

23. Specialising in I2S

In addition to the three broad categories of I2S specialisation discussed for the first two domains—1) I2S for team leaders, 2) I2S disciplinary specialists, and 3) I2S appreciation for other integrative applied research team members—a fourth is also considered here: I2S appreciation for policy makers and practitioners.

I2S for Team Leaders

In taking responsibility for this domain and the project overall, team leaders provide guidance about how the integrated research can best support policy and practice change. They oversee decision making in two important areas. First, assessments must be made about which arena—government, business and/or civil society—their teams are in the best position to target. Second, judgment is required regarding the overall style of interaction—for example, whether it will be a highly engaged partnership or more independent and distant, with directed communication of integrated research results as the main activity. The leaders bring into their teams I2S disciplinary specialists familiar with how the relevant arena(s) operate, who can help map out more detailed options for providing support.

Team leaders set the tone for their teams in terms of openness to considering a range of options, appreciating that formulaic processes are not realistic and ensuring a commitment to the further development of I2S. They require a level of I2S expertise that is comprehensive enough to address the specific aspects of I2S described in Box 23.1. Finally, given that researchers have little control over the impact of their provision of integrated research support, integrative applied research team leaders need to think through the likely consequences if the provision is not successful in supporting policy or practice change and plan how to minimise the risk of wasting the research effort.¹

¹ In the diamorphine prescription feasibility research we emphasised publication of our findings. We also interacted with researchers and policy makers from other countries and it turned out that our results were useful for both the Swiss and the Dutch trials, even though they were not used in Australia.

Box 23.1 Specific I2S Responsibilities for Integrative Applied Research Team Leaders

Team leaders must have adequate knowledge about I2S to address

- aims and beneficiaries
- who will be responsible for providing integrated research support
- how the research world differs from the policy and practice worlds; as well as which differences can be harnessed to enhance the provision of integrated research support and which need to be managed, so that they do not prevent the provision of integrated research support
- when fresh thinking is required, and identifying processes—like Executive Sessions—that can achieve this
- authorisation
- facilitators and barriers to providing integrated research support, both in the relevant research organisations and in the arenas, be they government, business, civil society or some combination of these. Leaders also need to be able to tease out which are most important and determine how facilitators can be exploited and barriers managed.

I2S Disciplinary Specialists

In this domain, I2S disciplinary specialists provide detailed knowledge about how the integrated research can best support policy and practice change. They help their teams map out options for action, understanding the strengths and limitations of each. They not only have a deep appreciation of researcher world views and operations, but also understand the policy and practice worlds and can interpret these for other integrative applied research team members. I2S specialists therefore need to be at least ‘bilingual’ (able to bridge the research world and one relevant policy or practice world) or ‘multilingual’. Experienced I2S specialists can identify when the time for action is ‘ripe’ and help their integrative applied research teams respond appropriately. For example, specialists can recognise when a policy window is open and work with their integrative applied research teams on a well-crafted, speedy response targeted at the key players. Similarly, I2S specialists should be able to match research input to the appropriate stage of the policy cycle.

In order to achieve this, I2S specialists need to draw on the best available knowledge about how the government, business and civil society systems work and to make these insights available to their teams. It is unlikely that individual specialists will be equally proficient in each of the arenas, but they should have

a working knowledge of them all and be able to bring in colleagues to make up for deficiencies in their own skills. Within any one arena, individual specialists may also be more adept at some concepts and methods than others, but they should at least have basic knowledge of all of those described in Box 23.2.

Box 23.2 Skills for I2S Disciplinary Specialists

I2S disciplinary specialists must have a basic working knowledge of all of the following and particular competence in some

- organisational structures and processes—along with theories that can help explain them—that make up policy and practice systems
- scoping the range of possible avenues for providing integrated research support, including arenas, systems, organisations within systems and individuals
- boundary setting around the possibilities for providing support that are likely to be most fruitful
- framing the problem and the findings of the integrated research appropriately for the relevant policy or practice arena, in order to communicate the essence in a meaningful way
- dealing with values and how they influence the provision of integrated research support in terms of targets and processes
- options for supporting policy and practice change—including communication, advocacy and engagement—along with their advantages and disadvantages. This also involves assessing the most suitable policy and practice targets, as well as which options they will be most receptive to
- overall context—in other words, the ‘big picture’ issues that are likely to influence how the arena for implementation (government, business and/or civil society) views the problem and responds to integrated research.

In this domain, I2S covers a huge amount of material, when the government, business and civil society arenas are all taken into account. This is necessary because many real-world problems like global climate change, child labour and the illegal arms trade require policy responses from governments, business *and* civil society, as well as practice change at many levels, ranging from the individual to the organisational and from local communities to the international sphere. I2S disciplinary specialists must be skilled enough to assist integrative applied research teams in figuring out at which level(s) in which arena(s) they can most effectively provide support.

A major task for I2S disciplinary specialists is also to build and strengthen the discipline. This includes ensuring that, to the extent possible, the aspects of their

teams' investigations concerned with provision of integrated research support are documented in a way that makes evaluation by peers easy. In addition, I2S disciplinary specialists are responsible for learning from their evaluations of the work of others about new concepts and methods for providing integrated research support for policy and practice change, as well as how well they worked.

I2S Appreciation for Other Integrative Applied Research Team Members

The other team members need to have some understanding of the provision of integrated research support to policy and practice change, especially when highly engaged processes are used. In these cases they need to appreciate why policy makers and/or practitioners may be involved in boundary setting, framing and other I2S tasks. They also need to understand the processes in place for interacting with policy makers and practitioners and their role in them—for example, to be prepared to help the team seize opportunities when they arise or to refrain from engaging in certain kinds of advocacy. Further, the team members may themselves have valuable contacts, experiences and other expertise that can be drawn on in order to provide effective support.

I2S Appreciation for Policy Makers and Practitioners

Policy makers and practitioners also benefit from understanding what integrative applied research can offer them, which involves appreciating how I2S operates. This allows them to, for example, better assess and respond to overtures from researchers seeking to provide integrated research support, as well as to have more realistic expectations when seeking such support. They would also be in a better position to evaluate what sort of interactions they want to enter into.

The chapters in this domain have laid out a systematic approach to providing integrated research support for policy and practice change through the five-question framework. They have also outlined the concepts, methods, case examples and guides that must be collected and built on to make I2S an effective discipline through the I2S Development Drive.

In the next group of chapters, the framework is applied to bringing together the three I2S domains—synthesising disciplinary and stakeholder knowledge, understanding and managing diverse unknowns and providing integrated research support for policy and practice change. This includes taking into account the interactions between the domains, as these are inevitable when investigating complex real-world problems.

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