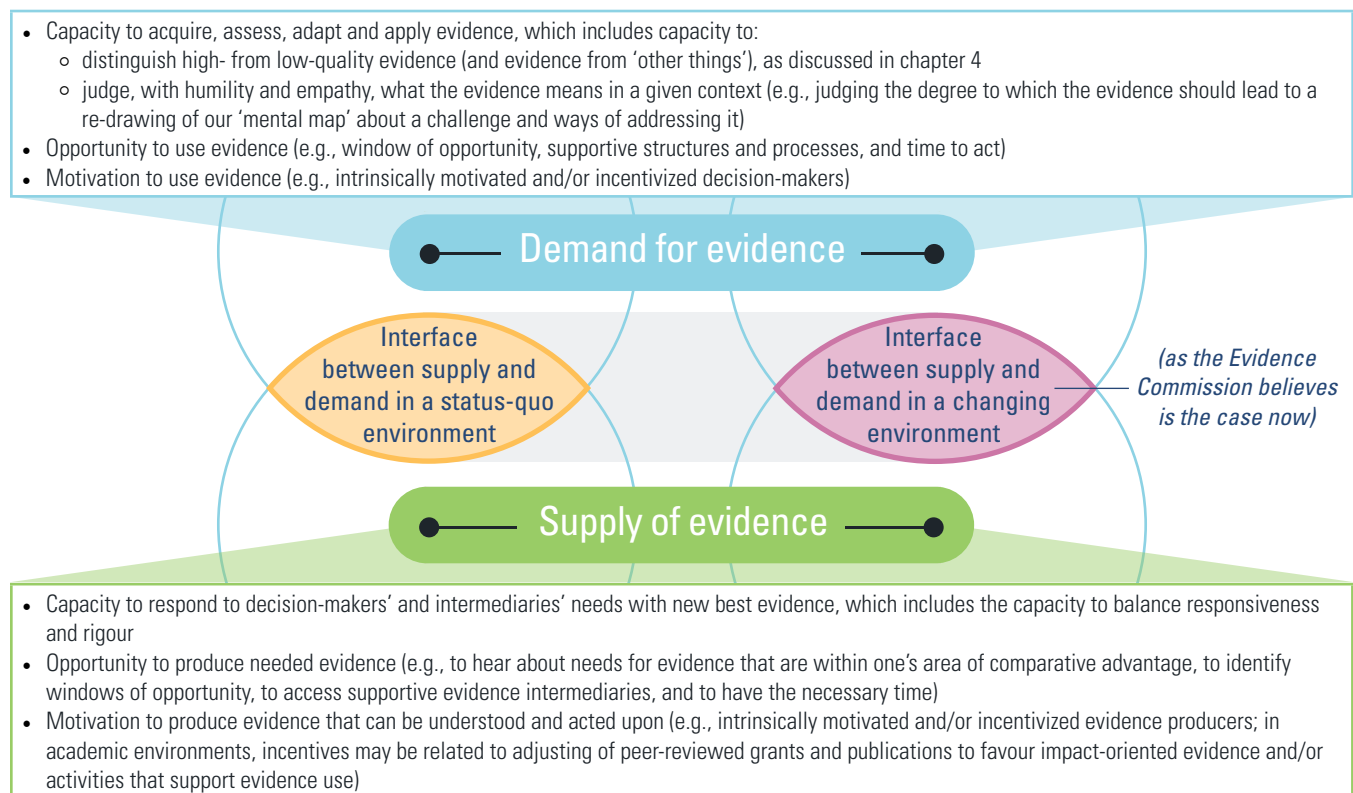


5.4 Conditions that can help and hinder evidence intermediaries

Some of the conditions that can help and hinder evidence intermediaries are within their sphere of control (e.g., aspects of their work at the interface between the demand for evidence by decision-makers and its production by researchers), while others are only within their sphere of influence. The simple behavioural-sciences framework of capacity, opportunity and motivation can be used to identify the conditions that can help evidence intermediaries.(2) The absence of each condition typically hinders evidence intermediaries.

Capacity can appear to be the easier ‘way in’; however, the types of capacity related to evidence synthesis addressed in chapter 4 (e.g., to distinguish high- from low-quality evidence) is in remarkably short supply. Many universities do not require the development of such capacity, with the result that having a PhD or other advanced degree does not guarantee that a person has the necessary skills.

Judgement, humility and empathy can also be in short supply.(3) Judgements about what the evidence means in a given context can take the form of Bayesian reasoning (as described in **section 4.7**). Such judgements are ideally leavened with both humility (e.g., we may need to downgrade our certainty about ‘what works’ and how to get it to those who need it, in light of our analysis of the local – national or sub-national – context) and empathy (e.g., we may also need to downgrade our certainty in light of how equity-seeking groups view ‘our’ evidence and how they describe their own ways of knowing). At the end of this section we describe – for the particular case of those supporting government policymakers – the additional types of capacity needed to make policy judgements with humility and empathy.



In a status-quo environment

- Capacity to respond to decision-makers' needs with best evidence, which includes the capacity to:
 - identify a need for evidence
 - match the right form(s) of evidence to the need
 - acquire (or support the production of) and assess the evidence
 - package it for and communicate it to decision-makers
 - convene deliberative dialogues and other processes that support judgements about what the evidence means in a particular context
- Opportunity to support the use of evidence (e.g., to hear about needs for evidence and windows of opportunity, to access supportive structures and processes, and to have the time to act)
- Motivation to support the use of evidence (e.g., intrinsically motivated and/or incentivized intermediaries; in academic environments, incentives may be related to peer-reviewed grants and publications being adjusted to give weight to impact-oriented evidence and/or activities that support evidence use)

In a changing environment

- Capacity to build the case for greater evidence use and to optimize supportive structures, processes and incentives, which includes the capacity to:
 - undertake the types of example sharing, demonstrations, internal audits and external comparisons described in [section 5.3](#) to build the case
 - design and implement (or adjust) structures, processes and incentives related to prioritizing and co-producing (including for living evidence products), packaging and 'push,' 'facilitating pull,' and exchange
 - routinize connections to complementary structures, processes and incentives (e.g., in the innovation and improvement systems)
- Opportunity to institutionalize the use of evidence and a high-functioning evidence-support system (e.g. window of opportunity and time to act)
- Motivation to institutionalize the use of evidence and a high-functioning evidence-support system, which will likely rely on intrinsic motivation rather than incentivization

In addition to capacity related to evidence synthesis, those supporting government policymakers need four other types of capacity to inform their judgements about what the evidence means in a given context.

Policy analysis

to clarify a policy problem and its causes, to frame options to address the problem, and to identify implementation considerations (which we addressed in [section 4.4](#))

Systems analysis

to understand who gets to make what types of decisions about the challenge now (governance arrangements), how money flows in addressing the challenge now (financial arrangements), and how efforts to address the challenge now (e.g., programs, services and products) reach and benefit those who need them (delivery arrangements); and to understand which of these system arrangements may need to change

Political analysis

to identify whether there is a compelling problem, a viable policy and conducive politics (i.e., a window of opportunity) to take action now; and to identify what it would take to open a window of opportunity if now is not the moment



Stakeholder engagement

to understand how a broad range of those who will be involved in or affected by any decision view a policy problem and its causes, options to address the problem, and key implementation considerations, and what they consider to be next steps for different constituencies; ideally such engagement is informed by evidence syntheses and the policy, systems and political analysis described above, but is also open to other ways of knowing and thinking, and is supported by robust conflict-of-interest policies and procedures.

Frameworks exist to help with systems analysis, such as the Health Systems Evidence taxonomy and Social Systems Evidence taxonomy, and to help with political analysis, such as the 'Setting agendas and developing and implementing policies' framework.



Evidence intermediary, Kerry Albright

Eternally curious international public servant bringing passion about evidence-informed decision-making, systems thinking, and help in understanding the value of evidence to international development

I want to celebrate the many successes we've collectively had with using evidence to address societal challenges – both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic – and to encourage all of us to re-double our efforts now to institutionalize what's going well and improve in other areas. We have come a long way in the past, say, five years in different parts of the UN system, and we still have a long way to go in supporting evidence use by government policymakers and other decision-makers in member states, in using evidence in the UN's normative guidance and technical assistance, and in making the most of partnerships with global public-good producers, which are the subject of many sections in chapters 5 and 6.

On the evidence-supply side, we need to recognize two points. First, there is a tension for researchers between promoting single studies (often their own, with case studies of impact often being linked to enhanced university funding) and promoting bodies of evidence, including the work of 'competitors.' As we address in **recommendations 22 and 23**, we need to re-visit the incentives created by academic institutions and journals to ensure that in future we support a focus on bodies of evidence and open science. Second, there is a tension for evidence intermediaries between distinguishing discrete forms of evidence and finding language that can capture more holistic approaches. In UNICEF, we are increasingly using a definition of implementation research that speaks to the generation and use of evidence being co-led by decision-makers, being integrated across all steps in decision-making (not just step 3 in **section 4.2**) including feeding into adaptive programming, and incorporating the types of complementary systems and political analyses described in **section 5.4**, as well as what I would call broader contextual analysis. This contextual analysis includes analyses of culture, relationships and power differentials, and can draw on tools such as situation analysis, social-network analysis, and power analysis. ” ”