

## Understanding the impact of sustainability intermediaries in a complex adaptive system

*Gary Kass*

Talk

**CMR1**

**Day Two: 1300–1325**



Scan the QR code to learn more about SCiO membership, subscribe to our newsletter and access SCiO resources.

# My aims for this session

- Introduce myself to SciO colleagues (I'm a recent joiner)
- Outline an effort to understand the impact of policy influencing
- Learn from the collective wisdom in the room
- Recruit fellow travellers

# A little about me

- Former public servant
  - Parliament – POST
  - Government – DTI, Defra
  - Agency – Natural England
- Chair of Policy Committee, Institution of Environmental Sciences
- Visiting Professor, Imperial College and University of Surrey
- Consultant, Socially Adept Ltd – *Generative Futures*
- Apprenticeship End Point Assessor for
  - Systems Thinking Practitioner (via SPA)
  - Sustainability Business Specialist (via Cranfield)

# My situation of interest

- The IES is the professional body for environmental scientists with over 6000 members in 55 countries, spanning multiple sectors
- I chair the Policy Committee and we're sponsoring a project by the IES Policy Team to develop an impact framework for policy work
- The Committee recognises the inherent VUCA-ness and the need to
  - Take a critical realist evaluation approach to identify and explain impacts (what impact, on whom, where, when, how and why)
  - Take a systemic evaluation approach and to embed impact assessment as an approach to learning and innovation

# Fuzzy boundaries, varied inter-relationships, multiple perspectives & multi-dimensional dynamics

## Internally

- The IES has 6000 members in 5 membership categories spanning multiple sectors
- What members mean by and how they value impact from policy work is varied:
  - from ‘nice to know we’re doing this’
  - to ‘what are we getting for our money?’
- Policy work is varied & interacts with many of the other areas of IES activities
- The Policy work fits into the IES Vision, Strategy & Theory of Change

## Externally

- The environmental policy world is dense, messy & dynamic
- Interconnections vary from isolationist, through cooperative to competitive
- Impossible to *attribute* impact from any single piece of policy work on ultimate outcomes (e.g. clean air)
- Think more about our *contributions* to intermediate outcomes that could lead to the ultimate outcomes

# Root Definition and 'ought to be' model

## **Root Definition – work in progress**

A system owned by IES where the Policy Team and EPAC assess the impact of policy work on behalf of IES Board, Management and Members because a clearer view of IES's policy impact will help to improve its impact and so better achieve its mission and objectives, constrained by available time and skills to undertake the assessment, the IES' ways of working and the complexity of the policy environment.

The transformation is unassessed impact to assessed impact

## **The 'ought to be' model – (very different to 'as is' reality)**

Collect, aggregate, and make sense of credible and relevant evidence of impacts across projects, programmes and portfolios, learning from insights to demonstrate and improve effectiveness

# So far (as of July), IES policy work has been reported as ...

## Externally

- Helpful
- Additive
- Patchy
- Varied by type
- Varied by level



## Internally

- Broadly adopted
- Helpful
- Appreciated
- Valued
- Varied depth

# Where we're going next

- More time & space in the Policy programme for greater impact
- Build impact assessment as shared learning process
- Engage internally & externally for feedback & feedforward
- Identify impact based on
  - degrees of contribution: e.g. REF “reach and significance” (inclusive ‘and’)
  - speed and depth of impact: e.g. rapid substantive vs long-term atmospheric
  - value for different groups: e.g. members, policymakers, partner-organisations
  - CRE: configurations of context and mechanisms leading to outcomes (CMOcs)
- Compost & cake
  - cultivating conditions for influence
  - mixing ingredients for success
- Align future Policy priorities & timings within the IES strategy



# Questions/Discussion points

- Experience in a complex, densely populated and dynamic ecosystem?
  - Systemic evaluation practice: juggling the BECM balls (Schmidt-Abbey, Reynolds & Ison, 2020)
- Clarifying inter-relationships, boundaries, perspectives & dynamics?
- Beyond data-points? engaging stakeholders meaningfully & ethically?
- From what? to so what? now what? then what?
- Towards a *community-owned* framework?

...other thoughts, suggestions, or offers very welcome!

[skagary1@gmail.com](mailto:skagary1@gmail.com)