The Importance Of Knowing What Works (And What Doesn’t)

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Chief Executive, The Behavioural Insights Team
Behavioural insights and experimentation in government
Nine out of ten people pay their tax on time.
Encouraging citizens to pay tax on time
Social norms to increase tax payment rates within 23 days (1 month)

Control (8,558) - 33.6%
UK Norm (8,300) - 35.1%
Local Norm (8,403) - 35.9%
Debt Norm (8,779) - 37.2%
Local + Debt Norm (8,643) - 39.0%
Replication: eg Guatemala (n=43,387)

Amount of tax received by letter sent (after 12 months)
Supporting jobseekers back to work
Conversations focused on motivation

Use this space to write down your commitment. Be as specific as possible about what you are going to do and when. Your advisor will be able to work with you to decide what might benefit you the most, but remember you are both working together to find the best way to find work.

Commitment:
I am going to spend 2 hours every weekday immediately after breakfast searching for vacancies online, e.g. on Monster

Outcome: Found 23 jobs, top 4 were: Customer Services Assistant, TG Smiths - Ref No: 123-14; Retail Assistant, Homebuy - Ref No: 12955-75288; Customer Consultant, Walls - Ref No: 2567-92098; Store Manager, Townsends - Ref: 35ba

Use this space to write down what happened after you when you completed your commitments and review this with your advisor. Be as specific as possible and be prepared to bring in your applications to your meetings so that your advisor can offer guidance on how you could improve.
Marginal Gains

Small but significant improvements add up to a large impact

2.4m jobseekers per year

5 million less days on benefits

Off-flow rates from benefits in Essex ‘Stepped Wedged’ trial (n = 110,838)

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<th>Site</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
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Replication: Australia & Singapore

n= 1403
Mobilising informal support for students

What have you been up to at college today?

Meh.

OK. Well, let me know if I can help.
So, you’re reading *The Hunger Games* in class? Who’s your favourite character?

Yeah, need to get started on that.

OK, don’t forget to read a few chapters before next week’s class!
GCSE pass rates increased by nearly 30%
Replication...and variation: ongoing!

Version 1: Student texts

Hi Alex, you're revising a range of topics in GCSE English class at the moment. Write down two specific questions you'd like to ask your tutor before your exams. #SUCCESS

Version 2: Supporter texts

Hi Lisa, Alex is revising for his exams in GCSE English class at the moment. Ask Alex to tell you two specific questions he'd like to ask their tutor before his exams. #SUCCESS

Version 3: Student + Supporter texts

Hi Lisa, Alex is revising for his exams in GCSE English class at the moment. Ask Alex to tell you two specific questions he’d like to ask their tutor before his exams. #SUCCESS
Not everything works…
The What Works Network
Putting high-quality evidence in the hands of decision makers.

“...a NICE for social policy...”
What makes a What Works Centre?

• Independent of government
• High-quality evidence syntheses and studies
• Translate assessments into practical guidance
• Build the capacity of decision makers to make use of evidence
Between them, the What Works Centres cover policy areas worth over £200bn of public expenditure.
Evidence toolkits make it easy for decision makers to understand what works – and what doesn’t.

Used by 59% of English headteachers!
Some centres undertake RCTs, quasi-experiments and other qualitative research.

Body cameras for the police
The world’s largest RCT of body-worn cameras by police, involving 2,060 police officers working in Emergency Response Teams across ten London boroughs.

Free school breakfasts
A cluster RCT implemented in 100 primary schools, testing the effect of free, universal breakfast on pupil attainment.

Home adaptations for older people
Primary, qualitative research into the experiences of older people and care practitioners with regard to home adaptations.
One in three English schools and 1 million children have participated in 160 EEF trials.
More than 800 Future Leaders in the Civil Service trained in critical thinking and research methods.

3.7 Analysis and assumptions should have an objective basis in research. Relevant evidence can be drawn from evaluations of past interventions, evidence of "what works", international comparisons, academic and other literature and relevant experience. The strategic dimension should also identify where there are gaps in the evidence base.

8.5 It is important to incorporate monitoring and evaluation into the development and appraisal stage of a policy, programme or project. Pilots can be used to test policy effectiveness of what works. Policies can also be designed with inbuilt variation to test the effectiveness of different approaches in real time.
...so can we all go home?
But still gaps…

Source: Budget 16 charts based on OBR 2016-2018 estimates
The Centres also show how weak the evidence base is in many areas...

**Apprenticeships**
- 1,250 evaluations identified
- 19 met required standard

**Asset focused approaches to tackling organized crime**
- 310 evaluations
- 0 studies met requires standard
• End of life care
• Community integration
• Competitive energy markets
• Driver safety

• Reducing reoffending
• Adult learning
• Employment
• Business productivity
• Etc.
Towards a more experimental government?

R&D spend as a proportion of total revenue (2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Internet companies</th>
<th>Electronics</th>
<th>Cars</th>
<th>Pharmaceuticals</th>
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<tr>
<td>Merck</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
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<td>Roche</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
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<td>Intel</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
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<td>Facebook</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
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<td>Alphabet</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
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<td>Pfizer</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
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<td>Johnson &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
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<td>Amazon*</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
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<td>Volkswagen</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
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<td>Samsung</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
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<td>Toyota</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
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Source: Bloomberg & UK National Audit Office.

*Amazon reports spending on "technology and content", not R&D.
What next?
Building a global evidence ecosystem.
Building a system...

Data:
- ADRP

Mining:
- Productivity analysis

Evaluation:
- TAP

Innovation funds:
- YEF

Translation:
- WW

Absorption:
- EB professions

Narrative

International collaboration:
- Events, publications, implementation

Cross-national funds:
- Replication; cross-national challenges

Infrastructure:
- Trial register, common metrics

Reviews:
- Co-fund

Toolkits:
- Share & adapt

Network:
- Evidence hubs

Learning:
- And testing materials

Cross-national funds:
- Replication; cross-national challenges

Infrastructure:
- Trial register, common metrics
The starting point is humility - acknowledging what we don’t know...