions also noted the structural changes in their workplace. For example, one Champion noted that her council was undergoing a "re-structuring" in order to enable the integration of the health and social care systems. As a result, the "children and families [department] has been split away from other social work service areas and will now be housed with education and criminal justice" (IRISS Champion / 4). The Champion voiced uncertainty about the future of her role, noting "we don't know where we'll end up". Whilst one council opted to integrate children and family social work services with education, another Champion noted that her council has decided to divide them: "The structure of the Council keeps changing — education and children's services used to be together, now they're separated" (IRISS Champion / 7). This uncertainty can inhibit staff engagement with learning and development opportunities. As one Champion notes, "it's harder to get people to take an interest now" (IRISS Champion / 7).

These challenges are echoed by the survey data. A number of respondents voiced concerns about lowered "morale" in social services. For example, one respondent noted: "Decreasing financial budgets, employment uncertainty, all of which increases the workload of an ever-reducing employment force. This consequently has a strong likelihood of impacting on morale and optimism for change, including lacking time to research good practice". The concern with morale is echoed throughout the survey data. One respondent reports: "A climate of cuts and restructuring affects staff morale". Another notes: "Job losses, low morale of staff asked to undertake more and more tasks leading to greater stress and higher absenteeism rate. Eventual cuts to front line services affecting the wider community".

Within this context of time pressures, structural change and low morale, respondents report a limited capacity to engage with learning, evidence or innovation. For example, one respondent notes: "As staff numbers are reducing, staff portfolios are extending which means that ability to accept invitations from organisations trying to help is limited". Another respondent shows the inter-relationship between budget cuts and the limitations for people who want to learn on the

job: “Austerity measures, budget cuts, staff turnover and low pay in some sectors and grades — needing to invest in staff training yet in some cases unable to guarantee longevity of posts. There are so many changes in the structures of social services — means there’s risk of staff burnout”. Respondents suggested that limited capacity to engage in learning and development is linked to budget cuts, structural changes and reductions in staff.

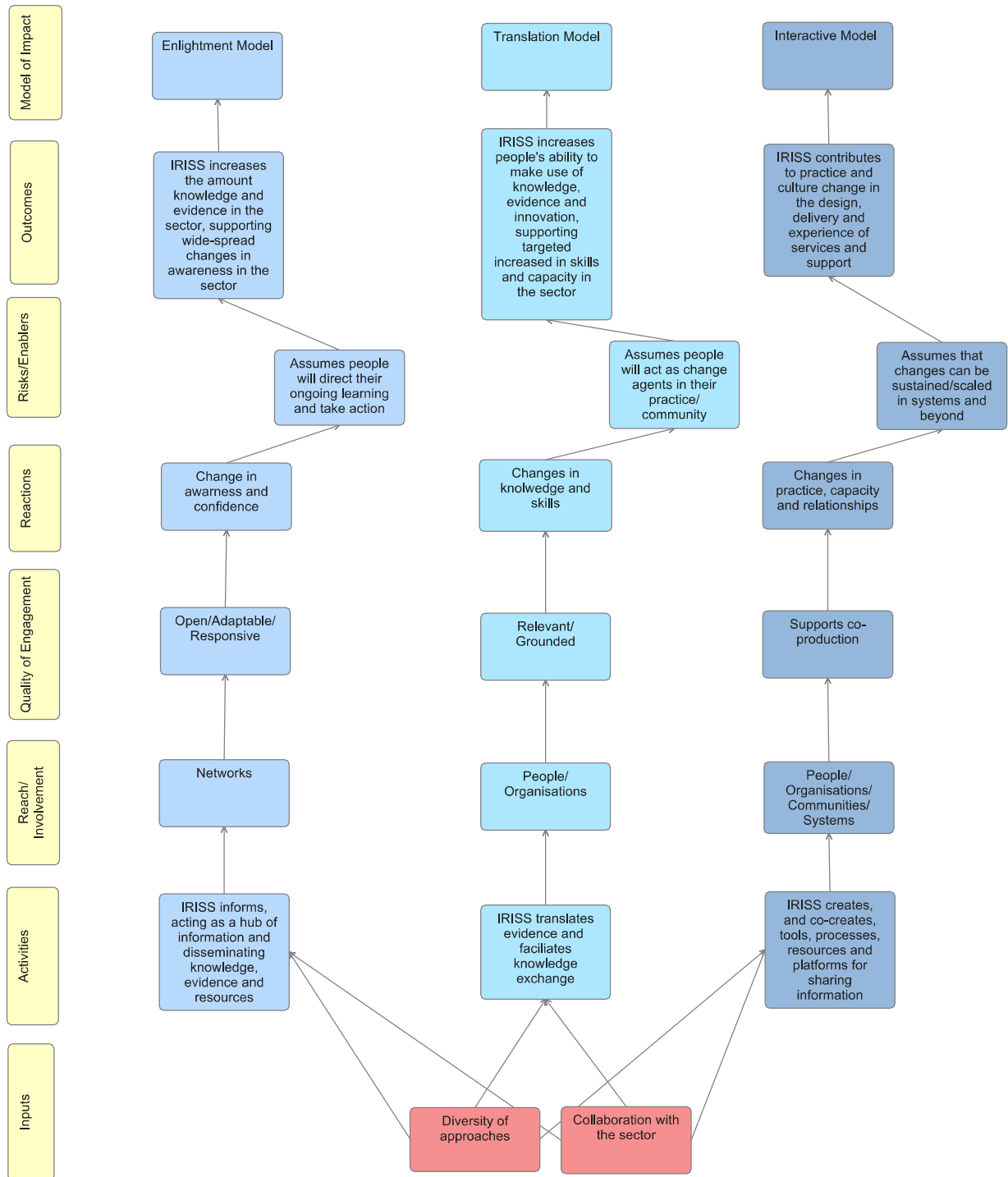
In this context of low capacity and structural change, IRISS seeks to support people to make changes that will improve the design, delivery and experience of social services in Scotland. In order to do this, IRISS adopts a three-part approach: IRISS informs, IRISS facilitates/translates and IRISS creates. These approaches reflect the diversity of IRISS’ skills as well as current thinking in the fields of knowledge mobilisation, evidence-use, innovation and digital participation. The following section describes IRISS’ theory of change — including:

- The resources IRISS brings to its work
- The activities that are undertaken
- The way IRISS reaches the sector
- The quality of its engagement
- Reactions to this work, and
- The changes and outcomes that result

This theoretical framework was developed in collaboration with IRISS over an 18-month period. It reflects a concentrated effort to make explicit the otherwise implicit aspects of IRISS’ work and its multi-disciplinary approach to improving social services in the sector.

As described in the methods section at the end of this report, the use of Contribution Analysis has provided an invaluable framework for understanding impact — however, mapping and evaluating an entire organisation’s activity was no easy feat. This research uses a ‘grounded’ approach to ensure that all findings are rooted in the experience of IRISS staff and the participants in IRISS projects. Furthermore, this evaluation uses an ‘appreciative’ lens to discover the implicit aspects of IRISS’ work and impact and collectively imagine the directions it might take in future. For more information on the methods used in this research, please see pages 59-70.

DETAILED ORGANISATION-WIDE LOGIC MODEL



INTRODUCTION

IRISS aims to contribute to the improvement of social services in Scotland, with a particular focus on embedding knowledge sharing, evidence-use and innovation in practice and the improved outcomes of people accessing services and support. From IRISS' perspective, these changes will contribute to culture change in the design, delivery and experience of social services in Scotland. Culture change requires changes in awareness, new knowledge and skills as well as new ideas and innovative practice change.

To that end, IRISS undertakes a spectrum of activity:

1. Wide-reaching dissemination to provide information, evidence and inspiration to the sector
2. Targeted translation and facilitation to enable knowledge exchange
3. Place-based inquiry that tests and scales-up improvements to services and support.

These activities contribute to three kinds of impact:

1. IRISS adds valued information, evidence, insight and provocation to Scottish social services sector, ensuring that this work is accessible, creative, and reflective of diverse experiences (including practice wisdom, experiences of people accessing support, policy makers and academics)
2. People who engage with IRISS identify a change in perspective and gains in knowledge, skills and capacity
3. IRISS has contributed to practice changes and culture change in the sector as well as the achievement of individual outcomes for people who participate in its work.

In order to provide evidence for IRISS' impact, this section of the report uses a theory of change framework to illustrate the pathway from IRISS resources, its activities, the quality of its engagement with the sector and the changes that it enables. A robust theory of change should include:

- A causal chain, showing the logic of the organisation and its work
- The assumptions which drive this work
- Risks and enablers to the success of this work
- A discussion of context and other contributing factors, or unintended side-effects, to these impacts (Mayne 2012, pp.273–274)

For the reader, this theory of change should follow a linear narrative (though of course, in practice, its hardly a linear journey!). The theory of change begins with IRISS' inputs, and then describes the kinds of activity that IRISS undertakes. This is followed by evidence on the quality of IRISS' engagement and reaction that people have to its work. An account of IRISS' reach in the

sector follows next, which leads on to evidence of the change. IRISS enables changes in awareness, knowledge, skills and practice — each of these are addressed here. Finally, a discussion of some of the long-term impacts concludes the theory of change. At each stage, an overview of IRISS' work is depicted, evidence supplied and risks and enablers examined.

Although IRISS' work is multi-faceted, this evaluation simplifies and clarifies these activities into three approaches (inform, facilitate/translate and create), which tend to lead to three kinds of outcomes (changes in awareness, changes in knowledge and skills, and changes in the culture and practice and experience of social services). By simplifying IRISS' work in this way, I hope that some general trends, risks and enablers can be communicated. There are a number of similarities across the three programme areas (EiP, KM and I+I) and a range of common risks and enablers to this work. This theory of change simplifies in favour of creating an explanation for IRISS activities and the impact they create.

IRISS' RATIONALE FOR IMPROVING SOCIAL SERVICES IN SCOTLAND

What is the issue that IRISS, as an organisation, seeks to address? IRISS seeks to close the gap between knowing and doing, assuming that more knowledge and more innovation will lead to improvements in the design, delivery and experience of social services. It adopts different theoretical starting points in addressing that knowledge-to-action gap — sometimes beginning with the action and learning along the way; at other times starting with the information and the evidence as a springboard into practice change.

In addressing this issue, IRISS seeks to contribute to three mid-level outcomes:

1. Embed a culture of collaboration, open to new ideas
2. Ensure everyone has the knowledge, resources and skills to effectively use evidence and to innovate
3. Place people at the centre of the design of services and support

In working to deliver these three outcomes, IRISS seeks to support a culture change in the design, delivery and experience of social services in Scotland. To achieve this vision, IRISS suggests that it acts as a catalyst —prompting, supporting and co-creating change for people who design, deliver and access social services and support.

IRISS' work reflects a spectrum of activity —sharing to creating, showing to experiencing, prompting to co-creating. This spectrum is reflective of the work of intermediaries in both the knowledge to action fields as well as those in the innovation and improvement arena. As described above, evidence on intermediaries shows a spectrum from educate and push to co-produce and systems-change.

This spectrum of activity reflects a set of assumptions in IRISS' work:

1. First, knowledge and ideas need to be shared widely and made accessible to people across the sector. IRISS uses creative communication processes and works to ensure all its events and information are easy to access.
2. Second, IRISS assumes that the sector needs innovative and evidence-informed resources that address practice-relevant issues. IRISS collaborates, brokers and translates knowledge and ideas so that its activities and outputs are relevant to the sector's needs.
3. Third, IRISS assumes that social services in Scotland need more co-produced understanding of issues, co-created evidence and co-designed tools and processes that reflect a wide-range of perspectives. IRISS works to test ideas with people, organisations and communities. Where these ideas are successful, IRISS works to scale-up these tools and processes.

During this CA evaluation, staff at IRISS and I worked together to develop organisation-wide theories of change — to make these assumptions more explicit and track them through staff's work. We concluded that the activities tend to reflect a spectrum from acting as 'hub' of information and resources which draws people in, to dissemination of materials which pushes information out, on to building of new knowledge and resources and ending in the co-production of tools and processes for improving social services. This spectrum is reflected in the [IRISS Strategy for 2015-2018](#) and has proved to be a useful sense-making device both for staff and collaborators who wish to understand the organisation.

When we drill down a little deeper, we can see the diversity of work at IRISS is reflected across the organisation's theory of change — from activities, engagement and the outcomes it achieves. To that end, this report uses a more detailed theory of change, and a more nuanced logic model — encapsulating the ways the organisation's diverse approaches are reflected in the outcomes it achieves as well as the risks it encounters.

WHAT RESOURCES DO IRISS STAFF BRING TO THEIR WORK?

IRISS staff have a diverse range of skills. A brief summary of their multi-faceted knowledge and skill would note that IRISS are experts in the development of new media, the translation of knowledge and evidence to new settings, expert facilitators and innovative designers.

More specifically, it is worth highlighting that these skills include the ability to programme in PHP, XML, HTML5 and Drupal, allowing them to build websites, repositories of information like the Learning Exchange and interactive media like the iPad App Witty. Staff also have skills in social design and expertise in using creative methodologies to support innovative changes to the design, delivery and experience of services. Still others have particular skills in communication, data visualisation and knowledge management. Or topic specific expertise in particular areas of social services such as outcomes, culture change, older people's services, young people leaving care, homelessness and so on.

In addition to these skills, IRISS tends to work in collaboration across its projects. For example, IRISS works with people accessing support, providers, and practitioners in its co-design work. IRISS includes a range of experiences — academic expertise and practice wisdom as well as the experiences of people accessing support — in its blogs and podcasts. IRISS worked with practitioners to develop the Leading for Outcomes Guides, academics to produce the IRISS Insights and graphic artists in the development of the IRISS ONs.

RISKS AND ENABLERS FOR THESE RESOURCES:

There are harmonies between IRISS skills and the expertise of collaborators in the sector. IRISS has abilities in design, knowledge exchange, evidence translation, facilitation and communications. Collaborators tend to have practice-based expertise or lived experience in the delivery of social services. The complementary nature of these resources encourages collaboration in the sector. As one of the IRISS Champions notes: IRISS' work complements our work — it focuses on what we do, but brings different skills. There's the same focus on relationships and supporting people but what you're good at is drawing together all the sources and bringing it together and drawing in different expertise" (IRISS Champion / 14).

Although IRISS seeks to work in partnership and collaborates with different people/organisations in the sector, staff note that the organisation tends to "work with the willing". From IRISS' perspective, willingness, and 'readiness' on the part of collaborators is an enabler for successful project outcomes. At present, 'readiness' is ill defined — though it likely reflects both capacity for project work (time and resources) as well as capacity for sustained investment beyond the project lifecycle. More could be done to define readiness and ensure expectations are made clear across diverse members of a project.

In addition, working with the 'willing' is likely an enabler to the local relevance of projects (since they have likely been designed collaboratively with partners), it may pose a risk to national relevance and scale-ability. IRISS will need to ensure continued dialogue amongst its network to ensure relevance of its local projects.

WHAT DOES IRISS DO?

IRISS undertakes three kinds of work:

1. Inform
2. Facilitate and translate
3. Create

The strength of this three-pronged approach lies in the interaction between the three activities. Informing work tends to be based on the knowledge, evidence and innovation produced through creative work. Likewise, scaling-up of creative work tends to rely on some level of translation and dissemination through IRISS' informing work. Similarly, the work that IRISS does to facilitate, creating a productive space for people to learn and test out new ideas, creates strong relationships and ensures that its informing work has a strong audience. The interplay between these activities strengthens IRISS' outputs by ensuring that information is based on creative work

to develop knowledge and test ideas in practice, and translated to ensure its relevance to practice.

INFORM

- IRISS sends resources out — through its mailing list, twitter feed, blogs, podcasts and Champions network
- IRISS also draws people in — using a variety of creative ways to learn and share

IRISS does more than disseminate. Sending information out is one way to view informing work. IRISS augments these more traditional dissemination activities by creating/using platforms for people to engage in knowledge sharing. For example, IRISS' websites, the Learning Exchange, IRISS' blogs, its use of LinkedIn for the Champions network are all examples of web-placed platforms that draw people in, offering them a variety of resources.

In 2014, IRISS communicated on a regular basis with 2300 people on its mailing list, made an average of 55 tweets reaching an average of 75,000 users on twitter per month and ran 60 different communications campaigns around its work (e.g. the Achieving a Better Life for Older People workshop, new animation of the Hospital to Home project and the 'IRISS On... Failure' publication). IRISS actively blogs about its projects, aspiring to be honest about the aspirations and challenges as well as the outcomes of its work. Active project blogs tend to be updated an average of twice a month and often include reflections from project participants (for example, IRISS' [Hospital to Home](#) blog). IRISS also blogs about [evidence-use](#), [innovation](#) and [digital participation](#), sharing theoretical as well as practical insight into the value of these approaches for improving social services in Scotland.

People also seek information from IRISS. For example, IRISS' main website received 417,000 page views over the year. Some of IRISS' digital resources were particularly popular. For example, IRISS' Learning Exchange received 100,000 views; IRISS' Blogs received 57,000 views; and IRISS' Social Assets in Action project (with East Dunbartonshire CHP) received 47,000 views. IRISS.fm episodes were downloaded approximately 4000 times. IRISS also receives a number of requests for information and support through its 'general enquiries' email. Statistics on these general requests are difficult to generate, but 25 of these requests were circulated amongst the team to crowd-source an appropriate response. Many more (uncounted) requests for information are made to IRISS staff individually, reflecting IRISS' ongoing relationships with people in the sector.

IRISS presents information at conferences and workshops. While there are no official statistics on this work, here are some examples from 2014: IRISS ran a series of workshops at the Annual Scottish Social Services Expo and Conference in March; presented its co-design and co-production work at the 3rd National Co-production Conference in April; engaged in debate about innovation at the National Conversation on the Future of Social Innovation in Scotland in May; gave a presentation at the Digital Scotland Festival in June; and presented on creative care and support for Highland Council's Third Sector Seminar Series in July. IRISS also launched new web platforms: Creative Quarter, Research Unbound and Hospital to Home in 2014.

IRISS has a Champions Network of practitioners based in local government, the third sector and private sector organisations. Although IRISS has higher aspirations for the Champions role and hopes that these individuals will create opportunities for collaboration and practice change, one of the central functions of the Champions Network is to disseminate IRISS information and resources. Champions often act as ‘filters’ for IRISS’ materials, funnelling them to relevant departments or individual colleagues who may be interested. Sometimes Champions will use IRISS resources to support learning and development in their organisation — though this seems to be a less frequent element of the role and there are only a few examples of Champions making use of IRISS materials in a discussion group or training event. Where these examples lead to practice changes, there are strong enablers such as a well-resourced learning and development team, a culture of learning in the organisation or a high-profile policy objective.

RISKS AND ENABLERS TO INFORMING WORK

This approach is underpinned by a central assumption: knowledge and ideas need to be shared widely and made accessible to people across the sector. In adopting this approach, IRISS draws inspiration from theories on social learning. First, IRISS is inspired by social learning, which values an experiential approach to learning and emphasises ‘know-how’ as much as ‘know-what’. IRISS is also inspired by a horizontal approach to teaching and learning that emphasises the exchange of knowledge over a more traditional, and limited, hierarchy of student/teacher. The increasing value of web-based networks for information sharing (i.e. social media) is also a significant driver in IRISS’ approach. In this way, IRISS aspires to model the ‘many-to-many’ communication of the Web 2.0 and its promotion of crowd-sourced collaboration and innovation.

There are two primary risks to IRISS’ ‘informing’ work. First, there is limited capacity in the sector, both in terms of resources and the technical barriers to accessing web-based information. Currently, 8/10 practitioners report that they have limited time to access IRISS resources (IRISS survey). Second, there is a risk that IRISS’ ‘informing’ work is limited by its reach in the sector. At present, IRISS is recognised by 68% of the social services sector (according to representative survey of the sector). Within that 68%, only 24% say they use IRISS resources regularly and a further 27% say they’re aware of IRISS but don’t use its resources or engage in its activities. People who work with IRISS tend to provide robust data validating its work. As IRISS continues to work with the sector, it will likely build up these relationships, but more could be done to ensure an increasing visibility.

In order to create changes in the design, delivery and experience of social services, this approach assumes that people will direct their own learning and take action to make changes. There is a wide gap between knowledge and action in this model. But the reach is high and offsets some of IRISS’ more targeted and place-based activity. IRISS’ contribution to ‘enlightenment’ outcomes can be difficult to trace. It is often one in a range of contributors working together to create cultural shifts in social services. Evidence is most robust at the point of changing awareness. Over time, this may lead to more concrete changes in culture - though even these are more easily traced at an organisational level, rather than in the system as a whole.

FACILITATE AND TRANSLATE

- Translation is reflected in a variety of activities: IRISS translates complex information into creative and accessible media, research evidence into policy and practice-relevant summaries, and local innovations are developed into universal tools for use across Scotland and beyond
- Facilitation work is reflected in IRISS work to broker relationships, its role as a “lynchpin” in its Champions Network and the role it plays to support people to develop their knowledge and skills (often through events and workshops, but this is also a feature of long-term project work)

One of the strongest examples of translation work is the IRISS Insights which convert complex research evidence into short, easy to digest, implications for policy and practice. Likewise, the [Leading for Outcomes Guides](#) translated evidence on outcomes-focused practice into toolkits for use in practice. The [Fit for the Future Project](#) translated evidence from projects with 18 social care providers to develop learning resources for people providing support to older people. Similar translations are apparent in other IRISS outputs, such as the [‘Pick n’ Mix’](#) video for the Pilotlight project, which summarises and simplifies the complexity of SDS into an accessible translation of information.

Recently, IRISS has started to translate knowledge, evidence or information for different audiences within the social services sector. For example the Plan P project on preventing loneliness and social isolation in older people produced two different outputs: (1) an [IRISS Insight](#) for social work practitioners and policy makers, translating key debates and evidence into a short, digestible, summary and (2) a set of [prompt cards](#) for people delivering support. The prompt cards are visual representations of the key points from the Insight and reflect IRISS’ attempt to produce information for the busy world of front-line practice.

IRISS often acts as a neutral intermediary and lynchpin in a project or network. For example, IRISS takes responsibility for bringing the Champions Network together. IRISS supports the network to maintain contact throughout the year and enables people to develop new relationships and insights into practice and the connection to relevant resources and information. The value of ‘networking’ is one of the strengths of this network for Champions. As one Champion notes: “it’s lovely to have the more formal inputs - presentations, etc. - you need that, but the networking is really valuable - it’s good to see people on a regular basis” (C4). This sentiment was echoed by other Champions who noted the value of “meeting similar types of people across different roles” and the ability to “share and learn from others” (C8). For this Champion in particular, the networking was valuable so that “when you’re frustrated you can share that with like-minded people” (C8).

IRISS also acts as the central facilitator in project-specific networks. For example, IRISS staff were the primary facilitator between the NHS, local government and third sector organisations in the first phase of the Social Assets in Action project. Similarly, IRISS staff are the hub between practitioner-researchers, mentors, workshop hosts, the University of Edinburgh and IRISS on the PROP2 project. Projects like Hospital to Home, Fit for the Future, and Pilotlight follow a similar model. In each case, IRISS is the prime intermediary between groups of people in a network,

both creating and maintaining the links. In addition, IRISS acts as a facilitator at events and workshops, often prompting praise for its careful work to ensure equitable participation: “Thanks again [IRISS] - I always learn something new when co-facilitating with you as you are a skilled facilitator- particularly in terms of remaining neutral; allowing the group to find its own solutions; and remaining positive and focused on solutions — awesome!” (Sunshine File).

RISKS AND ENABLERS TO FACILITATION/TRANSLATION WORK

The facilitation and translation approach is underpinned by a central assumption: IRISS assumes that the sector needs innovative and evidence-informed resources that address practice-relevant issues. In this approach, IRISS is contributing to more targeted interventions and supporting practitioners, policy makers and people accessing support with tools to improve services and support. Translation outcomes reflect the particular practice issues that IRISS seeks to address and the communities of people who are in need of new, practice-relevant, information/resources.

The reach of this work depends on the practice issue (Leading for Outcomes versus PROP projects) - some connect to changes at local level, addressing challenges in creating action from knowledge gain, but long-term embedding of these changes may prove challenging in some environments.

At IRISS, facilitation and translation are enabled by the organisation’s broad definition of evidence and its effort to include diverse perspectives. IRISS values practice wisdom and the experiences of people accessing support as well as peer-reviewed research evidence. This broad view of evidence is complemented by IRISS’ efforts to include diverse perspectives in its outputs and project activity. IRISS works to diversify the knowledge base and widen the conversation about issues facing the social services in Scotland.

But, there is a risk that IRISS relies too much on those people/organisation who have the capacity to participate. There may be an issue with representativeness in IRISS’ work. More could be done to ensure that the knowledge and evidence which is translated and the people who engage in facilitation are reflective of the wider issues facing social services in Scotland.

CREATE

- IRISS produces platforms to share information, iPad apps, and toolkits.
- IRISS generates new knowledge — through reflection, research and innovation
- IRISS co-designs new processes and tools for service delivery
- IRISS works to enable the conditions for scaling-up these ideas, tools and processes

In 2014, IRISS built three new websites — Pilotlight, Hospital to Home and Creative Quarter. IRISS developed a toolkit for running [Experience Labs](#). IRISS produced 43 [IRISS.fm](#) episodes with participants from across the sector. IRISS supported collaborators to produce four [IRISS Insights](#). IRISS wrote three [IRISS ONs](#), co-designed four new pathways for self-directed support and produced a [suite of resources](#) to enable successful use of SDS across the sector. IRISS developed two interventions to improve the hospital discharge process for older people and collaborated with animators to produce a [visual explanation](#) of this process. IRISS tested out new approaches

to person-centred support through two [Social Services Labs](#). IRISS also continued its work to scale-up assets-based approaches in East Dunbartonshire CHP.

IRISS generates new knowledge about the social services in Scotland. IRISS has produced a range of research reports on key issues facing the sector. For example, the recent report titled [The Impact of Welfare Reform on Third Sector Care and Support Services](#) was produced in partnership with CCPS and authored by an ESRC intern at IRISS. A similar report, also authored by an ESRC intern explores the [relationship between evidence and innovation](#). IRISS has also distilled research on the factors that support [integrated working between health and social care services](#). IRISS also evaluates its work. For example, formal evaluations have been conducted on the [first phase of the Social Assets in Action project](#) and the [Evaluation Exchange](#) project.

New knowledge is often generated through IRISS' project work where an in-depth analysis of the evidence and a robust accounting of methodology are used to expand our knowledge of issues facing the sector. For example, the Keeping it Personal project uses a co-production approach to support the integration of health and social care services. IRISS reviewed the evidence about co-production and provided a succinct summary of the rationale and methodology in a [blog post](#). Similarly, IRISS' project on prevention, Plan P, examined the evidence base on the need for preventative approaches in social services (see [blog post](#)). Likewise, the PROP project reviewed and summarised the literature on practitioner-led research (see [blog post](#)). Project reports are often produced in order to summarise new knowledge and learning from the project. For example, there are reports on [public social partnerships in commissioning, improving research use in the third sector](#), and [context-based learning through the use of digital technology](#).

IRISS also works to co-create knowledge and action. These projects aim to ensure a variety of experience is included in the co-production, assuming that this diversity ensures that the knowledge and resources produced will be robust. For example, the Pilotlight project uses co-design to design new tools for the improvement of services and the experience of support (see description of [co-design](#) on the Pilotlight website). Similarly, the [Social Services Labs](#) were designed to help people accessing support and practitioners test a new way of working, with the hope that they would change their patterns of communication. The Social Assets in Action project also used creative processes to test out assets-based approaches to mental health support. Collaboration was undertaken with groups of practitioners from across health, social work and the third sector and also included people accessing support. These projects work across traditional divisions in the social services sector to enable the production of new knowledge and action.

RISKS AND ENABLERS TO IRISS' CREATIVE WORK

This approach is underpinned by a central assumption: IRISS assumes that social services in Scotland need more co-produced understanding of issues, co-created evidence and co-designed tools and processes that reflect a wide-range of perspectives. IRISS works to test ideas with people, organisations and communities. Where these ideas are successful, IRISS works to scale-up these tools and processes. But these interventions take time and have a relatively small reach. As a result, these place-based innovations have a comparatively shallow reach, relying instead on

the translation of tools and processes to other contexts and an information campaign to share the lessons learned.

At IRISS, creative work is enabled by the combination of skills and knowledge in the organisation. IRISS staff have the skills to develop new media, co-design new ways of working and translate innovations, information and evidence to ensure relevance across the social services in Scotland. IRISS' creative work is also enabled by its interaction with the social services sector. Co-design and co-production are enabled by the knowledge, skills, time and enthusiasm from partners in the sector. Similarly, generative work is often a product of collaborative projects which rely on the investment (in terms of capacity, financing and skills) of people and organisations. Likewise, some of IRISS' generative work has been enabled by funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which has supported short-term research internships and some medium-term research projects (e.g. PROP).

There are also risks to creative work. Any creative work that involves people from the sector carries a risk that the investment of their time, knowledge and skills will not be borne out by the outcomes of the project. Given the pressures on capacity in the sector, there are risks that time away from practice to test ideas, generate new evidence or collaborate on the production of outputs will detract from the delivery of services and support. In co-designed work, there is also a risk that innovations to practice will not be adopted by the organisation/community. The careful work of co-design can produce exciting solutions, but the context of service delivery is an important factor in the successful implementation of these ideas. Leadership and buy-in within service providers and the statutory sector is a necessary part of the co-design process. Failure to adopt some aspect of the prototypes proposed can undermine the process itself, reducing the trust that has been generated between diverse groups of practitioners, providers and service-users. In undertaking a co-design process, brokering organisational and community buy-in are necessary parts of this overall set of activities.

WHO DOES IRISS WORK WITH?

IRISS notes that its primary working relationships (or audience) has been the social services 'workforce'. The culture of social services has shifted to include more personalised support and a greater recognition of the work that informal carers do within the system. In response, IRISS has broadened its definition of 'audience' to include anyone who accesses or provides support as well as anyone involved in the design, delivery or analysis of social services. Thus, IRISS' potential range of involvement is wide, as it places no internal limits on its reach. Reach is only the first indicator of involvement. Respondents were also asked about their engagement with IRISS. 50% of the social services workforce report that they have used IRISS resources, with a top-slice of 16% reporting that they use IRISS resources "regularly" in their work.

As part of this research, IRISS commissioned a survey of the Scottish social services workforce. According to that survey, IRISS is recognised by 68% (according to a representative survey) of the workforce. For a relatively small intermediary of 18 staff, 68% recognisability indicates a more than adequate reach. Respondents also indicated their familiarity with IRISS' specific aims to

promote evidence-use (43%) and innovation (61%). When compared with other ‘purveyors’ of evidence and innovation, only the SSSC, Care Inspectorate and local authority were more recognisable than IRISS. It is worth noting that the SSSC and Care Inspectorate have regulatory functions and local governments have statutory responsibilities — each of which is likely to increase their recognisability compared with other intermediary organisations.

Case study and observation evidence suggests that IRISS might consider its reach/involvement with the sector in three ways:

1. Networks
2. People and organisations
3. People, practitioners, systems and communities

These three ‘kinds’ of involvement reflect IRISS’ three approaches:

1. Inform,
2. Facilitate/translate
3. Create

In informing work, IRISS is often participating in a networked mode of communication — disseminating through its mailing list, uploading podcasts to IRISS.fm, providing open access to research and information through its websites, the Learning Exchange and so on. Even when IRISS staff present at conferences or meet with an IRISS Champion, they are participating in a network. Here, IRISS assumes that its links with the network are part of an information-sharing exercise. Thus, IRISS’ engagement is often more shallow — focusing a more linear information transfer.

Translation and facilitation work is much more targeted. When IRISS translates, it is working with particular communities or kinds of knowledge and finding ways to move the information from one area to the other. Similarly, facilitation relies on IRISS’ ability to work with particular groups of people and ensure that they are enabled to share and learn together. When working in this way, IRISS may build close relationships with particular collaborators (e.g. academic authors of the Insights, collaborators on IRISS.fm, practitioners on the PROP project). Instead of a wide-reaching information transfer within a network, IRISS establishes more in-depth relationships with particular people and their local community of practice. Here, IRISS assumes that the relationships it develops will enable successful facilitation and translation. IRISS also assumes that individuals will continue that facilitation/translation process with their organisation.

In creative work, particularly co-produced work, IRISS’ work is place-based and thus it tends to involve a wide range of people. Practitioners from different organisations, people accessing support, carers, and communities are often involved in the creative process. This kind of work tends to require a large investment of time and resource for IRISS. Staff on the project will work closely with participants to co-produce the project and create the conditions for sustainability after the project is complete. This kind of involvement tends to involve some form of embedded working. IRISS assumes that the interactive process of co-production will lead to short-term

(positive) outcomes for participants and establish the groundwork for service improvement and culture change.

RISKS TO IRISS' REACH

According to the survey, IRISS is reaching more “managers” than people engaged in the delivery of services and support (28% vs. 19%). Similarly, less than 20% of the interview participants for this CA research worked in frontline practice. On the one hand, managers may be best placed to create strategic change, but there are risks that IRISS’ projects, materials and insights are not reaching the full range of staff in social services. Limited use (or perceived usefulness) with frontline practice could have long-term implications for IRISS’ relevance and trust in the sector (both of these are enablers for engagement, as I go on to discuss in the next section).

Another risk is contextual. 78% of survey respondents said that a “lack of time in the working week” prevented them from accessing IRISS resources, projects or events (based on a representative response). The most frequently listed challenges facing the sector are:

1. Austerity, budget cuts and lack of resources
2. Cutbacks to services
3. Lack of time
4. Increased workload
5. Addressing integration

These barriers are echoed by qualitative interview data, which suggests that practitioners face (1) a discomfort with engaging with information, evidence or innovation as it is not perceived as ‘real work’, (2) information overload and (3) uncertainty and structural changes in their organisation.

HOW DOES IRISS ENGAGE WITH OTHERS IN THE SECTOR?

There are other organisations that inform, create, facilitate and translate. What’s different about IRISS’ approach?

IRISS’ engagement is:

1. Open, adaptable and responsive
2. Supportive
3. Encourages co-production

This is the spectrum of IRISS engagement — from open and adaptable ‘push/pull’ engagement that informs, supportive approaches that translate knowledge between fixed points in the system, to challenging and creative engagement that enables the co-production of knowledge, processes and tools.

IRISS IS OPEN, RESPONSIVE AND ADAPTABLE

IRISS is open and adaptable. Its resources are developed under Creative Commons licenses and developed on open-source software. Here, IRISS assumes that users are self-directed learners

whose engagement is driven by their own learning needs. These users may also contribute to the learning environment by adding content and sharing their own networks and knowledge. IRISS assumes that these users value resources that are free, easy to access and adaptable. Practice contexts and personal learning needs vary, so IRISS encourages users to pick and choose, taking what they need and leaving the rest.

In this case, IRISS's engagement tends to draw users in. It is open and responsive, but comparatively passive when set alongside IRISS' other approaches to engagement. The passivity is deliberate, and reflects the assumption that users/learners are actively developing their own learning networks. In this way, IRISS provides resources that can be searched for, used, and adapted. Indicators of empowerment are exemplified in users' ability to make use of the resources and their perception that IRISS is supportive. When IRISS informs — through pulling people in or pushing resources out — that engagement is perceived as accessible and adaptable. For example in using the Leading for Outcomes Guides, The Richmond Fellowship Scotland (TRFS) notes that “we immediately customised them to suit our purposes. We legally plagiarised them which is what we were encouraged to do”.

Survey data shows the range of ways IRISS' work has been used in practice. For instance, one respondent noted “I have used IRISS materials alongside a range of materials to explain and reinforce outcomes to team leaders. We practised using the tools before they in turn delivered sessions to front-line workers. Some of the simple concepts and video clips really brought home the concepts. Support workers could then relate to their experience and practice to date and consider ways that they would support people to understand and work with an outcome focus going forward”. Likewise, respondents noted a wide range of uses, from informing policy and practice to social work studies and preparation for SVQs: “I have used IRISS resources to inform training sessions and policy”; “I have used IRISS resources with students in a role as link worker”; “I have used IRISS for research and articles for my SVQ”; “I have used IRISS for coursework on the MSc social work”; “I have used IRISS to inform conversations/strategy development with colleagues in other agencies” and so on. The wide range of uses reflects the adaptability of IRISS resources as whole, which can be used to suit changes in policy to training purposes.

Sometimes it is IRISS itself that is perceived as open and responsive, offering support and advice on an ad hoc basis. For example, one organisation described their “two-way” relationship with IRISS. When in need of some advice and support, IRISS was “always very helpful”. In one instance IRISS supported them to develop their approach to e-learning, “recommending a book and a few websites” and linking them to others in the sector who might help. This partner notes that “very quickly I have all the information I need”. They also suggest that “IRISS is very responsive” — that they act as “an incubator” for new developments. For this organisation “there's a sense that IRISS is a good place to go” — “I had confidence in IRISS - assumed that the advice I'd get would be sound and I trust them” (KEY Housing Support).

RISKS AND ENABLERS TO OPEN, ADAPTABLE AND RESPONSIVE ENAGEMENT

This kind of engagement is enabled by cultural shifts towards asynchronous web-based learning (i.e. on-line learning which allows for students to engage at various times rather than being required to attend a particular seminar at a specific time and place). For example, learning and

development within the social services sector is beginning to include e-learning models — as KEY suggests. More significantly — at least in terms of the data on IRISS’ impact — is the culture of learning within social services organisations. TRFS notes “we have a learning culture built into the organisation” — we’ve always been a change organisation — we do talk about that, because change is the norm”. KEY Housing Support also suggests that it is a “learning organisation”, suggesting that “we need to work to be constantly imaginative - we need to constantly see if there are better ways to work”. Both KEY Housing Support and TRFS have capacity to focus on practice and culture change. TRFS has four regional learning and development teams, totalling 20 people. It has the capacity to support that learning culture. KEY also has a dedicated learning and development team that runs regional and national training.

A risk to this openness and adaptability is the assumptions it makes about the system of potential users. This mode of engagement assumes learners can direct their own learning and have the capacity to find relevant resources to support their practice. There is a risk that the context of social services delivery does not, at present, enable this kind of self-directed learning. As with other networks, the ability to access the network is sometimes determined by resources. People with more strategic roles, whose workflow ensures they have time to learn on the job, may have capacity to access hub-like resources. Similarly, students or people undertaking a professional qualification, may have more opportunity to determine their learning needs and seek out resources to meet them.

IRISS IS SUPPORTIVE

IRISS is thought to enable people to learn and develop. One of its strengths, according to interview participants, is its ability to “start where people are at” (IRISS Champion / 3). As one Champion put it, IRISS has a “yes, and” approach (IRISS Champion / 2).

For some Champions, IRISS supports them by validating their approach: working with IRISS on projects “validates the work” so that “projects will be stronger” and the “learning can be shared more effectively - much stronger than if the organisation alone was sharing the learning” (IRISS Champion / 9). Similarly, other Champions note the value of IRISS’ support: It “helps when seeking other ideas and when one wants to clarify your own thinking before exposing yourself to others in the organisation”. She goes on to suggest that “sometimes there’s not much experience in your own organisation” so IRISS helps “when you’re struggling with certain things”, particularly its “wealth of evidence” (IRISS Champion / 8).

For some Champions, working with IRISS is “less about being critiqued” compared with some other intermediary organisations in the sector, such as the “SSSC, Care Inspectorate or Local Authority” (IRISS Champion / 3). For this particular Champion, “working with others in the sector” seems to involve a more prescriptive “what you have to do is this” approach. When working with IRISS “there’s more of a sense of ‘here’s a method that can help you resolve your problems’” (IRISS Champion / 3). This kind of engagement seems to be enabling — it works with people to resolve issues from their perspective, rather than demanding top-down changes to practice.

Survey respondents note a range of ways that IRISS has supported them. One respondent notes the value of IRISS' "face to face contact" during the Evaluation of Women Offenders project - evaluation of the Scottish Women's Criminal Justice Centres, saying "I couldn't have done any of the evaluation work, outcome focussed work, or logic model, without their help and support". Others note the supportive quality of IRISS' resources: "IRISS provides great resources that I can use for my own learning in a specific service area, but can then also pass on to my students to support them in the practice placements", the "dissemination of Insights to practitioners supports the development of practice" and IRISS "supported me in completing university degree". IRISS' facilitation at events is also thought to be supportive. As one respondent notes: there was "excellent support and leadership from IRISS at our recent innovation event".

CSWOs also view IRISS engagement as supportive to the sector. One CSWO noted the 'freshness' that IRISS brings to policy and practice issues as well as the value of the additional capacity and methodologies it provides:

"I think it was just taking the step back - just having that additional structure that you can depend on and of course - somebody coming in fresh and asking all the awkward questions: 'I don't understand - surely you could do something different - why wouldn't you want to ask - etc, etc'. Just somebody from outwith the CHP, from outwith the council, is going to come and challenge a lot of the assumptions that you do or do not make. We welcome that and we welcome that from IRISS" (CSWO/5).

Support was also a significant feature of the PROP (Practitioner-Research: Older People) project. In this project, nine practitioners worked closely together for 14 months to investigate a research topic within their practice. Practitioners reported that the supportive space became important as "oasis" in the challenging process of doing research and maintaining the commitment to day-to-day demands of their practice: "Very useful day and as usual the day is an oasis in this busy research". The practitioners were often very grateful for this time away to think and work on their projects: "Again – thanks for the friendly and supportive environment for learning about complex task of doing research!"

RISKS AND ENABLERS TO IRISS' SUPPORTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Support is thought to be a necessary enabler to evidence use (Nutley and colleagues 2007). In this model of engagement, relationships are paramount. Working with Champions or the practitioners on the PROP project are in-depth activities, reliant on IRISS' ability to negotiate and build a functional working relationship. Moreover, this kind of support is often carried out within the context of a group project, so that the focus is on creating a supportive 'environment' for all participants to share and learn with ease.

Creating this environment can be challenging, particularly as people work together to challenge each other's assumptions and develop new insights or skills. Sometimes the supportive space is conveyed through the smallest of gestures: good food at the breaks, space to rest, easy to access buildings, well-configured seating to ensure accessibility for everyone, clear communication

about the programme of events and next steps, and so on (for more details, see PROP Contribution Story 1, and the Pilotlight CA Case Study).

IRISS CHALLENGES AND ENABLES

IRISS co-produces the creation of new knowledge, processes or relationships with the aim that all outcomes are created 'with' participants. IRISS' approach to co-production is diverse, sometimes aiming to produce new processes of communication or change the quality of relationships as was the case in the Social Services Labs. At other times, it aims to produce new pathways for action, using prototypes to develop substantive inputs into the development or re-design of a service, as in the Pilotlight and Hospital to Home projects.

IRISS' approach to co-production also adopts different levels of risk. Co-production requires the inclusion of different perspectives. At IRISS, co-production involves more than the inclusion of different groups of practitioners, but includes people using services as well. As a result, co-produced work often works to challenge power dynamics between groups of people accessing support and practitioners or policy makers who facilitate access and delivery to that support. Some of IRISS' projects have used creative spaces outside of practice to support the imaginative development of new ways of working. At other times, IRISS' approach to co-production involves using a practice-setting to test new approaches to communication and support immediate changes in practice. In this way, IRISS moves beyond the current model of a 'co-production' ladder (Needham and Carr 2009) to show the diversity of the knowledge created by 'working with' people (see discussion about ['kinds' of co-production](#) on IRISS' Keeping it Personal blog)

For example, Pilotlight operates a model of co-production which is rooted in local communities and service delivery contexts. All four Pilotlight pathways worked within a particular service context (SDS), service user group (e.g. people accessing mental health services and support), and local community (e.g. Moray). The engagement is intended to be participatory. As IRISS suggests: "key to the success of co-design in Pilotlight is working from the basis that experiences of service users are of equal value to the knowledge and experience of professionals who deliver services" ([Pilotlight Blog, April 2013](#)). In ensuring that everyone's experience was valued, Pilotlight pays unwaged participants for their time. They also ensure that the spaces they use are accessible environments. They deliberately chose community spaces which are familiar to all participants, rather than Council buildings or other spaces which might be associated with statutory services and challenging prior engagements with the council.

Early aspirations from IRISS give a sense of this participatory approach: "We plan to work in a collaborative way with a co-design team. We hope that the team will be made up of people who access support, carers, support providers, social services, advocacy and health. We believe that equal representation from each of these groups will achieve best results throughout the pathways" ([Pilotlight Blog, January 2013](#)). In practice, this equal representation can be challenging - a point emphasised by one member of the co-design team in Pathway One: "When there are a lot of issues to cover, the many different subjects that have to be discussed, it felt like the mountain was too big to climb. However, this just showed how much we wanted to all be there and for us as a group, how much we wanted to be heard. I suppose a lot of people in the

same space fighting for the same thing just takes time to mellow a bit - which it greatly has” ([Pilotlight Blog, May 2013](#))

The value of different perspectives was echoed by participants who suggested that “the most positive part of this is being with people who bring different experiences to the team. Pointless if done otherwise” (Questionnaire / Co-Design Team). The value of these multiple perspectives and experience was voiced as a learning opportunity for some of the group. For example, one member of the group suggested that “I feel I have learned so much about how it really feels to cope with illness of various sorts. Some projects you enjoy and some, like this one you will always remember”. Similarly, one participant said: “I love being part of the co-design team and really wish this strategy was used more. Getting both points of view - service users and service providers - means the best outcome is met. Working together, towards a shared goal, in the best way to achieve outstanding results - which we have!” (Questionnaire / Co-Design Team). IRISS has used a similar approach in its [Social Assets in Action](#) project — an early example of co-design in which people accessing support, statutory providers (NHS and Local Authority) of mental health services and the third sector co-produced strengths-based processes to improve mental health support in the area. Co-design has also been used in the [Hospital to Home](#) project, which has worked with older people accessing services along with hospital and community based services in NHS Tayside in order to re-design the hospital discharge process. Both projects involved long-term investment in a particular area (two years in East Dunbartonshire and two years in NHS Tayside). Like the Pilotlight project, diverse perspectives and experience were included in the co-design process so that developments are reflective of the outcomes for people accessing support (not services or practitioners). In each case, creative methodologies were used to challenge perceptions, change attitudes and enable the transformation of services and support.

RISKS AND ENABLERS TO CHALLENGING AND ENABLING ENGAGEMENT

A contextual risk to successful co-production is the degree to which participants are able to work through the process, taking risks, challenging one another, and eventually producing new insight, processes and tools for changing practice. Without some degree of risk, learning can be shallow (e.g. Experience Labs at Perth Prison). That said, participants' safety in the process must also be well guarded and there can be a number of challenges in ensuring that safety is maintained (e.g. Pilotlight Pathway 1). There is a balance to be struck in co-produced work, as IRISS experience with risk reveals.

Another risk for IRISS is that it may ‘facilitate’ others’ co-production, but fail to act as a full-participant in the co-production process. Recent criticisms of co-production (See [Nurture Development Blog](#)) suggest that professionals tend to ‘lead’ co-production and thus fail to unsettle some of the assumptions about service delivery and people accessing support.

Co-production is enabled by the inputs that people and organisations make — without these particular resources, the process would not realise its aims. There is more potential for sustainability if participants have the capacity/role to champion the project after its completion. Organisational commitment and leadership are necessary to ensure the tools, processes and

relationships are able to develop without IRISS' direct support (see discussion in Social Assets in Action CA Case Study).

HOW DO PEOPLE RESPOND TO IRISS' WORK?

IRISS aspires to be “enabling” in its engagement. But how do people actually react to IRISS' work?

Interview, observation and survey data suggests that people who engage with IRISS tend to respond in three ways:

1. People trust IRISS
2. People find IRISS' work relevant to policy issues and grounded in practice
3. People are prompted to think differently and prepared to make changes

IRISS IS TRUSTED

IRISS is viewed as a trusted, and visible, intermediary in the sector: “IRISS is a good, professional, positive organisation” that is “visible to us within our work” (LX Collaborator / 1). According to this collaborator, IRISS is “respected”, “well-resourced” and “useful” — all of which support their ongoing involvement in the production of a collection on the LX. In particular, this collaborator voiced the value of that neutrality for supporting change: “you need someone outside of service delivery to see the bigger picture” - “I'm endlessly surprised at how hard it is to instigate change” (LX Collaborator / 1).

IRISS' is also a respected organisation: “I think everybody knows who IRISS are — I mean one of the reasons why we're happy to be associated with IRISS, want to work with IRISS, is because it's a reputable organisation” (IRISS.fm collaborator / 1). Similarly another collaborator notes their appreciation for IRISS' approach: “We have worked alongside IRISS and I have a lot time and respect for their knowledge and this collaboration on a variety of different areas” (IRISS.fm collaborator / 2). For one organisation, IRISS is said to be a “comfort” in the work to be creative in the social services sector: “We work really hard to create a space [for creativity]. We don't want to be the flavour of the month, drawn into posturing, rather than making a genuine commitment. So we need to constantly see if there are better ways to work and IRISS is a comfort in that process” (DM).

IRISS Champions suggest that IRISS “begins where people are at”, providing support that is relevant to their needs and enabling. Champions note that IRISS “works at a nice level” and “gives options for where people are comfortable” (C3). Likewise IRISS is said to be a “trusted source of support” (C8). Likewise, another Champion notes that “IRISS is empowering — rather than putting people down for where they're not, IRISS provide a healthy alternative to openness and learning” (C14).

This sense of trust is enabled by IRISS' role as a neutral intermediary. Collaborators across IRISS's projects and CSWOs noted the value of IRISS' neutrality and the difference in its approach given that it is neither regulator, policy maker or service provider. For example, one CSWO noted the

value of IRISS' mix of staff and the 'freshness' they have found in IRISS' approach: "I felt that IRISS came with more of a blank piece of paper than someone from the JIT would come and therefore there were fewer assumptions about what does or does not happen - or what does or does not work - and I think that came across to everybody including the independent sector - there appeared to be a degree of neutrality around this via IRISS. I think JIT can still be perceived as somebody that links into the Scottish Government that is following a specific policy line. I think for me there's something about the professional independence" (CSWO/5).

IRISS' WORK IS RELEVANT AND GROUNDED IN PRACTICE

40% of the workforce were aware of the Insights and those who have used them note that they are "important" for their work. The Insights were used as examples in a range of answers about IRISS' usefulness to the sector. According to survey data, the Insights are used most commonly in (1) teaching for students (2) self-learning as part of a course or professional development and (3) group learning in team meetings or group supervision. For example, participants noted that they have "drawn on IRISS Insights for research and teaching", "regularly used IRISS Insights to provide information to my students to assist with gathering evidence", "have used IRISS Insights to help develop work and practice with other colleagues" and "have used the Insights for empirical evidence for a master's dissertation — have also used further Insights for further learning in my current job".

The use of the Insights in practice was echoed by Insight authors who note the increase in knowledge and capacity in the sector: "The whole point of the Insight was to get practitioners motivated, encouraged — or in fact senior management — to think about what small steps they could take towards becoming more user-facing and so that was the whole premise" (Insight author / 1). When asked if she thought it had been successful and it had changed capacity, she replied: "I think it has been successful — I still direct students to it, and give it out at training, I used it again as an appendix to a Scottish Government report to show examples. I suppose the whole rationale was it's something people hadn't thought of particularly in Scotland. When you give examples it becomes more tangible, so I think it's had an effect in that respect" (Insight author / 1). The use of Insights in these forums suggests that there is an existing culture of both evidence-use and ongoing learning to which IRISS Insights have contributed.

Similarly IRISS' presentations are relevant, grounded, and valued for being inspiring:

"Oh my goodness, [IRISS] did such a lovely job!!! I cannot thank you enough for your presentation. I have to be honest, I was a little worried myself that people in the audience may have found it challenging! But as the day went on, I had a chance to gather feedback from people. The feedback was that people were really paying attention to what you were saying and were worried that if they even shifted in their seats they may miss something! I noticed many people making notes throughout your talk. Each and every one of the speakers throughout the day acknowledged different ideas and things that you said and I think that really helped to resonate with people as well. In the afternoon session, we played back the video starting at the beginning of your presentation. After

that, we asked everyone at their tables to discuss your presentation and talk about what a culture of innovation looks like to them. It was excellent! It really created a buzz in the room and it gave people a chance to have a conversation around your presentation. I know that your topic and the way that you presented was very well received! I have had emails, texts, and Facebook messages from friends and co-workers telling me how much they enjoyed hearing from you and they are all hoping to learn more” (Sunshine File).

CSWOs note the relevance of IRISS’ work. One CSWO succinctly said: “You produce good quality work, it’s thoughtful, it’s thorough, you read it and it seems to make sense, it seems to touch on the key issues, that’s my experience. You need organisations like IRISS to be able to provide independent advice based on the evidence - not just agreeing with people - I think we do need sounding boards - we need to commission work at times that will give us that confidence - so yeah I think IRISS are absolutely credible” (CSWO/4). Similarly, another CSWO noted: “So an organisation like IRISS is valuable - you go and look at the website when we’re developing a new policy and procedure - you look at the evidence - what does good practice say about this so we can give guidance to staff, so that’s one value. IRISS also plays another role in terms of individual members of staff who are keeping their own professional development up to date and are continuing to develop their own skills and abilities. I suppose also from a corporate perspective - it’s also useful from the perspective of our trainers when they are training staff as well” (CSWO/8).

PEOPLE ARE PROMPTED TO THINK DIFFERENTLY AND PREPARED TO MAKE CHANGES

Participants value IRISS’ creativity and are prompted to see/do things differently: “IRISS has a different background - prompts us to ask ‘are there things here we can use’ and supports ‘thinking space’” (IRISS Champion / 14). Others note the value of having “somebody else that is interested in doing things differently”, noting that “it’s important to have an outward-looking focus beyond the busy and sometimes dirty work of running services” (Interview Participant / 1). For this participant, working with IRISS leaves them feeling “energised and invigorated”. They note that “imagination doesn’t cost anything - but can lead to great, great, impact” and “IRISS is about that spirit of unlocking potential” (Interview Participant / 1).

This prompt to think differently is echoed by survey respondents: “I think the focus on innovation, enquiry and creative practice approaches is the way forward for social care services, and the work of IRISS captures and harnesses this ethos very well”. Others note the value of particular IRISS projects: “IRISS Creative Quarter was really useful for confirming the importance of Creativity in our work and for meeting others in the field”. Or IRISS’ interactions: “[IRISS] has been a regular contributor to our work and unfailingly brings positive, creative, practical and often inspiring contributions. She is my main point of contact for IRISS and a fantastic ambassador!”. This creativity prompts people to change the way they work. As one survey respondent suggests: “I attended a Champions event last year and there was a lot of work about creativity. Since then I have tried to be more creative and encourage others to think out of the box. This has led us as a team to dream big. We also try to ensure that we have evidence to back up the work we do and question how we can provide this”.

Being prompted to think differently is not quite enough to enable robust changes to practice or culture in social services. IRISS uses co-production and co-design approaches in order to constructively challenge people's assumptions and ensure they are prepared to make changes to their practice. For example, one member of a Pilotlight co-design team noted a dramatic shift in her perspective of people accessing support: "I know this sounds a really, really, awful thing to say and I hate saying it but you don't realise actually how much really good ideas can come out from service users - they were coming up with some ideas and it was mind-blowing, they really were mind-blowing" (Pilotlight Interview / 2).

But, changing perspectives is also an enabling process for participants — leaving them feeling more confident about their work. As another interviewee noted: "I've been a social worker for a long, time - I've spent a lot of time really listening to people to hear what they had to say but my involvement with the first Pilotlight kind of, uh, it didn't take me back to being a frontline social worker but it allowed me to hear things that people had to say about their experiences that I think meant something different to me as a manager who was responsible for service delivery - it was a real gift and an insight that the project offered me" (Pilotlight Interview / 1).

RISKS FOR IRISS

IRISS' outcomes, and the change it hopes to see in the sector, hinge on these reactions. Ideally, some (or all of) these reactions will be present when people engage with IRISS. For example, when the practitioners on the PROP project engaged with IRISS (and its partner CRFR), they found them to be responsive, open, adaptable, supportive and reported learning new things and thinking differently (see [PROP Contribution Story](#)). Likewise, when someone downloads a podcast, a marker of success will be whether they found the material easy to access and prompted to think differently. When people participate in a co-design process, they should ideally feel that IRISS is responsive to them and open to their needs, supported through the process and prompted to think differently. These terms will mean something different depending on the mode of engagement, but their presence is likely an indicator of success.

Conversely, when these reaction are absent, they indicate a risk in that the theory of change will fail to achieve its outcomes. For example, some IRISS Champions report miscommunications with IRISS and a lack of support to understand and develop their Champions role. Though IRISS aims to support Champions, there have been inconsistencies in IRISS' approach over time. As a result, some Champions have asked for more clarity and more "in-depth" collaboration with IRISS.

Sometimes IRISS' resources prompt people to think differently, but don't seem to offer support in making use of the ideas. As one Champion notes, the IRISS ONs "did make me think 'I've got to write down my innovative ideas' but it doesn't offer concrete support — if it was just as easy as that to innovate - everyone would be doing it" (IRISS Champion / 15).

Similarly, if IRISS' work is perceived to be divorced from practice realities, it may fail to maintain its relationships with practice. As one practitioner notes "IRISS needs to make sure its writing to its audience" (IRISS Champion / 9). This Champion compared a Pilotlight presentation which

included people accessing support and practitioners with the Pick ‘n Mix video: “Too much of the concept of sweeties compared with the Champs event which was about people who access support and their stories — the animated material lost some of the fundamental things and people struggled to see the point” (IRISS Champion / 9).

OUTCOMES: CHANGED MINDS, NEW SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND SERVICES — IRISS ENABLES CULTURE CHANGE

IRISS adopts three approaches to improving social services: IRISS informs, IRISS facilitates and translates and IRISS creates. These three approaches diverge and converge across the theory of change. They begin together and inform one another within the boundaries of IRISS, creating what I call a ‘churn’ where creative work is eventually translated and turned into a widely relevant information campaign. Likewise, ideas are sometimes generated through IRISS’ wide- reaching ‘inform’ work and these are used to create new projects that ‘facilitate’ shared learning (e.g. the Outcomes and Supervision project). Likewise, there is considerable churn in the engagement and reaction parts of the theory of change as many projects will aspire to be open, adaptable and supportive. Equally, reactions to IRISS’ work are likely to include a range of ideal responses.

These three approaches come into their own again at this stage of the theory of change. When it comes to considering the short-term outcomes of its work, IRISS’ theory of change shows three kinds of change:

1. Changes in awareness and confidence
2. Changes in knowledge and skills
3. Changes in relationships and services

Each of these outcomes can lead to culture shifts in the design, delivery and experience of social services — but they bear different assumptions and pathways to creating that change.

1. Changes in awareness can lead to culture shifts if people have the capacity to direct their own learning and have organisational/community capacity to take action — IRISS’ involvement is minimal.
2. Changes in knowledge and skills can lead to culture shifts if participants who have gained these new capacities are enabled by their organisations/community to integrate them into their professional context — IRISS will support the short-term project outcomes, but assumes participants will be able to take their learning forward and embed it.
3. Changes in relationships and services can lead to culture shifts if those tools and processes developed in the co-design process are sustained after the life cycle of the project.

CHANGES IN AWARENESS AND CONFIDENCE

People who engage with IRISS report changes in their awareness and understanding as well as changes in their confidence. For example, one Champion notes: “There’s lots of stuff we can learn about the way information is shared”. Another collaborator notes: “in the past, we felt we didn’t

capture the learning as much as they could have — now we've thought about filming as a more powerful way of sharing a project's achievements". IRISS has provided "inspiration for how things could be done differently" (IRISS Champion / 11).

Changing one's mind is the first step to changing practice. As one of the co-design team put it: "Pilotlight is about changing perceptions and changing relationships" (Questionnaire / Co-Design Team). This particular team member has been tasked with taking forward the outputs from the Pilotlight project within Moray Council. For her, "Pilotlight has been a real eye opener". She particularly valued that "people turned up as who they are". As she says, "we all have preconceived ideas and it's down to that personal interaction to change perceptions".

Similarly, practitioners at Inverclyde CHP note the value of IRISS' work on outcomes: "outcomes work involves slight moves - constant almost - both internally and externally and they all help" (IRISS Champion / 14). For this practitioner, "IRISS' outcomes work was pushing against an open door" (IRISS Champion / 14). In particular, she notes that "GIRFEC was coming along - and that outcomes is a focus in different areas of work" (IRISS Champion / 14). What's more, Inverclyde was thought to be "friendly - to have a healthy attitude towards learning" (IRISS Champion / 14). Inverclyde CHCP has a tradition of developing outcomes-focused ways of working which pre-dates their involvement with IRISS. In 2010 (prior to becoming a CHP), the Council "produced a handbook which gave some detail on recording procedures for outcomes - but it wasn't implemented". Later that year, Inverclyde became a CHCP, which was, according to one practitioner, "a time of transition". In describing this period of change, practitioners indicated that the outcomes-focus was less of a priority during the transition.

The impact of this cumulative work on developing outcomes-focused practice, with support from IRISS among others, has been to help Inverclyde "to start to build a common language towards outcomes - figuring out the difference between outcomes and outputs for example" (IRISS Champion / 14). According to one practitioner, "there is more of an outcomes focus at Inverclyde as a result of all these collective shifts" (IRISS Champion / 14). In particular, "working with IRISS on the outcomes work doesn't give you the answers - it makes you think, makes you reflect and starts a discussion" (IRISS Champion / 14).

Similarly, IRISS' work on digital literacy and the value of using web-based media has had an impact on the way one of its partners views their resources: "We had considered some aspects of audio recording but I suppose what we found particularly useful from an IRISS perspective is a lot of work that they've done on social media access in local authorities and other public services. It has given us more evidence to be able to challenge some of the usual obstacles that people face — partly based on what IRISS has done we have been willing to invest in other methods with really a view to putting the onus back on the organisations who are blocking use" (IRISS.fm collaborator / 2).

Participants also reports gains in confidence as well as awareness. When asked about their achievements as a co-design team, the group talked about their increased capacity and confidence. For example, one participant noted "my confidence in my business idea has grown immensely. I'm still terrified of doing my accounts and tax return, but I also know how to source

help when I need it. I feel able to move forward with my business and to have belief in my products and what I can achieve for the future” (Questionnaire / Co-Design Team). Similarly, another team member wrote “I have gained in confidence, knowledge and understanding on how to start and maintain a business using SDS”.

This sentiment was echoed by a participant in the Social Assets in Action project who noted: “I think it has had a positive impact on me as an individual. I think I am more confident in my role, and I think I am hoping that what I do here - the way that it’s enhanced me - is then a benefit to everything else, the services around me, the people that use our services through the way that I approach things”.

IRISS SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Survey respondents describe IRISS contributions to knowledge and skills, often referring to particular IRISS resources. One respondent noted: “I have used the various outcomes resources as part of training social workers, including the outcomes for children affected by parental substance misuse material. The outcomes materials have helped to me to grasp this subject and help other people to understand it”. The impact of resources is echoed by another respondent who writes: “I regularly refer my social work students to IRISS Insights in order to focus and improve their understanding of sometimes quite specialist areas such as dementia care”. Another respondent notes the value of a range of IRISS’ work: “PROP research on carers assessments - widely quoted and used this research to support practice development. The Leading on Outcomes and the toolkit - widely used material and referenced it to others for their use. The Insight on measuring outcomes - again used for practice development and discussions with other partner agencies. The IRISS On Failure - used in meetings to promote discussion on improving versus proving”.

Echoing the value of IRISS resources, another respondent notes the value of the ‘IRISS On Failure’: “The ‘fear of failure’ report provided a unique approach to looking at organisational change and we are trying to use the themes in this to work with providers facing organisational and cultural change”. Similarly, respondents note the value of particular IRISS projects: “Reimagining the future stimulated thought about preparing for a range of contexts. The master classes a few years ago were good at offering opportunities to hear from new ideas from leading cutting edge thinkers. We worked with IRISS on exploring new technology and hand held consoles which was a helpful way of encouraging reflection on new ways of working”.

Changes to knowledge and skills were also echoed by Champions: “Being a Champion has increased my confidence to raise innovative and evidence-based issues within my own organisation. IRISS materials, events and web-presence are a constant stimulus to think and act differently and a haven from reductive and utilitarian approaches to learning and development which is my main role in the agency where I work. IRISS has given me opportunities to make a contribution to good practice and innovation and be less held back by bureaucratic barriers”.

There is substantial evidence on the gains in knowledge and skills through IRISS’ PROP project (carried out jointly with the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships). PROP

(Practitioner-Research: Older People) project aimed to enable practitioners working with older people to carry out a research project to improve services. As part of this project: 9/9 of practitioners reported increased confidence in use and producing research, an increase in their ability to do research, and increased capacity for reflective practice. All six of the project's partner organisations increased their research capacity through the development of practitioners as researchers. Three partner organisations also gained new research ethics policies through their involvement in the PROP project (Alzheimer Scotland, Midlothian Council, VOCAL).

PROP was considered highly successful by all who participated; however, there is a risk that individual changes in knowledge and skills do not result in practice change. At the time of the PROP evaluation, only 2/9 practitioners reported changing their professional practice as a result of undertaking research and gaining new knowledge about the experience of service users and carers. That said, 2/9 practitioners also reported a development of professional role as a result of being involved in the PROP programme — these kinds of developments could lead to other, unforeseen, impacts for practitioners and partner organisations.

[IRISS ENABLES PEOPLE TO CREATE/CHANGE THEIR RELATIONSHIPS AND SERVICES](#)

IRISS contributes to concrete changes in service delivery as well as changes in the relationships in the practice setting. Evidence suggests that when IRISS tests out new ideas, processes and tools with people, enabling them to co-produce new ways of working, it contributes to practice change and supports cultural shifts in the design, delivery and experience of social services.

Survey data shows some of the practical ways people have created change in their work. For example, one respondent notes that the “experience of work on outcomes led to focused support on developing an outcomes approach in delivery of foster care services and the Pilotlight project in Moray around micro enterprises is influencing thinking around the SDS/commissioning/procurement relationship”. Another respondent notes: “the Insight document on attachment really helped me to explain to a child with attachment difficulties, her family and the caring team around her what attachment was, what a diagnosis of attachment disorder meant, and how she could be supported. This had a beneficial impact on practice”. Similarly, IRISS is said to have “helped to form and inform the development of an outcomes-based approach and more recently helped staff to work through some of the opportunities and challenges set by integration of health and social care services based on evidence and good practice”.

Some of IRISS' particular projects have been shown to create practice and culture shifts in organisations. For example, IRISS partners in the Social Assets into Action project described their sense of a “pioneering” project, and talked about the potential for this project to continue to grow beyond the service area of mental health support: “I think we've been part of something that will be everywhere at some point. I think we're at the forefront and we did get it at the right time because it is the buzzword everywhere now, assets based rather than deficit based, and it is something that you talk to people that are a bit old school and they say, oh we did this, twenty, thirty, forty years ago, but obviously you didn't do it right because if you had we'd still be doing it

so we need to take this opportunity and do it properly - get the right people involved and by the right people I'm not saying people under mental health, or people under addictions, it's your community that's the whole point, because it's about prevention".

In terms of substantive changes to practice, the NHS in East Dunbartonshire has trained the majority of its mental health practitioners (95%) on the assets-based approach. Embedding within the third sector has been a strong feature of their approach since the testing phase and they continue to champion the use of both community assets maps and personal assets mapping in their service. Within local government, there seems to be a continued, and expanding, drive to embed the community assets approach. Concrete indicators of this embedding might be reflected in the number of library computers which promote the community map or the development of community champions for the map. Further work in schools has been undertaken in partnership with NHS and the third sector, which seems a promising indicator for the usefulness and reach of this kind of strengths based approach.

CONCLUSIONS ON CREATING CULTURE CHANGE

IRISS' work can reasonably be assumed to create three kinds of outcomes which reflect its three approaches.

1. People who are informed by/seek information from IRISS gain changed awareness and increased confidence
2. People who engage in facilitated or translated activities and resources gain new knowledge and skills
3. People who engage in interactive, co-produced, activities gain new relationships and changes to their services and support

These outcomes work together to create culture change in the design, delivery and experience of people accessing support. More specifically, we might think of these outcomes within three models: enlightenment, translation, and interactive (cf Weiss 1979).

ENLIGHTENMENT MODEL

In an enlightenment model, IRISS contributes to widespread increases in knowledge and capacity in the sector, adding to shifts in the culture of social services. In this model, practice changes take time and multiple avenues of intervention. IRISS is just one of the organisations that has promoted an outcomes focus and its approach is fortified by the ten years of the Talking Points programme in Scotland (Miller 2012) and a range of policy initiatives like the Christie Commission (2011) and Social Care (Self-Directed Support) Act 2013. Similarly, IRISS' work to promote digital literacy is enabled by government policies such as the [Digital Participation Strategy](#) as well as broader cultural changes like the development of mobile phone technology and social media.

This model is enabled by IRISS' investment, over time, in particular issues. IRISS' focus on 'outcomes' began in 2010 and includes a range of different approaches: Five 'Leading for

Outcomes Guides', an outcomes toolbox, two IRISS Insights on outcomes, a recent project on outcomes and supervision in social services and a range of presentations, blog posts and collaboration with other outcomes 'champions' in the sector (such as Emma Miller and Ailsa Cook). Similarly, IRISS' work on digital literacy is one of the founding interests in the organisation and has contributed to the development of the [Strategy and Action Plan for Embedding Knowledge in Practice in Scotland's Social Services](#).

The adaptability of IRISS' approach is also an enabler. IRISS' Leading for Outcomes Guides are training toolkits, designed to be used in a variety of ways. Readers can start at the beginning and work their way through the information and exercises or break up the Guides, using the sections most useful to their needs. Interview participants who have used the 'Guides' talk about being able to "legally plagiarize" them, taking their definitions of outcomes or parts of the toolkit to suit their own practice needs.

At an organisational level, adopting a cultural shift of this kind can be risky. It can require negotiation and 'champions' to facilitate that shift. Well-established learning and development teams as well as the learning culture within an organisation enabled adopting of the Leading for Outcomes Guides. At one participant notes, IRISS was "pushing against an open door".

IRISS' contribution to 'enlightenment' outcomes can be difficult to trace. IRISS is often one in a range of contributors working together to create cultural shifts in social services. Evidence is most robust at the point of changing awareness. Over time, IRISS' work can contribute to culture change in the design, delivery and experience of social services, though IRISS relies on individual self-direction, capacity and leadership in the sector.

In short, informing work tends to have a wide reach, but relies heavily on capacity and initiative in the sector to make use of the information provided. For IRISS, informing work is enabled by its relevance to the sector — resources and information are often drawn from IRISS' more in-depth co-creation and translation work. For IRISS, there is a risk that people are prevented from accessing information, that they fail to pass on what they've learned, or reflect their learning back to IRISS. For IRISS the greatest risk is that people will not be able to make use of this information to improve services and support

TRANSLATION MODEL

In a translation model IRISS contributes to more targeted interventions, supporting practitioners, policy makers and people accessing support to develop new knowledge and skills so that particular knowledge gaps can be filled or practice issues addressed. In this model, IRISS translates academic research and peer-reviewed evidence into practice relevant summaries through the IRISS Insights. IRISS translates the learning from its projects into resources for the sector. For example, the Fit for the Future project translated the evidence from 14 case studies into a three-part suite of training resources for care providers. The Pilotlight project developed the innovations from its four pathways into tools for understanding and making use of SDS.

IRISS also facilitates knowledge exchange, supporting people (through its events, networks or project-work) to share their experience. Through this facilitation, IRISS supports the development of new knowledge and skills, with the aspiration that these increases in capacity will enable culture changes in the design, delivery and experience of social services and support.

IRISS tends to focus this work on individual and organisational change. Facilitation and translation are often directed towards specific practice such as integration, commissioning or data visualisation. As such, IRISS' aim is to support the development of new knowledge and new skills — with the aspiration that this encourages practice changes. For example, the PROP project supported practitioners to gain new skills in doing research and confidence in making use of research in practice. Each of the practitioners involved in the PROP project reported gains in knowledge and skills.

IRISS' engagement with the participants tends to adopt a supportive approach. Here IRISS assumes that the people need encouragement, as well as financial, emotional or structural support, in order to make changes to practice, share their learning, take-up new knowledge and innovate. An inspiring event, a well-facilitated debate, an in-depth workshop which uses creative methodologies, support for reflective practice — just having someone around who can help — these are all elements of IRISS' approach and each is valued by the people who work with the organisation. In the PROP project, participants described the support from IRISS/CRFR as an “oasis” amongst the pressures of practice and research. The “informal” atmosphere was said to be “supportive” — a place for people to ask “silly” questions and learn “together”.

People who work with IRISS, or make use of its outputs, suggest that IRISS' work is relevant to practice. Translation and facilitation are perceived as successful when they are grounded in the realities of practice and current policy debates. This was particularly true of the PROP project where practitioners, themselves, were directing the focus, process and outcomes of the research. IRISS is viewed as a “lynchpin” in the sector — bringing people together, negotiating conflict and acting as a neutral go-between. This neutrality was highly valued by participants and one of the central features of IRISS' trusted role in the sector.

At IRISS, facilitation and translation are enabled by the organisation's broad definition of evidence and its effort to include diverse perspectives. IRISS values practice wisdom, the experiences of people accessing support as well as peer-reviewed research evidence. This broad view of evidence is complemented by IRISS' efforts to include diverse perspectives in its outputs and project activity. IRISS works to diversify the knowledge base and widen the conversation about issues facing the social services in Scotland. But, there is a risk that IRISS relies too much on those people/organisation who have the capacity to participate. IRISS will support the short-term project outcomes, but assumes participants will be able to take their learning forward and embed it. For IRISS, there is a risk that gains in skills and knowledge are limited to the people we work with — that these increases do not translate to practice changes, organisational development or culture change.

The facilitation and translation approach is underpinned by a central assumption: IRISS assumes that the sector needs innovative and evidence-informed resources that address practice-relevant

issues. In this approach, IRISS is contributing to more targeted interventions and supporting practitioners, policy makers and people accessing support with tools to improve services and support. Translation outcomes reflect the particular practice issues that IRISS seeks to address and the communities of people who are need of new, practice-relevant, information/resources. The reach of this work depends on the practice issue (Leading for Outcomes versus PROP projects) — some connections to changes at local level, challenges in creating action from knowledge gain, but long-term embedding of these changes may prove challenging in some environments.

INTERACTIVE MODEL

In an interactive model, IRISS contributes to small but intensive changes in relationships, understanding and service delivery. When working in this way, IRISS tends to focus on a community of people, practitioners, and service delivery organisations, focusing on the particularities of the local policy and practice context as well as the needs and assets of the local community. This model has the potential to create long-term outcomes in the design, delivery and experience of services and support but these changes assume short-term embedding and scaling-up of ideas.

In this model, IRISS creates platforms to share information, iPad apps, and toolkits. IRISS generates new knowledge — through reflection, research and innovation. IRISS co-produces ideas and tests them with people. IRISS co-designs new processes and tools for service delivery. IRISS co-creates the conditions to scale-up these ideas, tools and processes. Evidence suggests that when IRISS tests out new ideas, processes and tools with people, enabling them to co-produce new ways of working, it contributes to practice change and supports cultural shifts in the design, delivery and experience of social services.

IRISS tends to co-produce the creation of new knowledge, processes or resources with the aim that all outcomes are created ‘with’ participants. IRISS’ approach to co-production is diverse, sometimes aiming to produce new processes of communication or change the quality of relationships as is the case in the Social Services Labs. At other times, it aims to produce new pathways for action, using prototypes to develop substantive inputs into the development or re-design of a service, as in the Pilotlight and Hospital to Home projects.

At IRISS, creative work is enabled by the combination of skills and knowledge in the organisation. IRISS staff have the skills to develop new media, co-design new ways of working and translate innovations, information and evidence to ensure relevance across the social services in Scotland. IRISS’ creative work is also facilitated by its interaction with the social services sector. Co-design and co-production are enabled by the knowledge, skills, time and enthusiasm from partners in the sector. Similarly, generative work is often a product of collaborative projects which rely on the investment (in terms of capacity, financing and skills) of people and organisations. Likewise, some of IRISS’ generative work has been supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) which has funded short-term research fellowships and some medium-term research projects (e.g. PROP).

There are also risks to creative work. Any creative work that involves people from the sector carries a risk that the investment of their time, knowledge and skills will not be borne out by the outcomes of the project. Expectations are often high and IRISS carries the risk that projects may fail to deliver the expected changes in services, relationships or culture. Given the pressures on capacity in the sector, there are risks that time away from practice to test ideas, generate new evidence or collaborate on the production of outputs will detract from the delivery of services and support. In co-designed work, there is also a risk that innovations to practice will not be adopted by the organisation/community. The careful work of co-design can produce exciting solutions, but the context of service delivery is an important factor in the successful implementation of these ideas. Leadership and buy-in within service providers and the statutory sector is a necessary part of the co-design process. Failure to adopt some aspect of the prototypes proposed can undermine the process itself, reducing the trust that has been generated between diverse groups of practitioners, providers and service-users. In undertaking a co-design process, brokering organisational and community buy-in are necessary parts of this overall set of activities.

This approach is underpinned by a central assumption: IRISS assumes that social services in Scotland need more co-produced understanding of issues, co-created evidence and co-designed tools and processes that reflect a wide-range of perspectives. IRISS works to test ideas with people, organisations and communities. Where these ideas are successful, IRISS works to scale-up these tools and processes. But these interventions take time and have a relatively small reach. They require translation work and informing work to achieve widespread reach and impact.

In describing IRISS' three models, one summary conclusion can be drawn — IRISS' work to inform, facilitate/translate and create strengthen one another. Without translation and informing work, IRISS' small-scale and intensive creative work would have a very limited reach. Without the practice relevance of co-created and translated work, IRISS' efforts to inform would be too divorced from practice to ensure uptake. Together, this spectrum of approaches enables culture changes in the design, delivery and experience of social services in Scotland.

In the following section, I offer some reflections for IRISS on its three theoretical pools of knowledge (knowledge media, evidence-informed practice and innovation and improvement). Based on these reflections, I summarise the strengths that IRISS can build upon and offer some recommendations for the future.

IMPACT CASE STUDIES

IRISS acts a catalyst for change. To evidence this catalytic work, the CA evaluation undertook seven case studies of IRISS' activities. Each of these case studies was selected to provide insight into different kinds of work, and they each show different mechanisms for change. As IRISS is a multi-disciplinary organisation, working across three different disciplines, its work as a catalyst is diverse. The seven case studies reflect that diversity — though there is undoubtedly further exploration to be done.

PILOTLIGHT

- Impact: Contributed to more person-centred mental health services and support in Moray Council, there is increased capacity within the Council to deliver SDS, commissioning support for people starting their own small business using SDS is more developed, tested pathways for accessing SDS have been developed and implemented in Moray
- Co-design and creative tools highly valued by participants
- Diversity with the co-design group viewed as necessary enabler for success
- Embedding changes to practice needs local champions and leadership
- Co-design tests changes outside the day-to-day realities of practice - it relies on embedding and scaling within pressures of practice and still requires local champions to translate changes

SOCIAL ASSETS IN ACTION

- Impact: Changes to practice - and organisational culture - have been attributed to this programme of activity and community capacity to share local assets has been increased
- Diverse perspectives and cross-agency partnerships were valued within the 'test' phase
- The process of 'scaling' relied on organisations - some of the work to unsettle power dynamics between people and organisations was not maintained within the scaling process
- Resources to test and scale are high - and investment can be unpredictable - but the outcomes achieved are significant

LEADING FOR OUTCOMES GUIDES

- Impact: Contribution to culture change and more outcomes-focused policy and practice
- Policy / practice salience as well as the clarity of communication considered an enabler - the Guides were timely, easy to understand and relevant to practice-needs
- The toolkit form was considered an enabler - the Guides were there to be used, adapted and 'plagiarised' to particular practice needs
- Support with using and adapting the guides was not available - and relied on local practitioners/organisations to support their organisations to use the guides
- Most robust evidence comes from organisations with strong learning and development teams who had capacity to make use of the guides, adapting them to local practice contexts

LEARNING EXCHANGE

- Impact: More practice relevant, easy to access and understand, evidence available for the sector
- The LX' reach - The Hub and SSKS and IRISS' audience - is considered an enabler for curators
- But the assumption that the LX would be a self-sustaining community of curators is not borne out by the evidence
- The LX may be used by students - more evidence is required to test its use there and/or whether there are other ways to meet that audience's needs

IMPACT CASE STUDIES CONT'D

IRISS FM

- Impact: More practice relevant, easy to access and understand, evidence available for the sector
- Accessible media - with a different approach to sharing information considered an enabler
- Digital literacy amongst the sector is likely the biggest challenge to the reach/use of IRISS FM
- More evidence is needed - particularly around impact for listeners

INSIGHTS

- Impact: More practice relevant, easy to access and understand, evidence available for the sector
- The series is well recognised and widely used within IRISS' core audience
- Translation of information in practice-relevant, easy to understand, writing is perceived as an enabler
- Policy/practice salience perceived as an enabler
- The range of topics and coverage of key debates could be a risk - IRISS are not experts in particular policy or practice issues - and there may be limits to the information covered

CHAMPIONS

- Impact: IRISS has closer links to practice, channels for dissemination in each of the 32 local authorities and a range of third sector and private sector organisations, Champions gain new knowledge, skills and networks from their involvement in IRISS, IRISS' work has a reliable reach within the sector
- Champions have time/roles which allows them to share information
- Champions trust IRISS and have a strong relationship with the organisation
- Risk - Champions are a gatekeeper providing one of the only links to IRISS and the sharing of information relies too heavily on their individual capacity to boundary span

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Translation will always be required - even the knowledge gained from the most practice-relevant resource or project will require some level of translation when adopted in a new context
2. Testing will always involve some, purposeful, reduction of risk - which means that any project that is co-designed will require a scaling phase to ensure appropriate management of day-to-day practice realities
3. There is a spectrum of risk in IRISS' project work - some co-design work involves more 'risk' (see Labs or Jams) compared with Co-design teams (Pilotlight)

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CREATIVITY IN IRISS' THREE PROGRAMMES

IRISS' work is multi-disciplinary. As such, it draws from a range of fields of expertise such as web design, interactive media, advertising, communications, research, knowledge exchange, co-design and social innovation. These kinds of work tend to draw from different pools of inspiration, rarely finding shared communities of practice in which to voice their challenges and insights. These differences are particularly evident when looking to the theoretical base for each of the three programmes at IRISS.

Evidence-informed practice can draw from a long-tradition of knowledge translation and exchange literature (variously known as knowledge into action, knowledge transfer, knowledge mobilisation, research utilisation and so on). The Innovation and Improvement team can draw from typologies of the innovation process, the related field of improvement science, as well as methodological approaches like service design. The Knowledge Media team, as discussed in the introduction, is an under-theorised aspect of intermediary work. The KM team draws inspiration from a range of sources — moving from knowledge management, digital literacy and advertising to the methodological conversations involved in interactive web design and theoretical conversations about ownership of information and creative commons.

Although the teams at IRISS overlap and combine in creative ways (as the theory of change shows), there are some fundamental differences in the assumptions underpinning their three theoretical pools of inspiration. In the following sections, I outline some of the key themes in those three areas and show the way they complement and challenge one another. IRISS is itself an expert in these different approaches and no doubt some of this will seem a simplistic overview of complex ideas. The aim here is to highlight some of the implicit assumptions in IRISS' work — with the hope that this begins (continues) a conversation and encourages us to be reflective about our work.

EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE

The 'evidence-informed practice' team derives its names from debates about evidence use in policy and practice. In some fields, the term 'evidence-based' is still used — though this term tends to dominate the rhetoric around policy making and is generally thought to reflect a set of strict assumptions about the type/quality of evidence. Evidence-based policy making is typically associated with quantitative studies such as cross-national comparative research, evaluation and randomised controlled trials. It has been critiqued for failing to take into account the messy realities of research and evidence production, instead promoting a narrow vision of how evidence should inform policy and practice. 'Evidence-informed practice' is a more subtle take on the evidence debate in policy and practice. It suggests a more complex relationship between people, their need for evidence and the context in which they apply it. The 'informed' aspect of this

relationship also tends to suggest that policy makers and practitioners may draw from a range of evidence in their decision-making processes (see for example (Gabbay and Le May 2004)).

IRISS takes a particularly forward-thinking approach to the concept of evidence, suggesting that it has three dimensions: practice wisdom, the knowledge and experience of people accessing support and the more traditional notion of research evidence. In this way, IRISS sidesteps a whole host of debates within academic research communities (e.g. quantitative or qualitative, surveys vs. focus groups, comparative cross-national research vs. ethnography) for a much more nuanced, and pragmatic, approach to evidence. This radical redefinition of evidence chimes with IRISS' focus on creating a culture of collaboration which puts people at the centre of services and support. In order to facilitate that collaboration, IRISS places value on everyone's knowledge and experience, and supports them to use that knowledge as a basis for evidence use.

Theories around evidence use have tended to take a 'two worlds' view, with evidence production on one hand and evidence use on the other. Though IRISS uses a forward-thinking approach to evidence, the concept of a 'theory to practice gap' remains a persistent concept. For example, EiP's work on practitioner-led inquiry (PROP and PROP2) attempts to close the theory to practice gap by supporting people to do research in the context of their work in the social services. Underpinning this work is an assumption that practitioners are best placed to make changes to their practice since they have the local knowledge, networks and practice wisdom to tackle the complex issues facing service improvement in their area. Within this model, we assumed that practitioners became 'boundary-spanners' — occupying both a research role and a practice role. Rather than a model of 'two-worlds', we assumed 'two-minds' or 'two-hats'.

Even the terms used in the field, such as 'knowledge to action' gap (Best et al 2008) or 'knowledge transfer and exchange' processes (Mitton et al 2007), reflect that division between researchers and users. Best and colleagues (2008) recently tried to move beyond this 'two-worlds' model suggesting that the theory to practice gap has been theorised in three different ways: a linear model which assumes a direct transfer from producer to user (Crowley 2004), a relationship-based model that focuses on people and the ways they exchange knowledge (Graham et al 2006) and a systems model that looks to the complex and overlapping interdependence between people, organisations and place (Lomas 2007). Best and colleagues (2008) call these models the "three generations" of knowledge to action. Though they advocate the use of a systems lens to understand the interactive nature of knowledge production, Best and colleagues also suggest that linear and relationships suit particular contexts and kinds of evidence production/use.

What can a systems perspective offer? Walter and colleagues (2004), suggest a "whole systems approach", an interactive model of evidence use that focuses on people, their relationships and place/context. This could include evidence use strategies that take a micro, meso and macro approach and facilitate exchange between the individual, their organisation/community and local/national government structures. In a systems approach, different kinds of evidence are valued and integrated with one another, i.e. the experience of practitioners and people accessing support should be included in university-based research as often as academic research seeks to be included in practice.

Co-producing evidence can address some of the aspirations for a systems approach to evidence use. Co-production refutes the ‘two communities’ view of knowledge exchange (e.g. Caplan 1979), because it blurs the boundaries and increases trust (Lewicki and Bunker 1996). Co-production is thought to support the interaction between the university and practice, offering a “disciplining of the disciplines” so that policy, practice and people-wisdom can hold academic disciplines to account (Walter 2010). Green (2006) suggests that “if we want more evidence-based practice, we need more practice-based evidence”. Similarly Van de Ven (2007) argues that knowledge and evidence will be more successfully implemented when research producers and users co-produce research evidence.

What lessons can we take from this literature?

1. Systems improvement has less to do with dissemination of evidence than with the implementation and use of that knowledge (Glasgow and Emmons 2007; Green 2009)
2. Evidence into action strategies tend to focus on the individual to make system changes, but an “individualised framing of the research process” does not account for the “ways that organisations shape and constrain” individual uses of evidence (Nutley, Walter and Davies 2007)
3. The concept of ‘evidence’ is defined too narrowly — effective research use involves the interaction of research-based evidence and other types of knowledge e.g. practice wisdom and the experiences of people accessing support (see IRISS’ Evidence and Practice Blog)
4. Evidence-use is often viewed as a linear process when in fact this process is often much more dynamic, with evidence users and producers co-producing knowledge (Weiss 1979)
5. A failure to take account of the context/system when evidence suggests that knowledge exchange processes are shaped by structures, relationships, capacity, values and culture. Systems are complex and adaptive. Changes in one part of the system can have unexpected consequences in another. Likewise, knowledge and experience in one part of the system can provide solutions to problems in another part (Nutley, Walter and Davies 2007; Best and Holmes 2010).

KNOWLEDGE MEDIA

Media has always played a role in the mobilisation of knowledge — from the development of the first printing press and mass publication of books and newspapers to the development of the world wide web, including email and search engines, to the evolution of mobile technology which allows for more and more sophisticated interaction between users and their online environment. As technology has changed, the role of information and knowledge sharing the social services has begun to change along with it. People who may have viewed themselves as knowledge managers are now being asked to see themselves as knowledge brokers. Online repositories of information, catalogued to ease their ‘findability’ have been overtaken by ‘google juice’ of more modern web pages. In-person training, led by learning and development teams, is being augmented (and replaced) by e-learning courses. Social media is enabling people to develop their own resources

for seeking, sharing and using information and the vision of the learner as a passive recipient of knowledge is changing to reflect people's dynamic, social, learning activities.

The use of 'knowledge media' is an underdeveloped aspect of knowledge mobilisation work. At IRISS, the term refers to the digital design work (building of websites and apps), media production (internet radio, short films, animation), artistic direction, and copyright work undertaken by the KM team. These skills are underpinned by an ethos which draws from a range of influences, including open source design and debates about digital freedom, networked learning, and the importance of access and accessibility on the web. A summary of some of those influences is provided here.

As the web has become more dynamic, the capacity for people to learn in a networked environment has increased. The concept of 'Web 2.0' describes an internet which foregrounds 'networked' ways of working such as crowd-sourcing, social media and wikis. Communities such as Wikipedia and [open street map](#) have been highlighted as exemplars of the collaborative nature of the Web 2.0. Collaboration, in the spirit of Web 2.0, is intended to be free, accessible and open. Anyone with access to a computer and the web is free to add content to Wikipedia, for example. Likewise, anyone can create new content on a blog, [Flickr](#) or [Soundcloud](#). In this version of the web, the view of knowledge is social, developed through interactions. Knowledge is exchanged rather than transferred from a 'knower' to a 'learner'. This view of social learning chimes with advances in the evidence-use paradigm which has begun to focus more on the relationships and systems that shape evidence use (and moved away from linear models of knowledge transfer).

Networked learning has the potential to produce better learning outcomes as learners develop their own communities and sustain their learning over time, moving from a passive recipient to an active creator of their knowledge. [Adler and Brown](#) suggest that the development of the 'Web 2.0' has "blurred the lines between producers and consumers of content" and reduced the sense of two silos divided by expertise, authority and power (2008, p18). Where journalists and formal news agencies were the primary producers of radio programmes, now internet radio has opened the field to amateurs who produce and listen to podcasts/internet radio. Production and use are now more horizontal in nature. This social view of learning is affecting more than just web-based interactions. Universities are changing the way they deliver courses. Organisations are beginning to promote the concept of continuous learning. People are beginning to view their learning and development in terms of their own personal learning networks.

Some analysts highlight the growing risk to this flat, non-hierarchical, learning space. For [Lessig](#) (2001) the web's potential for "many to many communication" which allowed us to "collaboratively participate in making something new" is shifting in favour of closed systems, ownership of content and the loss of the creative potential of the web (pp7-9). Lessig references network theorists in defining three layers of communication that make up the modern web: (1) the physical layer of wires (2) the code layer of software and (3) the content layer. In describing the historical development of the internet, Lessig highlights the decentralisation of control (freedom of ownership, production, usage) that was inscribed in its creation of the code layer. Although the physical layer of phone lines was owned by various companies (and still is), the code

and the content that make up the internet are free (in the broadest sense). For Lessig, this freedom - the lack of centralised control - is at the heart of innovation.

These debates about ownership continue in many small ways across the use and development of the internet. Open source is one of the concepts used to reflect the values of Lessig's decentralisation. The development of open-source programmes relies on a collaborative model of knowledge sharing and an economic model which values exchange over ownership and profit. Wikipedia is often cited as an example of the spirit of 'open source community'. Within this environment "both the content and the process by which it is created are equally visible, thereby enabling a new kind of critical reading—almost a new form of literacy—that invites the reader to join in the consideration of what information is reliable and/or important" ([Adler and Brown 2008, p20](#)). The principles of open source reflect an ethos of collaboration and open access to the building blocks of any content.

But praise for the potential of the network also comes with a caution. Self-sustaining learning communities can require a substantial investment. The altruistic quality of these online communities is often a cultivated ethos, created and maintained by founders, paid staff and/or enforceable guidelines (see [discussion](#) on Ravelry and Orton-Johnson 2014). Similarly, online spaces (and their production) are still human spaces and can reflect some of the same power dynamics. Active interventions are sought to ensure diverse perspectives are included in these communities (see discussion on [Wikipedia edit-a-thon](#)).

What lessons can we take from this literature?

1. Learning is a social activity — a development which reflects a shift in traditional power dynamics between teacher and learner
2. This shift is also reflected in the development of the Web 2.0 in which people can produce and consume materials in equal measure — knowledge sharing is a horizontal activity
3. Networks — when we view them through the lens of the internet's development — are limitless, allowing for "many-to-many" connections with seemingly endless possibilities for crowd-sourcing, collaboration and creativity
4. Some analysts caution the power of "many-to-many" connections, arguing that pre-existing power dynamics resurface within web-based networks, requiring active intervention to create 'safe' online spaces

INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Social innovation operates on a spectrum from incremental to transformational. It is commonly perceived as a process that begins with new ideas, develops through testing and prototypes and is embedded through efforts to scale-up and create systemic change. This process is sometimes visualised as an "innovation spiral", beginning with a prompt and ending in systemic change ([Murray, Caulier-Grace, Mulgan 2010](#)). As innovators acknowledge, this process is likely to be iterative and sometimes requires a tracking back and forth between action and understanding, scaling-up and back to testing (Murray, Caulier-Grace and Mulgan 2010, p9). IRISS draws inspiration from this approach and extends it to consider the needs of innovators (see discussion

at [Open Innovation](#)). IRISS supports innovation from the 'inside-out', working with people who are "searching for new ways to respond to dilemmas", and from the 'outside-in', "nurturing people to grasp ideas and give them a place to grow" (Pattoni and Petch 2014)

When working to enable innovation, IRISS draws on service design methodologies. Design methodologies are diverse in their approach to people, tools, processes and evaluation. Some of the key debates in the field are outlined here.

Designers debate the degree to which 'good design' can be 'user-led'. Some claim that truly radical and transformational change can only occur through an inventor's creativity. Mulgan suggests that some designers perceive it to be their role "to jump ahead of public perceptions of want and need" (p2), formulating new ways for us to work, create and interact. This kind of design work tends to be a top-down, linear, process. Ideas are developed and then picked up and translated into practice. There are a number of examples of this kind of innovation, and designers in particular make reference to a suite of culture-changing inventions like airplane, automobile, telephone, radio, television, computers and the Internet (see discussion by [Don Norman](#)). Designers who advocate for radical change suggest that it requires a 'vision' beyond the everyday experience of users: "[Designers] need to step back from current dominant needs and behaviors and envision new scenarios, otherwise our current thinking on the environment, poverty, social cohesion and so on will remain the norm, framing the development of innovation and limiting the possibilities for truly radical change" (see discussion by [Roberto Verganti](#)). In these debates, designers question the value of ethnographic observation of people and their needs, arguing for a focus on a new, imagined, future.

Proponents of a user focus do not disagree with this 'vision' of an imagined future and suggest that people themselves are best placed to conceive of the innovations that could transform their work/lives. Advocates of this approach suggest that there is dynamic interchange between design and experience, noting that "invention is not innovation" - "it has to be socialized or else it sits in the lab" (see discussion by [Bruce Nussbaum](#)). Participatory design is one methodology for including people in the design process.

This process supports people to "co-design tools, products, environments, businesses and social institutions" and tends to involve a range of creative methods, such as "design workshops in which participants collaboratively envision future practices and products; scenarios, personas and related tools that enable people to represent their own activities to others (rather than having others do this for them); various forms of mock-ups, prototypes and enactment of current and future activities used to coordinate the design process; and iterative prototyping so that participants can interrogate developing designs and ground their design conversations in the desired outcomes of the design process and the context in which these will be used (Robertson and Simonsen 2012).

Murray, Caulier-Grice and Mulgan (2010) note that there is a tension in design between "technology: the spread of networks; creation of global infrastructures for information; and social networking tools" and "the growing emphasis on the human dimension; on putting people first; giving democratic voice; and starting with the individual and relationships rather than systems

and structures” (p5). Traditional design methods have focused on the development of products. The growing field of social design is shifting that focus to include the development of new pathways and processes — with a more explicit interest in the changes in relationships that can come with it. Underpinning these processes is a set of values (see Rice 2015). Democratic participation is central to the success of co-design. In practice, this involves the “equalising power relations, working democratically, focusing upon situation-based actions, supporting mutual learning, developing tools and techniques that enable people to find a common language to work together, and considering alternative visions of technology” (Rice 2015; Kensing and Greenabum 2013).

Within the field of co-design, Sanders and Strappers (2014) suggest that co-design processes can have three kinds of intent: to provoke, to engage and to serve. Provocations might take the form of cultural probe and tend to reflect an “expert-mindset” which views the user as ‘subject’. On the other end of the spectrum, creative tools are used to enable non-designers to co-design together, acting as “partners”. This spectrum from user as subject to user as partner reflects the breadth of design work — sometimes working ‘for’ and sometimes working ‘with’ people (see discussion pp9-11). Sanders and Strappers (2014) visualise this spectrum as follows — placing service design and social design in the along the work ‘with’ end of the spectrum.



Figure 6. Movements of design are emerging across time scales: the world as it is (inner ring), the near future (middle ring) and the speculative future (outer ring).

Strappers and Sanders (2014) also suggest that design processes focus on three time frames: the world as it is, the near future (next generation) and the long-term speculative future. Here we return to the question of radical versus incremental innovation. Design processes that look to the speculative future might be more likely to envision radical innovation, whereas design processes focused on the immediate concerns of services and support might create incremental innovation and improvement.

What can we learn from this literature?

1. For many, social innovation and design thinking go hand-in-hand. Leading thinkers in the social innovation field (Young Foundation, Nesta) often conflate the two approaches, using 'design thinking' and 'design approaches' as the natural vehicle for creating innovation — though of course there are a number of routes to innovation.
2. Within design culture, there are important distinctions to be made between a 'user-focus' and a 'consumer-focus'. The commercial aspect of some design work can create relationships with users, and does not necessarily reflect the wide range of people who will be affected, or invested, in the 'vision' of those designs.
3. Participatory design researchers and co-designers often adopt a set of values and principles in their work — signally their interest in deliberative democracy and social justice. This interest chimes with advocates of person-centered approaches to services and support who have long-advocated for participatory approaches.
4. Even with the adoption of these democratic principles, some design processes may 'facilitate' others' co-production, but fail to act as a full participant in the co-production process. Recent criticisms of the co-production approach (see [Nurture Development](#) blog) suggest that professionals tend to lead co-production and thus fail to unsettle some of the assumptions about service delivery and people accessing support.
5. There are different levels of engagement 'with' people during a project, often depending on the kinds of needs required and the design approach that is employed. But what about after a project is complete? Mulgan (2014) suggests that designers could do more to think about the implementation of their work as well as its impact. Even in co-design processes, the production of prototypes and processes is likely to be limited to the co-design experience, while the scaling of these inventions is related to the no-man's land of 'post-project' work.

ADVANCING IRISS' THEORETICAL BASE

Each of these three areas of expertise (EiP, KM and I+I) challenge assumptions in the others. Learning can be gained from the overlapping nature of these approaches at IRISS. A summary of the harmonies, and provocations, is outlined here.

ASSUMPTIONS:

I+I draws on co-design principles and advocates for co-production in both the development of knowledge and the implementation of changes to practice/systems — actively seeking to unsettle power dynamics and change relationships

EiP assumes that evidence use is a spectrum and draws on range of approaches — sometimes focusing on dissemination and translation, at other times using action research and co-production to close the theory to practice gap. These approaches vary depending on capacity of researchers/users and the complexity of the issue. A particular strength of an EiP approach is the focus on translation.

Knowledge media draws on principles of open source design and horizontal media and challenges the idea of two worlds: 'producers' and 'consumers' of knowledge. It works to cultivate a networked approach to knowledge production and learning, ensuring that information (and the means to produce new information) are universally accessible.

CHALLENGES:

A spectrum of approaches to evidence-use (and the concept of evidence itself) can reproduce ideas of 'producers' and 'consumers'. Likewise, concepts of co-production and co-design are often led by 'experts' who facilitate group learning. The principles of open-source, horizontal approaches to knowledge mobilisation value the independence and self-direction of individuals within the network over the facilitated learning produced by 'gatekeepers'. Both I+I and EiP could draw lessons from these approaches and try approaches to evidence use and innovation which work within collective models of production and ownership, perhaps relying on pre-existing networks as a starting point.

Web 2.0 celebrates networked learning, but sometimes assumes an idealised vision of the 'network' in which the only barrier is access. In fact, virtual and non virtual communities share patterns of human interaction — power and inequality can function in similar ways within the networked learning environments as they do in offline interactions. Similarly, the aspirations of horizontal media assume that everyone has the capacity to both create, and use, digital technology. Some aspects of the Web 2.0 have become populated with users (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Wordpress), but few people can build their own versions of these platforms. The view of 'horizontal' knowledge sharing is challenged by the practices and ethos of co-production, which aims to share all aspects of the production process and ensure that all participants can have the skills to re-create these interactions/environments.

CONCLUSIONS

- Each approach values experiential, social, learning
- They also share an interest in the idea of knowledge into action, but views on that process differ
- Networked learning process is dominant in the KM approaches
 - There is a 'many-to-many' horizontal exchange of information
 - Linear model that involves push/pull
 - Assumes a wide gap between knowledge and taking action
- Relational learning process is dominant in EiP approaches
 - More targeted process of knowledge development — usually involving particular people or information
 - Translation process targets specific barriers/needs
 - Assumes a narrower gap between knowledge and action
- Interactive learning model is dominant in I+I approaches
 - Co-production with a community of people, rooted in a place and particular needs
 - Co-creation process that focuses on discovery and action 'together'
 - Can not separate knowledge from action — no gap between knowing and doing

STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON

IRISS' work is focused on supporting and sustaining innovation, embedding knowledge sharing and digital participation, and the development and use of evidence (broadly defined) in practice. Evidence from this evaluation suggests that IRISS' contribution to the sector is enabled in the following ways:

INPUTS

- IRISS' core principles and ways of working aspire to be enabling
- IRISS' skills complement the skill sets of partners who tend to have practice-based expertise or lived experience in social services delivery
- IRISS' methodologies are creative and responsive

ACTIVITIES

- IRISS' work ranges from producing resources and acting as a hub of information to co-producing responses to issues in the sector
- Importantly, there is interplay between these activities – learning from co-production is used to produce resources
- Ensures outputs are relevant, tested in practice and responsive to emerging issues

ENGAGEMENT

- IRISS' engagement is enabling and empowering
- Equitable engagement is facilitated and sustained across groups/partnerships
- All of IRISS' communication is easy to access - complex information is synthesised and made relevant to practice
- Diverse perspectives are included, i.e. within authors/presenters in blogs, podcasts, etc., partners who produce toolkits, and co-design teams
- Support offered to enable on-going learning and development of skills (e.g. Personal Learning Networks project), projects (e.g. PROP and PROP2) or large-scale change programmes (e.g. Social Assets in Action)
- IRISS is a trusted, neutral, intermediary in the sector whose work is relevant to practice and supports creativity in the sector

CONTEXTUAL ENABLERS THAT SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

- Partners have the time and resources to commit to change programmes
- Trust in resources/projects – through engagement with evidence base and equitable engagement with diverse perspectives in partnership working
- Policy salience of issues to be addressed, e.g. outcomes, assets, integration, service re-design, partnership working, etc.
- Organisational leadership and community buy-in that enables participation, sustains involvement and supports scaling-up of the changes
- Flexibility for IRISS to respond to on-going issues and support scaling-up/learning

If we combine these enablers with the evidence from the literature on evidence-use, digital participation and innovation, we can create a simple list of enablers for sharing knowledge, using evidence and innovating in the social services sector (Note: numbers 1-8 are extrapolated from Nutley and colleagues' 2007 review on knowledge mobilisation and policy)

Ten enablers for sharing knowledge, using evidence and innovating:

1. Enthusiasm
2. Trust
3. Support (financial, emotional and technical)
4. Leadership within the impact setting
5. Tailor information to the policy/practice/community contexts
6. Discover and target particular barriers/enablers within that context
7. Ensure everyone has access to the tools and resources being used to create change
8. Integrate the production of knowledge and innovation into existing, context-specific, activities and networks
9. Create equitable engagement — work to address power imbalances
10. Evidence of plan, process and impact

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. IRISS' impact is enabled by its three-part approach: creative work may enable short change to services, but this approach requires translation and informing work to enable wide-spread sustainability and scaling.
Recommendation: IRISS should maintain its delicate balance between these three approaches, investigating how they can support one another.
2. IRISS approaches involvement with the social services sector through three avenues: networks, person-to-person relationships and place-based interactions. Each avenue has valuable lessons to offer about reach and impact. For example, networked interaction assumes many-to-many communication and (often) un-facilitated collaboration.
Recommendation: Place-based interactions could draw lessons from this approach, perhaps attempting to test innovations within pre-existing networks and acting as a participant rather than facilitator.
3. Likewise, networked modes of interaction could draw lessons from place-based and relationship-based models, perhaps working to develop more robust relationships with the network to ensure feedback on information/resources is robust.
Recommendation: Ensure opportunities for feedback are clear, develop small network of interested practitioners to test out IRISS resources, develop stronger links with IRISS Champions.
4. Evidence suggests that use of information, translation, scaling-up are each enabled when barriers are identified and challenged as part of the programme of activity.
Recommendation: IRISS could do more to challenge specific policy/practice/community barriers to ensure people who engage with it have the resources they need to make use of its resources.
5. IRISS is viewed as a neutral intermediary and is trusted in the sector, a finding which sets IRISS apart from many other intermediaries in Scotland.
Recommendation: IRISS should continue to value its independent, neutral, role in the sector being careful to work 'in-between' different groups, perspectives and organisations.
6. IRISS' outputs are perceived as policy relevant and grounded in practice, though there is a risk that some of its work does not resonate with front-line practice (based on limited reach in that area of the sector).
Recommendation: More work could be done to engage a wide spectrum of practitioners, carers, people accessing support as well as policy makers, artists and academics, to ensure IRISS' ideas, evidence and innovations are well-tested and robust.
7. IRISS has gained new insights into its work through the CA process, but more work is needed to make use of the evidence from the seven case studies, the survey and this report.
Recommendation: Continued reflective practice to capture on-going learning, robust

project planning, a new plan for routine data collection to capture evidence of implementation and impact and follow-up with participants to discover lasting effects.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO FURTHER DEVELOP IRISS' EVALUATION PRACTICE

1. IRISS could do more to connect routine statistics on its 'informing' work (e.g. twitter statistics, website page views, engagement with IRISS.fm or IRISS blogs) with ongoing project monitoring and impact. There is a wealth of untapped data that can be used to understand IRISS' reach in the sector and the relevance of particular projects/outputs at a more macro level.
2. It may be worth adding a mechanism for feedback when users download information from IRISS' web platforms or some other mechanism for collecting more representative feedback from people who make use of IRISS materials (though may have limited relationships with the organisation).
3. Like many practitioners, IRISS staff are busy with ongoing work and struggle to find time to reflect on their practice. More could be done to ensure that reflective practice is a protected part of IRISS' work, particularly where project monitoring and evaluation are concerned. Lessons learned need to be captured and shared across the staff group so that it lives up to its aspirations as a 'learning organisation'.
4. IRISS could do more to share its evaluations with the sector, showing the value of reflective practice and the ongoing learning that is required to create shifts in practice and culture change. This could be accomplished through a blog, interactive web-based resource and/or podcasts.
5. IRISS could test out some of its recommendations for other organisations within its own walls. For example, IRISS assumes that practitioners make use of reading groups and seminars as a way to learn about new ideas and evidence. IRISS could adopt a similar model to test out the model and share its own experience with the risks/enablers to sustaining that kind of engagement.
6. IRISS could recruit a group of interested people from the social services sector to advise it on its relevance and impact — supporting the organisation to develop in line with the needs of its stakeholders.
7. IRISS staff could adopt some of the methods from this CA evaluation, testing them out and adapting them, to make sure that project planning, monitoring and end outcomes are developed with a theoretical understanding of rationale, activities and (projected) outcomes. Embedding evaluation practice across IRISS' work could greatly strengthen the organisation's learning and development.

INTRODUCTION

Catherine-Rose Stocks-Rankin (CR) was hired as an IRISS Associate on a 12 month FTE contract. This evaluation was carried out, part-time, over 18 months between October 2013 and March 2015. In this section, I describe the purpose of the evaluation, the methods used and give a high level overview of the research process (from planning, discovery, development and delivery).

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

1. To tell IRISS' contribution story: What does IRISS do, why, how and what difference does it make?
2. To use and potentially embed 'evaluative' thinking within IRISS in order to support the on-going planning, monitoring and evaluation of IRISS' activities
3. To produce outputs which can be used to evidence IRISS' (positive, negative or neutral) impact on the social services sector in Scotland
4. To better understand contribution analysis, and ethnographic approaches to evaluation, as a method for understanding impact within intermediaries like IRISS

METHOD: CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

Contribution Analysis (CA) is part of a family of evaluation approaches called theory-based evaluations. CA uses a theory of change to show how a programme is intended to work and the projected impacts of its production. This process of "logical argumentation" (Wimbush 2012) determines whether the outcomes observed are the result of the programme's activities.

Contribution Analysis is typically conducted in six stages (Mayne 2010):

1. Determine the cause-effect issue to be addressed
2. Develop a theory of change and risks to its success
3. Generate evidence in response to the theory of change
4. Assemble the contribution story, and outline the challenges to it
5. Seek out additional evidence
6. Revise and strengthen the contribution story

Developing a robust theory of change is central to a successful CA evaluation. The theory of change is modelled through a set of tools called logic models (Rogers 2008) or results chains (Mayne 2001). These tools act as a template for how a programme is intended to work. There are various templates for creating a theory of change. The appropriate model will depend on the nature of the intervention or process to be studied.

For example, Morton (2012) has developed a results chain which focuses on research use and impact. It begins with an account of inputs and outputs and then moves through key processes such as engagement, reaction, change and contribution. Importantly, it prompts the user to focus on assumptions and risk at each stage of this process in order to clarify 'how' the activities of research use are designed to make an impact.

Another model, developed by NHS Health Scotland, reflects an evaluation of Glasgow City Council's suicide prevention partnership in 2009 (Wimbush, Montague and Mulherin 2012). Their evaluation used a 'nested logic model' to capture the two stage process of their pathway to impact. The first stage maps the creation of a successful partnership. The second stage shows the impact of that partnership on the goal of positive health outcomes.

The central connection between these models is that each attempts to describe a pathway to contribution. Outputs from the evaluation tend to be narrative in nature and often read like a "journey" (Patton 2012) from resources through activities to outcomes and outputs. Done well, these narratives should showcase the rich detail and complexity of the programme's context.

BENEFITS OF CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

The use of contribution analysis is thought to provide a rigorous alternative to experimental models of evaluation that would typically use a counterfactual or control case (Wimbush, Montague and Mulherin 2012). This is appealing in evaluations of social services where the phenomenon under evaluation is complex and context specific – as for example in the case of practitioner research.

A useful aspect of a contribution analysis approach is the opportunity for collaboration and learning. Both Patton (2012) and Wimbush et al (2012) identify multiple opportunities for engagement in the evaluation process. Users of the evaluation are encouraged to participate in its design as well as the generation of evidence.

This participation is a cornerstone to the rigour of the process itself. The development of a theory of change is intended to be a dialogical process which includes producers of the programme and users of its outputs. The perspectives of these stakeholders on 'how' a programme is implemented and the possible changes it creates are the central elements of the theory of change. Without the contribution of these voices, the theory of change is reliant on the evaluator's distanced and singular viewpoint.

This process supports the development of 'collaborative capacity' (Wimbush, Montague and Mulherin 2012). It also creates opportunities for ownership of the evidence and encourages the development of evidence which is useful and relevant to the organisations involved and the programmes they develop and use (Patton 2012). In the context of knowledge production, engagement and exchange, it also creates opportunities for reflective practice (Schon 1999).

LIMITS TO CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

Definitive claims of attribution or contribution are difficult to make in the context of complex systems. Mayne (1999) suggests that the focus of evaluation in this context is more often directed towards increasing understanding of a programme and accounting for 'what works'; it rarely "'proves' things in an absolute sense" (p5).

Some suggest that the focus on contribution, rather than direct attribution, "is so weak that a finding of no contribution is highly unlikely" (See Patton 2012 p376). Patton suggests that this is a legitimate concern and offers an eight-step metric for promoting rigour in contribution analysis (developed from Woods 2007) to supplement his analysis.

Patton suggests that the narrative of contribution can be considered sufficiently robust if multiple perspectives are included in the creation of the logic model, alternative explanations for change are thoroughly addressed and accounted for, and the process itself is reflective and iterative so as to be appropriately critical (for more detail, see p375 in Patton 2012).

CA could be strengthened by a conceptualisation of different kinds of evidence or knowledge and how they might combine to support the CA approach. While Mayne acknowledges (2001, 2012) that CA can be used in combination with a range of methods, there remain some implicit tensions around the question of robustness and which methods produce the strongest results.

For more detail, please see the [literature review on Contribution Analysis](#).

STRENGTHENING CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

In response to Mayne's suggest that CA could benefit from more epistemological rigour, I have drawn inspiration from three fields of research practice: (1) appreciative inquiry (2) ethnographic methods and (3) grounded theory and analysis. I describe each of these in turn.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

CA has been criticised for failing to articulate its epistemological root (Dybdal et al 2010). In their review of CA, Dybdal et al (2010) conclude that CA practitioners could do more to clarify their methodological approach — particularly they way they conceptualise knowledge, the analytical tools they use to come to conclusions about contribution, and the purpose of their use of the CA lens to evaluate.

In response to those criticisms, I draw inspiration from appreciative modes of inquiry. Appreciative inquiry (AI) was designed as an organisational development tool (Cooperrider et al 2003; Bushe 2013) and has subsequently been adopted by researchers to describe the value of imagination in the action-research process. In both cases, AI focuses on creativity — on the importance of imagining what could be, as well understanding what is.

AI is underpinned by five principles. I address each of these and show the way my approach to CA has drawn from these ideas:

1. Within AI, the purpose of inquiry is to stimulate new ideas and possibilities for transformation. Within this CA evaluation, IRISS and I have worked to visualise a pathway from activities to outcomes which clarifies their contribution to culture change in social services. As part of this visualisation, we worked to articulate the implicit assumptions that IRISS brings to its activities as well as the risks and enablers for their activities. Through this process (called logic modelling in evaluation terms), we were able to come to an understanding of what IRISS does as well as what it hopes to achieve. We did this at project, programme and organisational level.
2. Within AI, the process of inquiry is the beginning of the change process — relationships, knowledge and systems will develop through the process of collectively asking questions. In this CA evaluation, I have been embedded within IRISS for 18 months, supporting them with project planning, strategic development, articulating their assumptions and activities and evaluating their impact. In each of these aspects of my work, I have sought to participate with IRISS and worked collaboratively to support them to reflect on their work/impact and come to a common understanding across the organisation. Through the very process of my embedded evaluation, IRISS has changed.
3. AI values stories as way of understanding organisations and views the development as a “co-authored” process. Logic modelling is a reflective tool, designed to prompt participants to tell the narrative of their work. Stories — about what was done and how it worked, the failures and unexpected triumphs, the outcomes and aspirations for next steps — were the bread and butter of these logic-modelling sessions. Through them, I learned the ‘story’ of IRISS’ work, its three programmes and the organisation as a whole. It was this narrative that I tested.

What’s more, I was embedded within IRISS for 18-months, adopting an ethnographic approach to this evaluation. By being embedded, IRISS staff and I have worked alongside one another, sharing stories about our work. Some of this has been informal — the kind of conversation one has round the lunch table. Sometimes it was the kind of stories we tell to new staff — explaining why we do things the way we do. At other times, we told stories to each other about the CA work — how it was functioning in the organisation, the value it had for different staff and the learning I was gaining as evaluator. Had I been based in a consultancy or external research centre, these are the kinds of stories I might have shared with other evaluators. Being based in IRISS meant that we did much of the sense-making about this work together.

4. AI suggests that our imagined future drives the actions we take today. This CA evaluation has had a dual purpose. First — to evidence IRISS’ impact. Second — and perhaps more importantly — to give a clear explanation for who IRISS is, what it does and why. The work to articulate a shared understanding of IRISS’ role in the sector has been an ongoing process through the 18-month evaluation (as evidenced by the many different logic models we created to clarify the organisation’s work).

5. Proponents of AI suggest that sustainable change requires positive feelings — joy, enthusiasm, camaraderie are all thought to increase cognitive flexibility and support innovation. In this CA evaluation, IRISS and I have had to find ways to work together. Though the staff articulate surprise when I suggest that we might have found this process difficult (a testament to their learning culture if ever there was one), I have nonetheless been surprised by just how much fun we've managed to have together. I've been able to test out some creative ways of logic modelling (a puzzle, a river metaphor, a recipe card) and IRISS in turn has brought their creative and collaborative ethos to bear. Though there have been missteps for all of us along the way, we began the project with openness and enthusiasm and have managed to sustain that approach throughout.

For my purposes, CA fulfils the need to evaluate 'with' rather than 'on'. Supporting the development of an organisation is, for me, the most valuable part of the evaluation process.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EVALUATION

There is a long tradition in evaluation studies of working with a 'user focus' (see [Quinn Patton](#)). Evaluations of this nature are often conducted by someone within an organisation who is well-placed to support and shape its development. These evaluations benefit from having a close proximity to the practicalities of an organisation's activity and a role within a wider range of organisational processes than would typically be afforded an external evaluator. In short, they get to 'know' an organisation more thoroughly as a result of being embedded within it. To do this work, I have drawn inspiration from Institutional Ethnography (Smith 2006; Campbell and Gregor 2002) and the work of Dorothy E. Smith to focus on the value of 'practitioner' wisdom and local knowledge. Smith suggests that an understanding of people's work in the everyday is the best way to understand institutional or organisational structures (Smith 1999).

In order to conduct this evaluation, I was 'embedded' within IRISS between October 2013 and April 2015, working part-time with the team to understand their work and help evidence the impact of individual case study projects, the three IRISS programmes (EiP, I+I and KM) and the organisation as a whole. This evaluation draws on ethnographic principles of 'thick' description (Geertz 2001). Ethnographic work seeks to describe — to make explicit the otherwise invisible practices of communities.

This process has proved to be valuable to IRISS for two reasons. First, it has prompted IRISS to be explicit about the rationale of their work and helps ensure this is effectively linked to the outcomes. When working through the CA model, IRISS has been prompted to think of the risks and enablers of their work. These prompts help to ensure that the planning and delivery of IRISS's work is robust. When using CA to reflect back on completed projects, these prompts create a space to talk openly about what did and didn't work. Similarly, partners in a project are prompted to talk openly about what works and doesn't work for them. These open and reflective discussions are key to the success of CA.

Second, we use CA as a participatory process involving the entire IRISS team. As a result, it has created new opportunities for communication about work processes, values and the direction of

travel for the organisation. As IRISS comes to the end of its current three-year strategy, this process has contributed to the team's thinking about 'why' it undertakes certain kinds of work, 'how' it hopes to create and sustain changes in the sector, and the long-term outcomes of that work. These sense-making activities are central to IRISS' development as an organisation.

GROUNDING THEORY

My approach to analysis draws on the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Corbin and Strauss 2008; Charmaz 2013). Grounded theory can be a broad church — many social science researchers claim to have conducted a 'grounded' analysis of their data. In my experience, grounded theory can be proxy for light-touch thematic analysis rather than the thickly descriptive, data-driven and theory-building work that was begun by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s (Glaser and Strauss 1966).

In this evaluation, I have adopted both the spirit and the practice of grounded theory. First, I focus on the experience of people and the 'data' we generate together as the driver for theory building. Charmaz notes that grounded theory is "a method of explication and emergence" which allows for discovery (Charmaz 2008, p156). Rather than developing a theory and forcing the data to 'fit', I have allowed the theory to emerge through an iterative tracking back and forth between IRISS' theory of change and the data I generated to evidence it.

In practice, this means I have worked with the data to develop themes and used them to test and re-develop IRISS' theory of change. Data was generated through ethnographic observation, collaborative theory-building (logic modelling) with IRISS, and qualitative data collection with people who have worked with IRISS or used its resources.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The following provides a high-level overview of the steps that were taken to determine research questions, generate data and conduct analysis. It is organised around the linear steps of the project with some detail given on timing. This is intended to offer the reader a practical insight into the steps and stages of the research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does IRISS support people to embed evidence use, innovation and ongoing learning within their practice?
2. What are the risks and enablers to this embedding activity?
3. Do these embedding activities support culture change in the design, delivery and experience of social services in Scotland?

To answer these questions, the project was divided into five phases: discover, define, do, develop and share:

Discover and Plan: October 2013-December 2013 (or 10% of project time)

- Conducted a literature review on CA methodology
- Critically reflected on the use of CA within the PROP project (see details on [PROP evaluation](#))
- Identified weaknesses in the CA methodology and made suggestions to strengthen the approach
- First 'CA Hangout' in December 2014 to establish shared understanding of the CA methodology and shared ownership of the project at IRISS
- Presentation summarising CA for IRISS, December 2013
- Collaboratively produced logic models of IRISS and its context, December 2013
- CA literature review, shared internally with IRISS in January 2014 (available [here](#))

Define: January 2014-May 2014 (or 20% of the project)

- All work in this phase was conducted collaboratively with IRISS
- We defined the cause/effect issues to be addressed
- We worked to define the scope of the IRISS CA project
- We developed several theories of change for IRISS' impact on the social services sector
 - These theories were refined as the team reflected on, and explained, their work
 - Additional work was done by the evaluator to synthesise perspectives from across the organisation into one, simple, logic model
- We identified seven primary case studies that would be used to evidence the organisation's theory of change
- In small groups, we developed theories of change for the seven case studies selected
- We discussed outcomes for the CA project
- Catherine-Rose established an Advisory Group for the project
- The Advisory Group had its first two meetings on: February 6, 2014 and April 29, 2014

Do — Data Collection for Case Studies: June 2014-September 2014 (or 30% of the project)

- Case studies were chosen to provide evidence on a range of IRISS activity
- In each case study, the six steps within the CA approach were used (see above)
- Selection criteria:
 - Chosen by IRISS
 - Reflect an equal distribution across the three programmes (EiP, I+I and KM)
 - Reflect a wide range of programme activity
 - Reflect a range of time periods (older projects as well as ongoing projects)
 - Reflect different mechanisms for change e.g. translation, demonstration, co-production and 'hub' projects (these categories are likely to overlap!)
- Format for case studies:
 - The rationale for the project – the 'why'
 - The mechanisms that create change – the 'how'
 - The highs and lows of the project – the 'process' of implementation
 - The impacts – the 'so what'

- The context, enablers and risks for creating change
- Recommendations for IRISS' development
- Process for generating each case study
 - Developed a theory of change with IRISS
 - Read project materials from IRISS (e.g. project plans, reports, blogs, etc.)
 - Recruited participants
 - Conducted interviews with partners (questionnaires also used in some cases)
 - Transcribed interviews/questionnaire data
 - Conducted thematic analysis using grounded theory and analysis
 - Wrote a draft contribution story
 - Shared the case study with IRISS to validate and refine narrative
 - Developed clear summary of mechanisms for change and impact
 - Conducted more research if necessary
 - Re-drafted and shared with IRISS

Do — Data Collection with CSWO: November 2014 (or 5% of the project)

- In order to develop a better understand of the context of social services, we opted to augment case study data with interviews with Chief Social Work Officers
- 29/31 CSWOs were contacted (IRISS/the researcher has close relationships with 2/31)
- Nine telephone interviews were conducted on three themes:
 - Current challenges and opportunities facing the social services sector
 - Reflections on the role of evidence, innovation and learning in the Council
 - Knowledge and perceptions of IRISS

Do — Strategic Development with IRISS: Ongoing (or 5% of the project)

- An unanticipated aspect of this work has included supporting IRISS to develop robust project planning, reflective practice, a formal strategy for 2015-2018
- This work includes:
 - Project planning for IRISS' Homelessness project, Supervision project, one Fit for the Future case study, Hospital to Home, Plan P and the Big Idea
 - Reflective practice on IRISS' Experience Labs, Personal Learning Networks and IRISS' three programmes (EiP, I+I and KM)
 - Support with IRISS staff away days in January 2014 and IRISS strategy days in August and October 2014

[Table 5: Interview participants by sector and case study evidence](#)

	SECTOR	ROLE	EVIDENCE ON	EVIDENCE ON	EVIDENCE ON
1.	INDEPENDENT	COMMS	CHAMPIONS		
2.	INDEPENDENT	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	IRISS FM	LX
3.	INTERMEDIARY	STRATEGIC	CONTEXT		
4.	LOCAL GOV'T	COMMISSIONING	PILOTLIGHT		
5.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
6.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
7.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
8.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
9.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
10.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
11.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
12.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
13.	LOCAL GOV'T	CSWO	CONTEXT		
14.	LOCAL GOV'T	HEAD OF SERVICE	CONTEXT		
15.	LOCAL GOV'T	LEARNING/DEV	CHAMPIONS	INSIGHTS	
16.	LOCAL GOV'T	LEARNING/DEV	CHAMPIONS	IRISS FM	LX
17.	LOCAL GOV'T	LEARNING/DEV	CHAMPIONS		
18.	LOCAL GOV'T	LEARNING/DEV	CHAMPIONS	INSIGHTS	LX
19.	LOCAL GOV'T	LEARNING/DEV	CHAMPIONS	LFO	
20.	LOCAL GOV'T	PRACTICE	PILOTLIGHT		
21.	LOCAL GOV'T	PRACTICE	SOCIAL ASSETS		
22.	LOCAL GOV'T	PRACTICE	CHAMPIONS	INSIGHTS	LX
23.	LOCAL GOV'T	PRACTICE	CHAMPIONS		
24.	LOCAL GOV'T	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	PILOTLIGHT	
25.	LOCAL GOV'T	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	LFO	IRISS FM
26.	LOCAL GOV'T	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	INSIGHTS	
27.	LOCAL GOV'T	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS		
28.	LOCAL GOV'T	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	INSIGHTS	
29.	NHS	PRACTICE	SOCIAL ASSETS		
30.	NHS	PRACTICE	SOCIAL ASSETS		
31.	THIRD	ACADEMIC	INSIGHTS		
32.	THIRD	ACADEMIC	INSIGHTS	LFO	
33.	THIRD	ACADEMIC	INSIGHTS		
34.	THIRD	COMMS	LX		
35.	THIRD	COMMS	IRISS FM		
36.	THIRD	LEARNING/DEV	CHAMPIONS	LFO	

37.	THIRD	LEARNING/DEV	INSIGHTS		
38.	THIRD	PRACTICE	SOCIAL ASSETS		
39.	THIRD	PRACTICE	IRISS FM		
40.	THIRD	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	PILOTLIGHT	IRISS FM
41.	THIRD	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	IRISS FM	
42.	THIRD	STRATEGIC	LX		
43.	THIRD	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	LFO	
44.	THIRD	STRATEGIC	CHAMPIONS	LFO	
45.	THIRD	STRATEGIC	SOCIAL ASSETS		

[Develop – All-IRISS Theory of Change: October 2014-April 2015 \(or 20% of the project\)](#)

- IRISS’ theory of change is based on six pools of evidence:
 - Collaborative, and iterative, development of IRISS’ theory of change
 - Qualitative data from case studies
 - Interviews with CSWOs
 - A commissioned survey on the social services sector in Scotland
 - Ethnographic observation with IRISS
 - Literature from the multi-disciplinary fields of: evidence into action, innovation and knowledge media
- A draft of the IRISS theory of change was produced in March 2015 and shared with the team for comment
- A CA Hangout was held in April to validate the analysis
- The draft was revised and shared with the IRISS Board Members in April 2015

[Reflect and Share: Ongoing \(or 10% of the project\)](#)

- Learning from the CA work was shared iteratively throughout the project
- Updates were made to Basecamp (IRISS’ internal project management platform) and all project documentation was shared
- CA Hangouts were held regularly to develop and discuss the work, including the development of theories of change for the organisation and the seven case studies, preliminary findings and final analysis
- Where relevant, reflections and resources on the project were shared on the IRISS’ Contribution Analysis Blog
- Primary project outputs include:
 - A literature review of CA methodology
 - Two presentations on CA (available on the CA blog)
 - Presentation and CA ‘recipe cards’ for the Social Services Expo 2014
 - A simple organisation-wide IRISS logic model for the IRISS Strategy 2015-2018
 - A detailed organisation-wide logic model for the IRISS CA report
 - Seven CA case studies
 - A full report on the CA evaluation
 - A summary booklet of the CA evaluation

STRENGTHS OF THE EVALUATION AND LESSONS LEARNED

The strengths of this evaluation are two-fold. First, the benefits for IRISS as an organisation are wide-reaching and include robust outputs on its impact as well as a more subtle embedding of 'evaluative thinking' within the organisation. Second, the evaluation itself reflects some of IRISS' principles and ways of working. As a result, IRISS has tested some of the ways it works with others on itself. Reflective practice, evidence-use and creative methodologies and shared ownership are all features of this project — as they are in IRISS' work as whole.

OUTCOMES FOR IRISS

1. Greater understanding of IRISS' activities, values and approach as an intermediary organisation
2. Evidence of IRISS' impact as an intermediary organisation
3. More knowledge about the risks/enablers to culture change for the social services sector
4. Project/programme development at IRISS
5. More reflective practice at IRISS
6. More knowledge about Contribution Analysis and its value as an evaluation method for intermediary organisations

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE EVALUATION

- Directed by IRISS!
 - This work is first and foremost directed by IRISS as primary users of the project's findings
 - I bring a method and some experience with the work you do - as well as an ethos of openness and a love of learning - but this work is for you to direct and shape.
- Accessibility and Co-Operation
 - I aspire to produce project materials that are accessible, easy to access and open to co-operative/collaborative engagement
- Dialogue
 - Discussion, reflection and revision are core aspects of this CA work. I hope to create multiple, and varied, opportunities for dialogue which is open and honest - and most importantly supportive
- Iterative Learning
 - We're learning to do this together (there are very few evaluations of this kind of work - and none which take our approach)
 - I've approached this work with the assumption that iterative learning over time will be best for all of us.
 - We're learning about evaluation and embedding 'evaluative thinking' by doing it!

LESSONS LEARNED

To our knowledge, no other intermediary organisation has undergone this kind of intensive, ethnographic evaluation of its processes and impact. In fact, few organisations undergo an

evaluation of this nature. As a result, IRISS and the evaluator have had to be highly flexible and creative in the collaborative work required to make this evaluation a success. There are two primary lessons to take away from this research experience.

1. There can be a trade-off between project deliverables and project responsiveness. This project was emergent by design — IRISS and I collaborated to develop the research questions, the scope of the evaluation, its outcomes as well as much of the data that underpins the theory of change. Very little was pre-determined aside from the methodology. As a result, expectations of project deliverables were sometimes difficult to manage. Deadlines were missed and the project overrun by approximately four weeks. But there were many unintended benefits to the project. Strategic planning, project planning, project management, reflective practice and embedding ‘evaluative thinking’ all became a part of this work — though none of that was an intended outcome of the project.
2. CA evaluators make claims about their use of ‘systems’ analysis and the ability to understand contributions in light of the contextual risks and enablers. The idealism of these claims is not quite reflected in my experience of CA evaluation. In practice, determining the implicit rationale of the project, evaluating its implementation and impact are significant undertakings. In order to truly give an account of the systems that surround it, a more thorough environmental scan (before, during and after) a project is likely required. Care should be taken in making any claims about a systems analysis. CA acknowledges complexity and works to understand risks and enablers — but CA has some way to go before it can truly claim to understand impact within systems as a whole.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

This research has proved to be highly innovative, providing new theoretical and empirical insight into intermediary organisations as well as new methodological insight into the process of Contribution Analysis. There are two main contributions to knowledge and practice for IRISS:

1. Intermediaries have been theorised as more than ‘research-into-practice’ organisations and knowledge brokers – at IRISS, brokerage and translation are extended to include innovation and the many-to-many exchange encouraged through digital participation. This is a new way of understanding ‘intermediary’ work and contributes both theoretical and empirically to debates with the broad field of knowledge mobilisation, innovation and digital literacy.
2. Contribution Analysis has been shown to support reflective practice and works particularly well when facilitated by a neutral party (as I have done throughout this research). CA has been highly valued as a project planning tool and has begun to be embedded in IRISS planning and monitoring workflow. The addition of evidence from this report should, ideally, support IRISS to track its impact more easily.

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