



Disability Rights Commission

Learning the doing while doing the doing: the challenges of conducting research involving practitioner-researchers

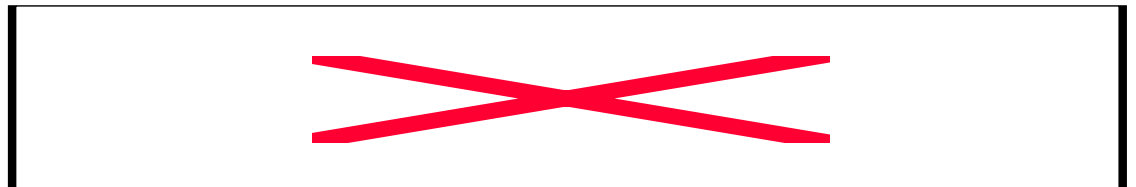
Dr Chih Hoong Sin
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My presentation today:

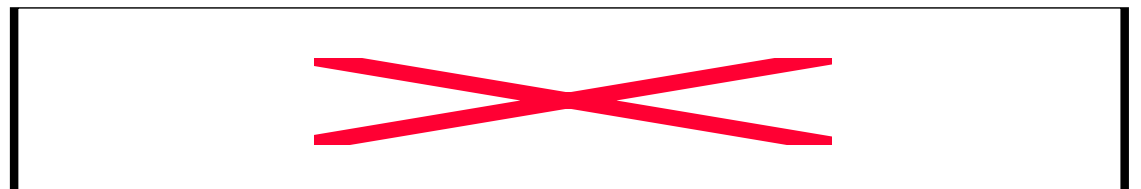
- Positioning myself:
 - within a commissioning body; and working with other commissioners
 - within a non-academic organisation providing research services
- Why commission non-academic researchers:
 - the view from inside a commissioning body
- Challenges of conducting research with practitioner researchers:
 - the view from inside a 'provider' organisation



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My research background

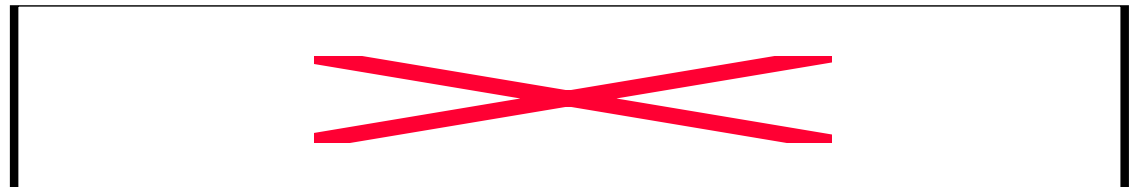
- University lecturer
- Researcher in charity
- Head of Research & Evaluation in private sector research/consultancy company
- Head of Information & Research in a Commission



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The bigger picture

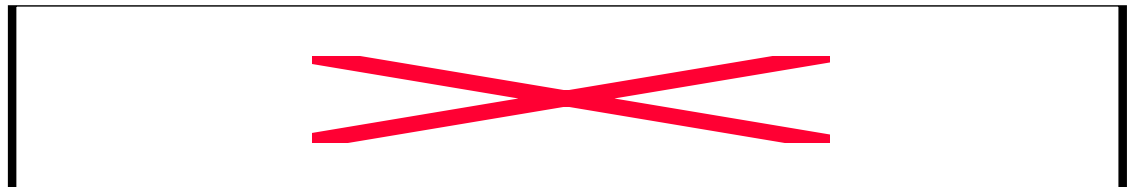
- Evidence-based policy and practice
 - Modernising Government, CSR
- Utilitarian view of research
 - ‘useful’ research
 - changes in funding regime
- Effective dissemination of research
 - ‘usable’ and accessible research



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Changing relations

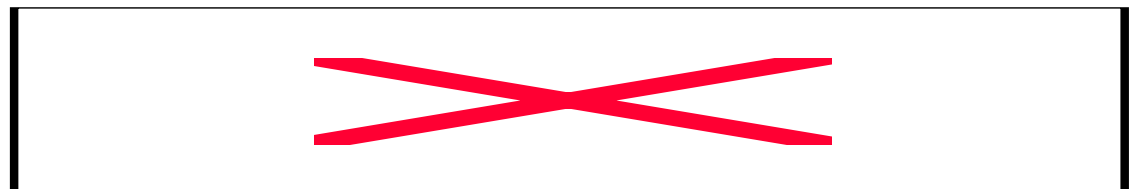
- Marketised:
 - ‘clients’ and ‘providers’
- Heterogeneity in research industry
 - new and / or different players
 - blurring of boundaries



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Why commission non-academic organisations / researchers?

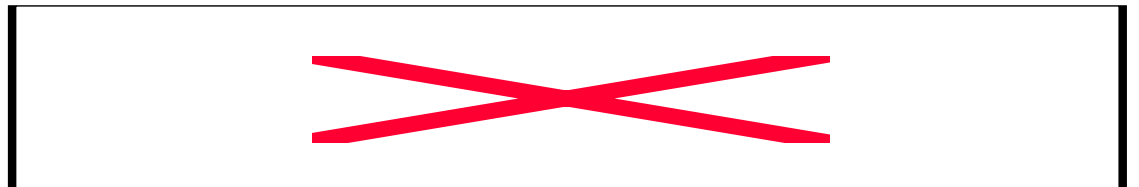
- Research 'evidence' as pinnacle of 'good evidence'?
- Rational model of research and dissemination questioned
- Different 'normative worlds' of research, policy and practice



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What do commissioners want?

- Type of research needed
- Timeliness
- Nature and uses of findings
- Format of outputs
- Dissemination routes
- Formative methods



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Case study: what a consultancy can offer

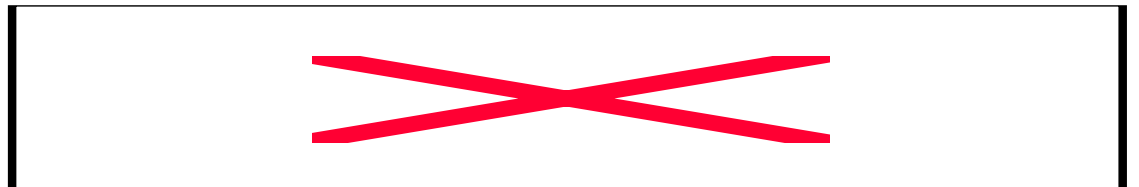
- Wide range of clients use consultancies for research despite higher cost and other risks. Why?
- Consultancies as:
 - cross-pollinators
 - match-makers
 - translators / processors
 - multiple dissemination routes



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Cross-pollinator role

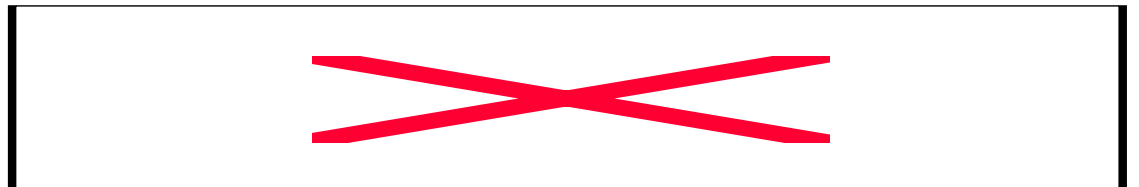
- ‘Stickiness’ of knowledge production and use:
 - geographical
 - sectoral



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Match-maker role

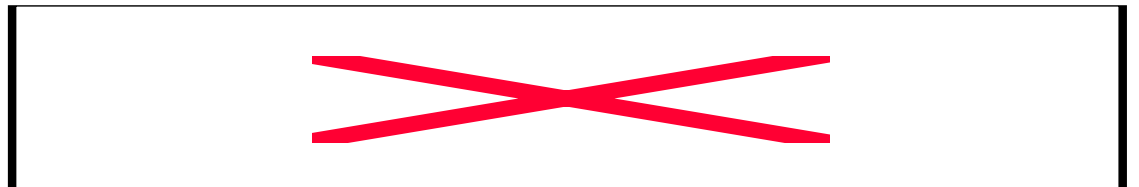
- Bringing together producers and users of research
- Analogy of personal relationships:
 - discourage promiscuity, monogamy, bigamy
 - encourage polygamy



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Translator / processor role

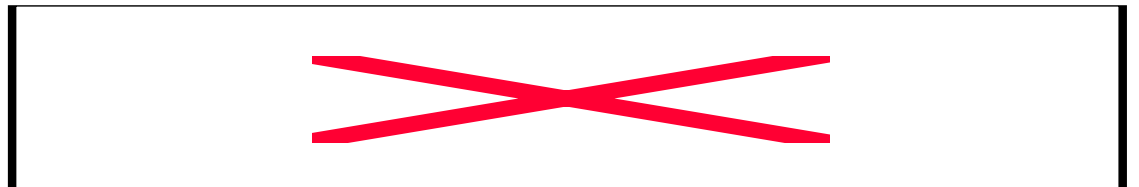
- Not everyone has ability or inclination to use or understand research process and outputs
- Lessons from technology transfer – unpack, redesign, (re)appropriate, recast
- Close relationships with clients = cultural knowledge; aid translation:
 - Policy
 - Practice



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Multiple dissemination routes role

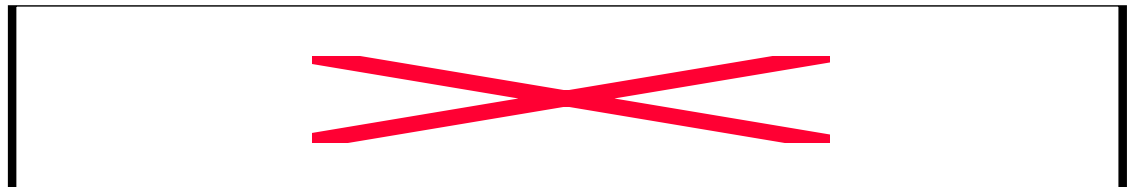
- Different normative worlds = different ways of creating/warranting knowledge
- Not one size fits all
- Too much reliance on written word (documentary)
- Researchers may be constrained in disseminating more widely and via more channels



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Challenges of conducting research with non-research organisations

- Lack of dedicated, trained research staff
- ‘On the job’ training - quality, timeliness, adequacy
- Fluid, ad hoc partnership working. Issues arising from complex project management
- ‘Fit for purpose’



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Case study: small/medium research and consultancy

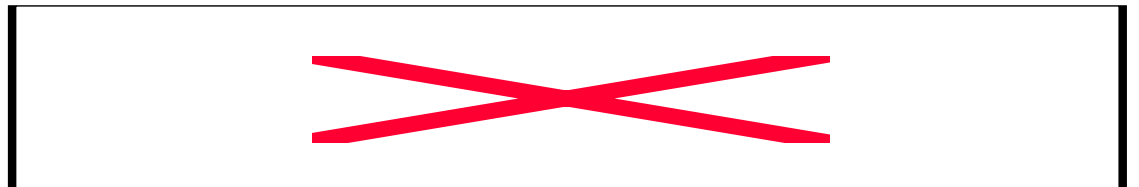
- 3-year national evaluation, >£1million
- Consortium
- Focus on use of QDAS for qualitative component of process evaluation
- First phase, end 2002, 15 staff from 3 organisations, 142 SSI transcripts



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Research process & output (1)

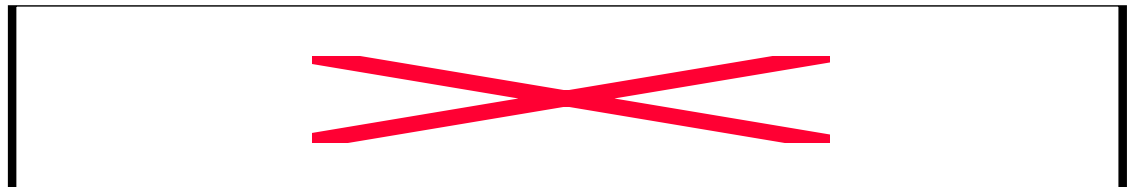
- Selection of QDAS - 'wow' factor
- Training - mostly 'on the job' and internal
- Expectations:
 - quick
 - 'analyse' data
 - hypothesis testing



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Research process & output (2)

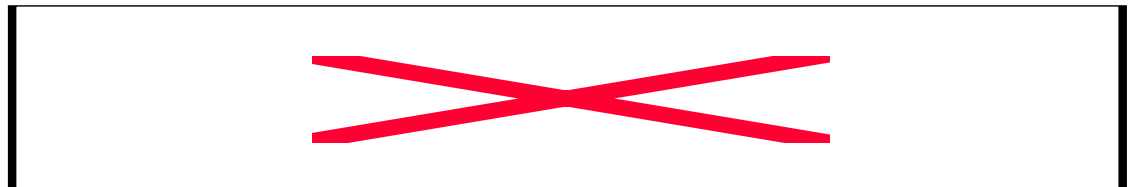
- Quantification of qualitative data
- Descriptive analysis and use:
 - quotes to ‘support’ and ‘contradict’
 - no theorising
- Partnership working and its impact:
 - coding structure



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Conclusion (1)

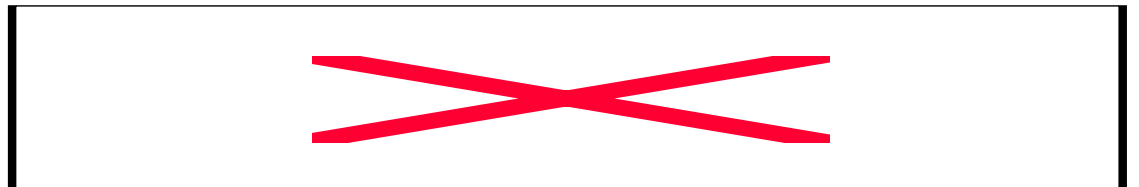
- Avoid 'straw men'. Need meaningful engagement across both sides
- Awareness of benefits:
 - different and potentially complementary sets of skills and experience
- ...and risks:
 - epistemological and methodological



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Conclusion (2)

- Research commissioners must not just focus on outputs but also on process
- Clear guidelines needed for assessing quality (of outputs and process)





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Thank you!

