



Impact Storytelling Training

The Agile Policy Centre



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Department for
Energy Security
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Welsh Government



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



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Department of Agriculture,
Environment and Rural Affairs
An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí
Tuaithé
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Environment an' Kintre
Matthers
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

What this training is for



A shared vocabulary

Outputs, outcomes, impact — Alignment



Fluency in hidden impact

Ways of working that make impact possible - Awareness



Shared impact standards

What counts as impact - Calibration



Storytelling for impact

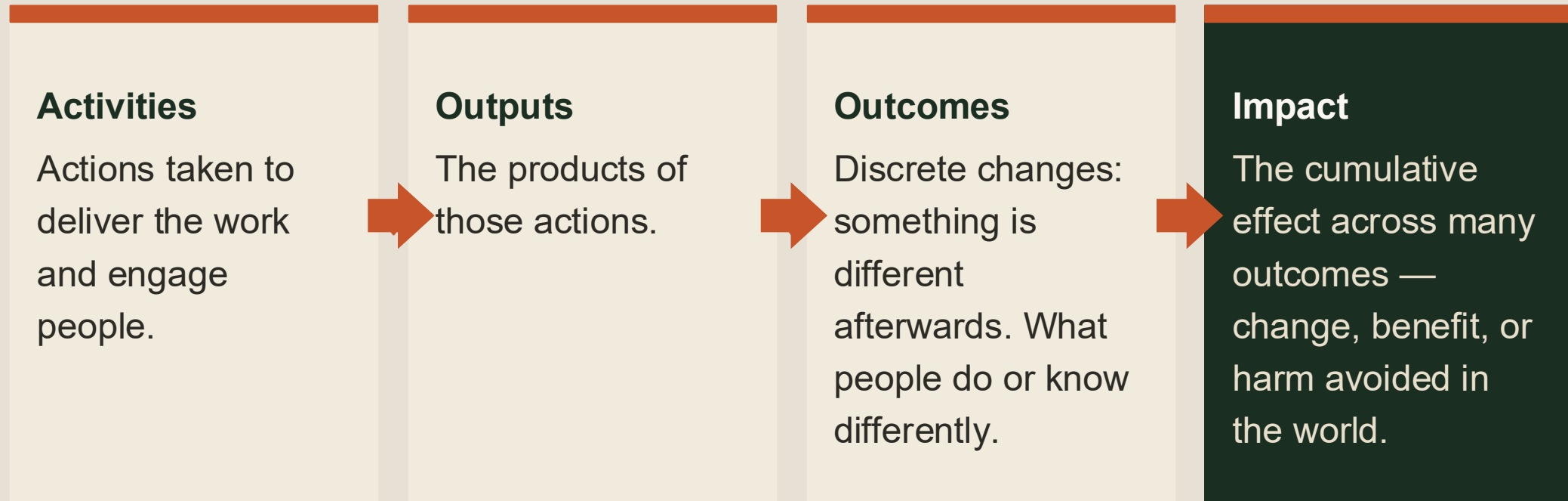
Frameworks to choose: Theory of change, logic models, the planning triangle, REF case studies and And-But-Therefore storytelling

PART 1

Definitions

Outputs, outcomes, impact — distinguished and used consistently.





- REF — definition of research impact** (the official one for "beyond academia"): <https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance-and-criteria-on-submissions/guidance/> — REF defines impact as an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, beyond academia.
- UKRI — why we ask you to report (outputs, outcomes and impacts)**: <https://www.ukri.org/manage-your-award/reporting-your-projects-outcomes/why-we-ask-you-to-report/> — frames outputs vs outcomes vs impacts in research terms.
- ESRC — research impact toolkit / what is impact**: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/impact-toolkit-for-economic-and-social-sciences/> — ESRC distinguishes instrumental, conceptual and capacity-building impact

Distinguishing between outputs, outcomes and impacts

Outputs

What we deliver

- Academic publications
- Reports
- Policy or practice brief
- Datasets
- Website
- Webinar
- Workshop
- Calldown specs
- Terms of reference
- Policy requests
- Advisory summaries
- Surveys
- Training
- Synthesis
- Partnership development
- Impact M&E

Short-term outcomes

What we can directly influence

- Awareness
- Knowledge & understanding
- Confidence
- Attitudes
- Skills & capacity
- Access to evidence
- Relationships
- Trust, credibility & relevance
- Motivation
- Identifying & influencing opportunities to act

Long-term outcomes

What can emerge under the right conditions

- Evidence improves design & implementation of policies
- Improvement in technologies, practices and services
- Sustained networks and systemic capacities
- New policy targets, practices

Impacts

Cumulative, positive, tangible effects

- Economy
- Culture
- Health
- Wellbeing
- Education
- Environment
- Inequalities
- Communities
- Etc.

Users and beneficiaries (rapid response context)

USERS

Those who pick up the evidence and act on it

- Policy teams, regulators, advisors, non-government organisations (repackaging of existing knowledge for new indicators, tools, insights and recommendations);
- Researchers reusing this work to build/test new hypothesis
- Comms teams citing your work in briefings
- Practitioners who have no access to academia

BENEFICIARIES

Those whose lives, work or environment is changed as a result

- Farmers and land managers whose decisions and practices are shaped;
- Communities whose land or air or water is directly affected;
- Specific sectors on local, regional or national levels;
- Future generations bearing the cost (before reaping the benefits) of the choices made now.



Worksheet 1 – Training activity

TWO PERSPECTIVES, SORT AND CLASSIFY THE PATHWAY

You will work with a list of statements.

For each statement, decide:

What type of statement it is:

- 1 – Activity
- 2 – Output
- 3 – Short-term outcome
- 4 – Long-term outcome
- 5 – Impact

Whose perspective it reflects:

A – Agile response to policy

R – Research

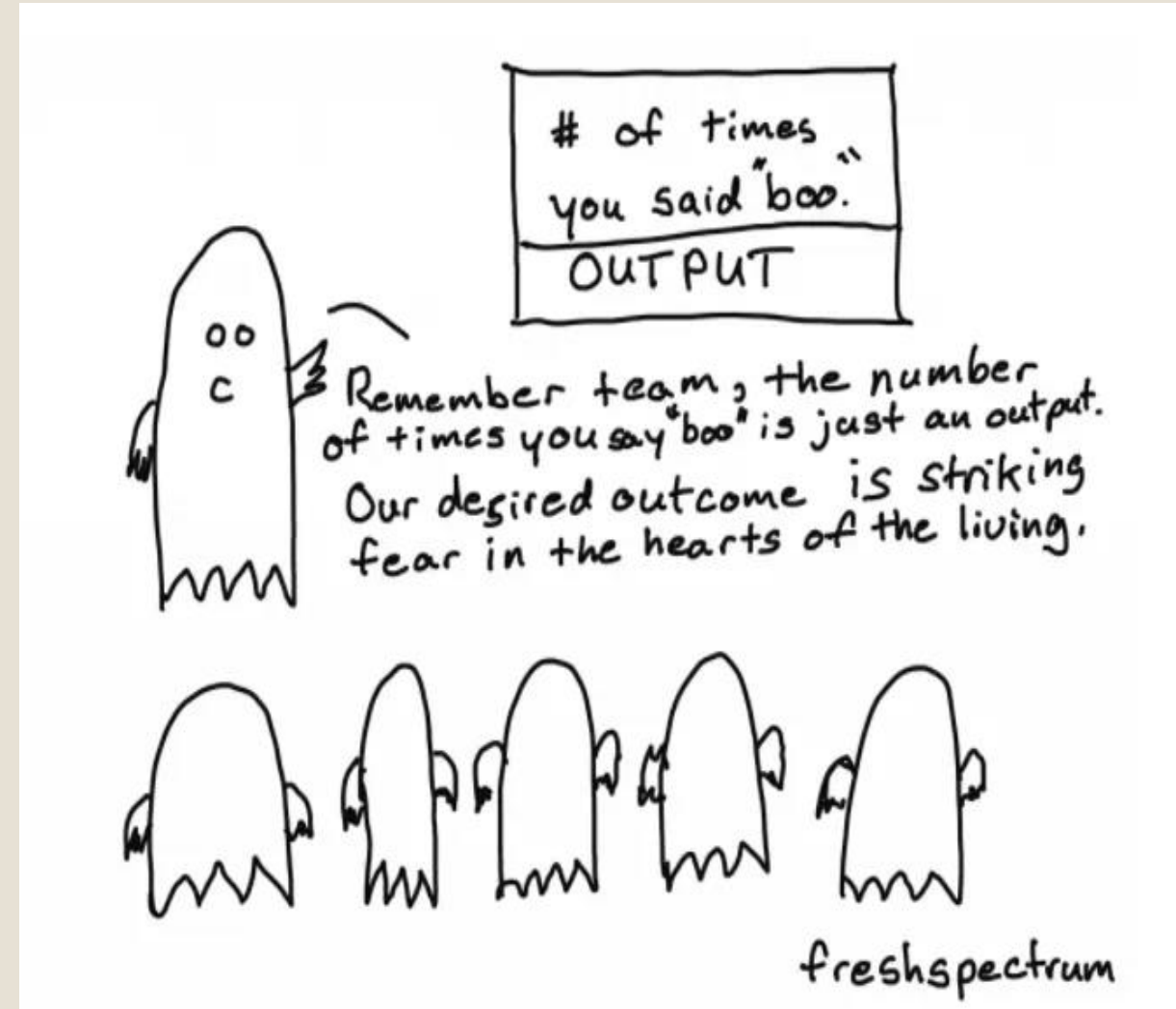
👉 Write your answer as a combination (e.g. 2A, 3R).

A perspective

You participate in a peatland and integrated land use project. Your role involves enabling and actively shaping the following: co-design, engagement, inclusion of all voices, diverse and equitable participation, evidence translation, synthesis of findings, facilitation, and relationship building.

R perspective

You participate in the same project, as above. Your role involves evidence generation, analysis, synthesis, mapping, indicator development, and scientific interpretation.



<https://thomasmtaston.medium.com/thats-an-output-not-an-outcome-b34cf23eb734>

PART 2

Enabling impact: the hidden work



Six ways of working ('principles') – Hidden work

 Co-design

Fairness and learning in partnership

 Context

Understand contexts of evidence use

 Equity, diversity and inclusion **Networks**

Build relationships and engage with stakeholders

 Capacity

Strengthen mutual capacities

 Embed impact work into the research process

A FRAMEWORK FOR EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS AND CO-DESIGN			
	Recognition	Procedure	Distribution
Design	Whose needs, interests and contexts recognised in project design?	How equal is engagement initial design and decision-making processes?	How have you accounted for different views of success and particular outcomes?
Systemic	Whose needs and interests are recognised in institutional agreements, and operational and management systems?	Who is engaged in ongoing governance and decision-making structures?	Are resources and risks distributed equitably and through transparent processes?
Relational	Are all partners' ways of communicating and learning informing how relationships are built?	Are there explicit processes to support building mutual trust and to make power differences explicit?	How are different capacities and development needs identified and addressed?

Why it matters

- Leads to **better quality evidence**
- Makes research **more relevant and usable** across different contexts
- Helps identify **bias, gaps, and unintended harm** early
- Builds **trust, legitimacy, and stronger relationships** with stakeholders
- Increases the **uptake and impact** of findings in real-world decisions



Inclusion & participation

- Who is included in shaping this research / who is missing?
- Are we engaging people with relevant lived experience?
- Are our engagement methods accessible to different groups?

Use and impact

- Who is this research for, and who benefits?
- Are outputs usable in different contexts?
- How are we communicating uncertainty, trade-offs, and limitations?

Power and ethics

- What power dynamics exist, and how are we addressing them?
- Do people feel safe to challenge, question, or withdraw?
- How are we managing risks?

Recognition and fairness

- Are all contributions valued?
- Are we sharing benefits fairly?

Bias and knowledge

- Whose knowledge is being prioritised — and why?
- What assumptions or biases are influencing our approach?
- Are we honest about gaps?

Impact is a shared, multi-way process

Not one-way from research to policy — every side needs the ability to produce, appraise and use evidence.

Build capability

- Researchers: to produce and mobilise evidence
- Policymakers & stakeholders: to access, appraise and use it
- Invest in training, skills and confidence
- Give partners time and resources

Create the conditions

- Tools embedded in real workflows
- Supportive processes and leadership
- Incentives to actually use evidence

The key point: impact (only) happens when capacity is shared and supported across the whole system.

Built in from the start

Begin by asking

- **Why** are we doing this? What is motivating us?
- **Who** is it for? Who must be included?
- **What** is needed in this context to be impactful?
- **How** will we make time to learn?

Then keep doing it

- Evaluative thinking in plans (assess against intent)
- Meaningful, practical monitoring (KPIs)
- Regular learning: What? So what? Now what?
- Notice and navigate tensions



AIM

What is this piece of work trying to achieve?

Define optimal "tree-to-crop ratio" on lowland arable farms
(Net Zero + Food security)

METHOD

What will you actually do? Activities and outputs

- Scoping the question /
- Convening relevant expertise
- Rapid Evidence Synthesis
- Two expert workshops
- 20-page report in 20 working days
- Practitioner event / Policy advice to ministers

MARKER OF SUCCESS

What change would tell you this worked?

- Official policy on "tree-to-crop ratio" as a decision tool (within 3 m. from output)
- New support decision tool /grant to farmers
- 15% of eligible arable farmers apply for grant (1st yr of implementation)

EVALUATION METHOD

How will you know whether the marker was reached?

- Agile delivery standards
- How close is the official policy to research report?
- Is 15% farmers' uptake compatible with the policy target?

PRINCIPLES – TENSIONS CHALLENGING OUR ABILITY TO EMBED IMPACT

QUALITY OF EVIDENCE

Excellent research



Usable research

TYPES OF IMPACT

Conceptual • Relational • Capacity



Instrumental

ACCOUNTABILITY

For learning and adapting



For delivery

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Researchers



Research users

FACILITATION

Staying neutral



Having a voice

PROCESS

Supporting people's needs



**Holding boundaries and
accountabilities**

Enabling Impact: Diagnosing and valuing the hidden work

Each scenario looks strong on the surface. Work through the principles and help surface what is missing.

For each scenario

- What appears strong?
- What might still be missing?
- Which principle is weakest?
- What risks could emerge later?

The six principles

- Co-design: Fairness & learning in partnership
- Understand contexts of evidence use
- Build & engage stakeholder networks
- Strengthen mutual capacities
- Equity, diversity & inclusion
- Embed impact in the research process

Synthesis: which principle recurred as missing? Which is hardest to evidence, even when present (hidden impact)?

PART 3

Credibility and Overclaim



Impact, from a practitioner's view

The same tests a consultant faces apply when we claim research impact.

What is it?

- Doing a deal
- Bringing technical expertise to a question
- Helping a client solve problems or seize opportunities

How do you make it?

- Answering the question
- Influencing thinking
- Influencing action
- Direct implementation

Do you measure it?

- Winning work
- Building a reputation
- Knowing whether it was the right answer

What mode are we in?

Start from the task: what kind of output does it actually demand?

Inform

- Communicate the findings
- The evidence speaks; the user decides

Facilitate

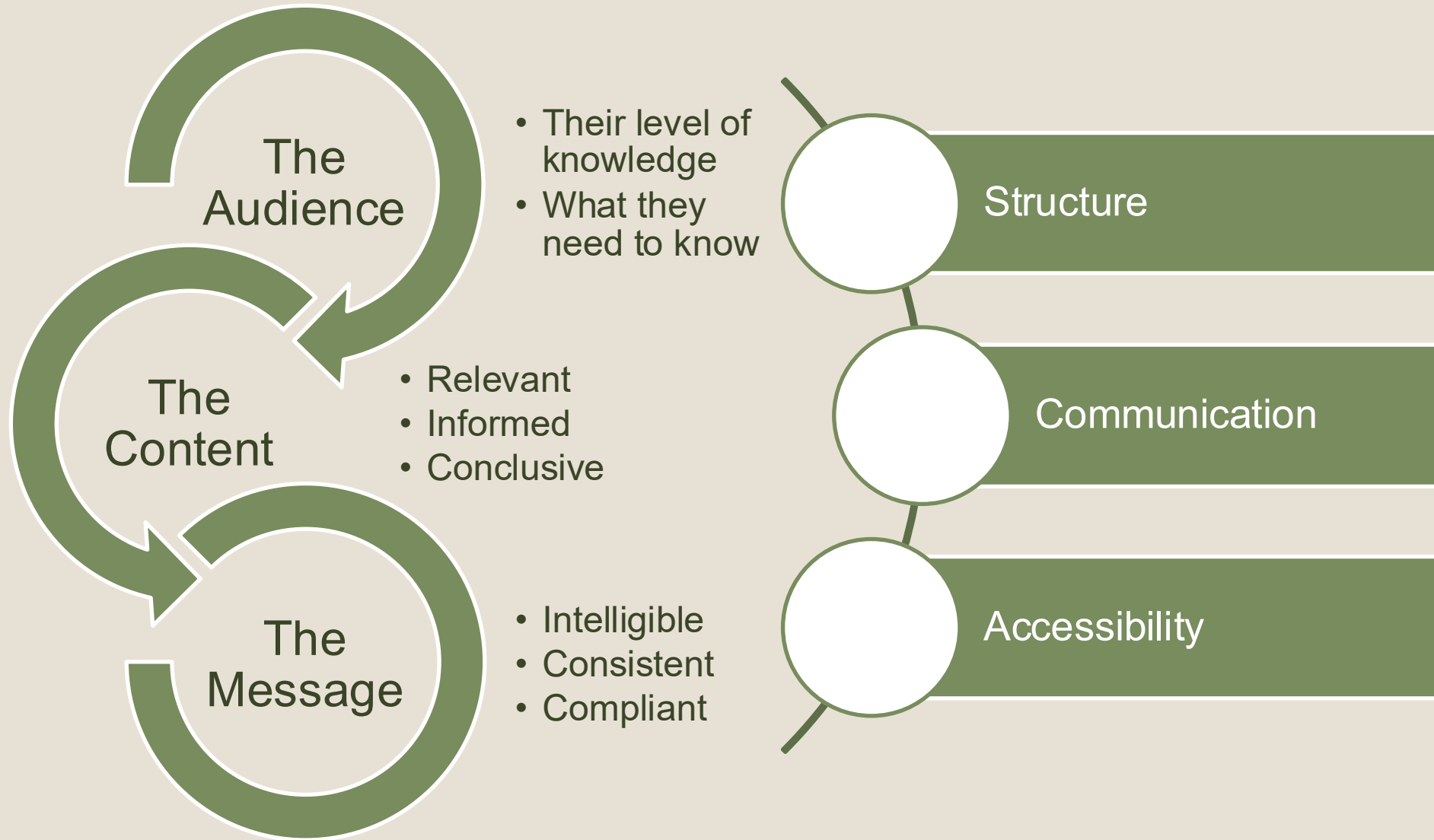
- Act as the catalyst
- Bring the right people together for a purpose

Co-produce

- Participate in developing the work
- The outputs (or outcomes) are shared

The real question: what matters here — the output, or the task?

Getting the message across ~ the challenges



Same pipeline, different filter

Consultancy

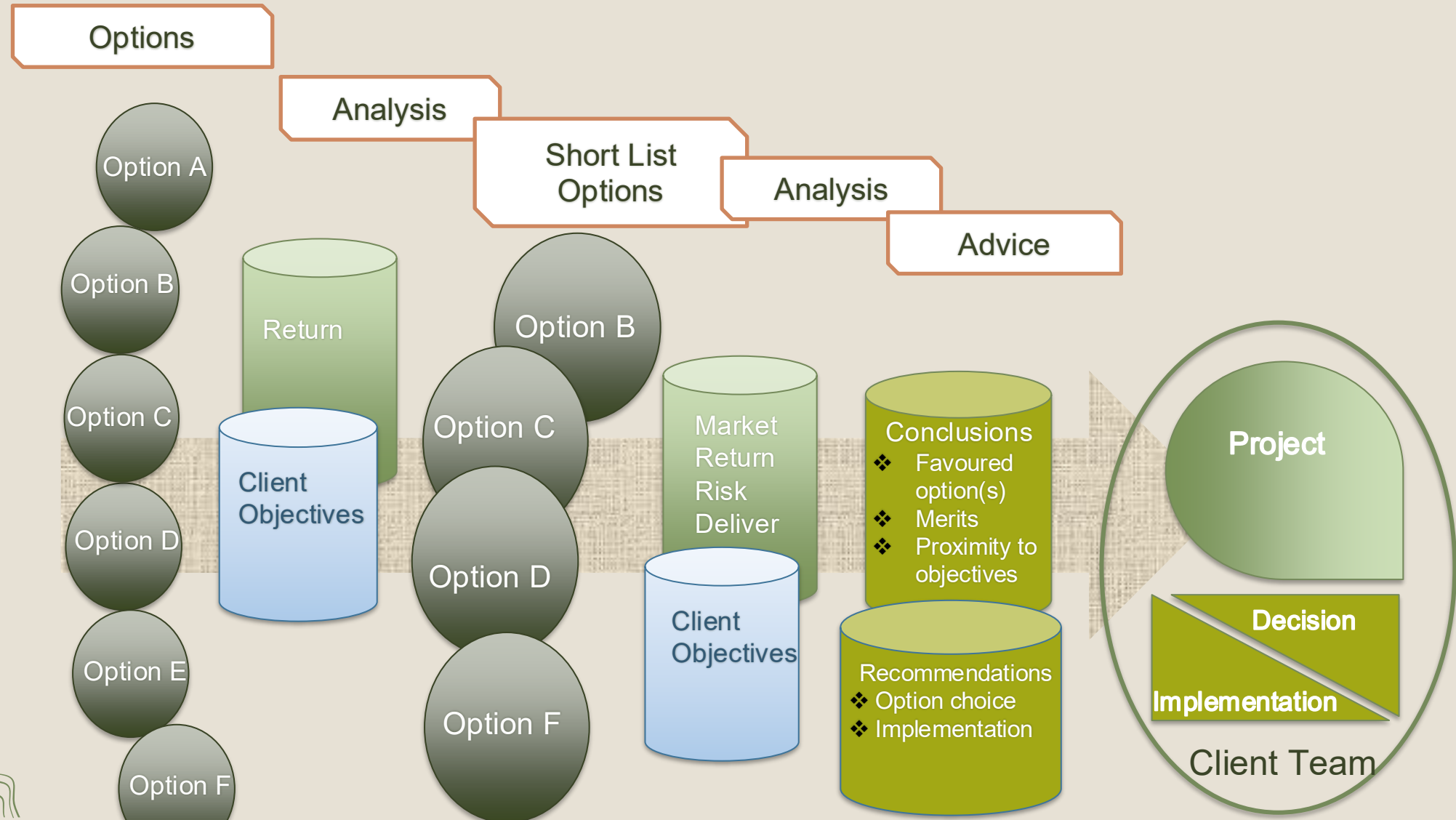
- **Inputs** all the options on the table
- **Shortlist** narrow to a shortlist
- **Weigh** weigh on return, risk, delivery
- **Advise** favoured option, with its merits
- **Recommend** the choice, and how to implement it

Research

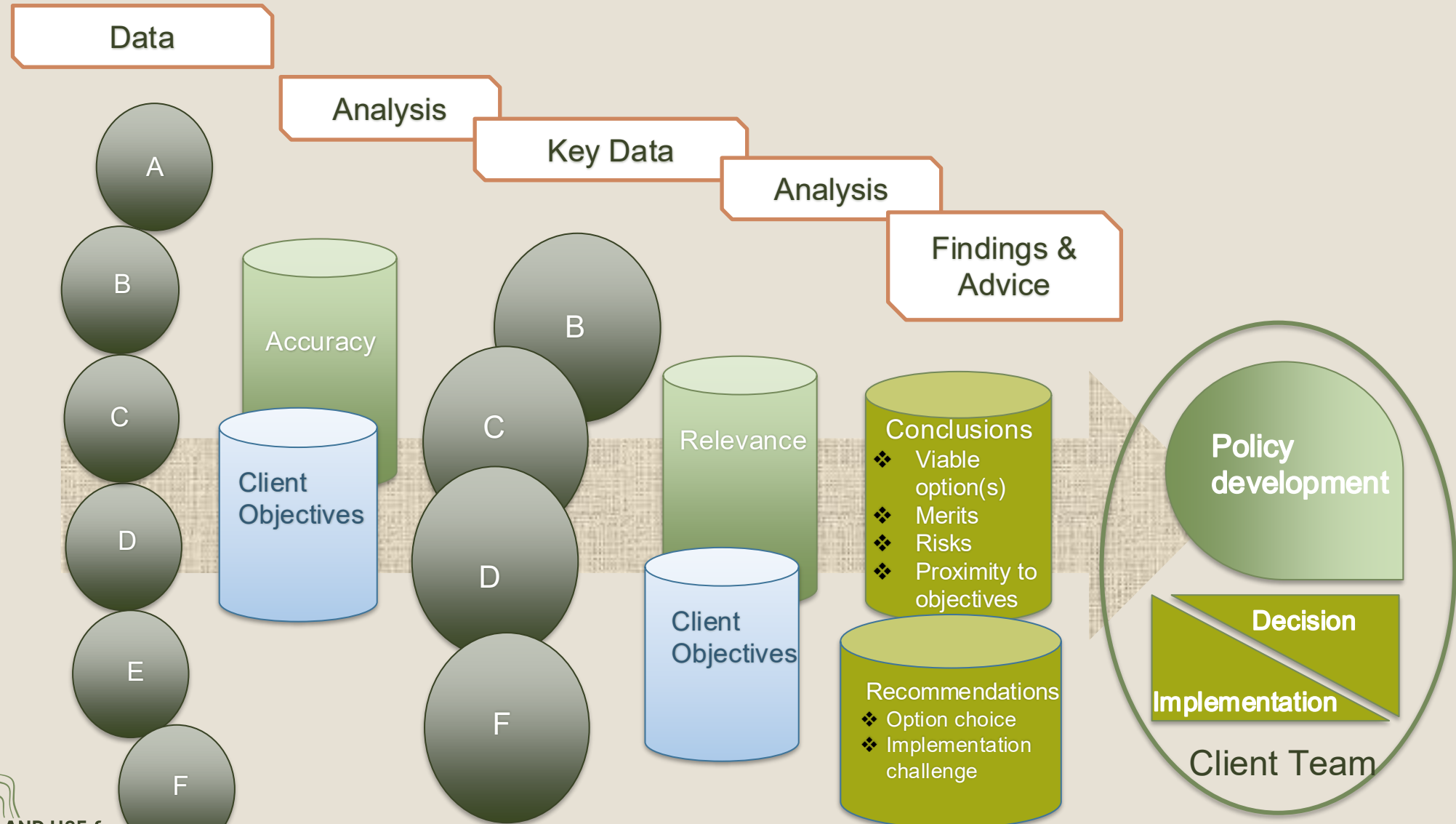
- **Inputs** all the available evidence
- **Shortlist** narrow to the key data
- **Weigh** weigh on accuracy, relevance
- **Advise** viable options, with merits and risks
- **Recommend** the choice, and its implementation challenges

The credibility test sits in the middle: what you filter the evidence on. Overclaim creeps in when the weighing step is hidden.

Getting the message across ~ which bit matters ~ **in consultancy**



Getting the message across ~ which bit matters ~ **in research**



Say what you can defend

Striking the balance

- Robust, resilient data
- Show sensitivity and confidence
- Resist exaggeration and speculation
- Analysis ~ sense and feeling
 - Process
 - Interpretation, forecasting and speculation
 - Technical accuracy
 - Innovation for good reason not fashion
 - Recognising client need and capacity
 - Completeness

Developing a voice

- **Substance** accuracy, completeness, innovation for good reason not fashion
- **Style** accessible formatting, clear writing
- **Fit** recognise client need and capacity
- Developing a **recognisable voice**
 - Builds reputation
 - Helps develop client relationships
 - Helps when encountering new things

Contribution ≠ Attribution

You have just weighed overclaim, credibility, evidence and language. Here is the test for whether a claim is defensible.

ATTRIBUTION

- Claims the change was caused by us.
- ‘Our work led to X.’
- Needs a clean causal line others accept.
- Rarely defensible in open systems — overclaim lives here.

CONTRIBUTION

- One credible influence among several.
- ‘Our work shaped / informed / enabled X, alongside...’
- Names the other factors honestly.
- Defensible under uncertainty — almost always the stronger story.

The test: Could you name other contributors? Would the people involved recognise your role? Does the claim survive the word ‘alongside’?



Claim contribution, evidence it, name what you don't know. A defensible story beats a grand one.

PART 4

Signals of impact

Impact rarely appears suddenly. Many signals are easy to overlook. We capture them collectively.



Qualitative signals — what early impact actually looks like



Unsolicited follow-up requests

Someone comes back without being prompted



Changed terminology in public planning

Phrases or framings from your work appearing in policy language.



Operational learning visible internally

Stakeholders telling you what they now do differently



Active evidence reuse or adaptation

Your work shows up in a different document, with or without attribution.



Continuing engagement after project end

Relationships that outlast the contract



Indicators or tools reused elsewhere

Your mapping framework picked up by another team for another question.

REFLECT

- 🕒 Which signals from the previous slide have you already noticed on your work?
- 🚫 Which signals do you suspect are happening but you have no way to see?
- ⌚ What would it take (practically) to capture one of them in the next three months?
- 👥 Who else from your team would need to be part of that capture?

Strong claim, or weak?

Strong (i.e. evidence-based)

Weak (i.e. overclaiming instead of evidencing)

Statements about research and its influence — some real REF case studies, some invented. For each, explore:

Which issue is it about?

- Uncertainty
- Impact awareness
- Evidence use
- Attribution vs contribution
- Engagement & uptake

Strong or weak — and why?

- No single right answer
- Listen for how each one lands
- Who would it convince?
- What does it let you defend?

Final reflection: which would you defend in writing? Which would you say in a meeting? Why are those sometimes different?

PART 5

Frameworks for telling the story of your impact pathway



Five tools, five functionalities

Framework	What it shows you	Best used for
Logic model	What happened, in sequence	<i>Quick orientation, internal planning, grant reports</i>
Theory of change	Why this would create change	<i>Strategy documents, funder narratives, complex programmes</i>
Contribution analysis	Plausible influence under uncertainty	<i>When attribution is impossible but contribution can be demonstrated</i>
Planning triangle	Connects daily tasks directly to long-term changes	<i>Acts as a checklist for the exact data you need to track.</i>
ABT (And–But–Therefore)	A three-sentence narrative arc	<i>Comms, policy briefings, pitching, opening paragraphs</i>

Same family, different job

Logic model

What happens, in sequence.

- Inputs → activities → outputs → outcomes.
- Built forwards, once the work exists.
- Best for planning, internal clarity, grant reports.
- Shows the what, not the why.

Theory of change

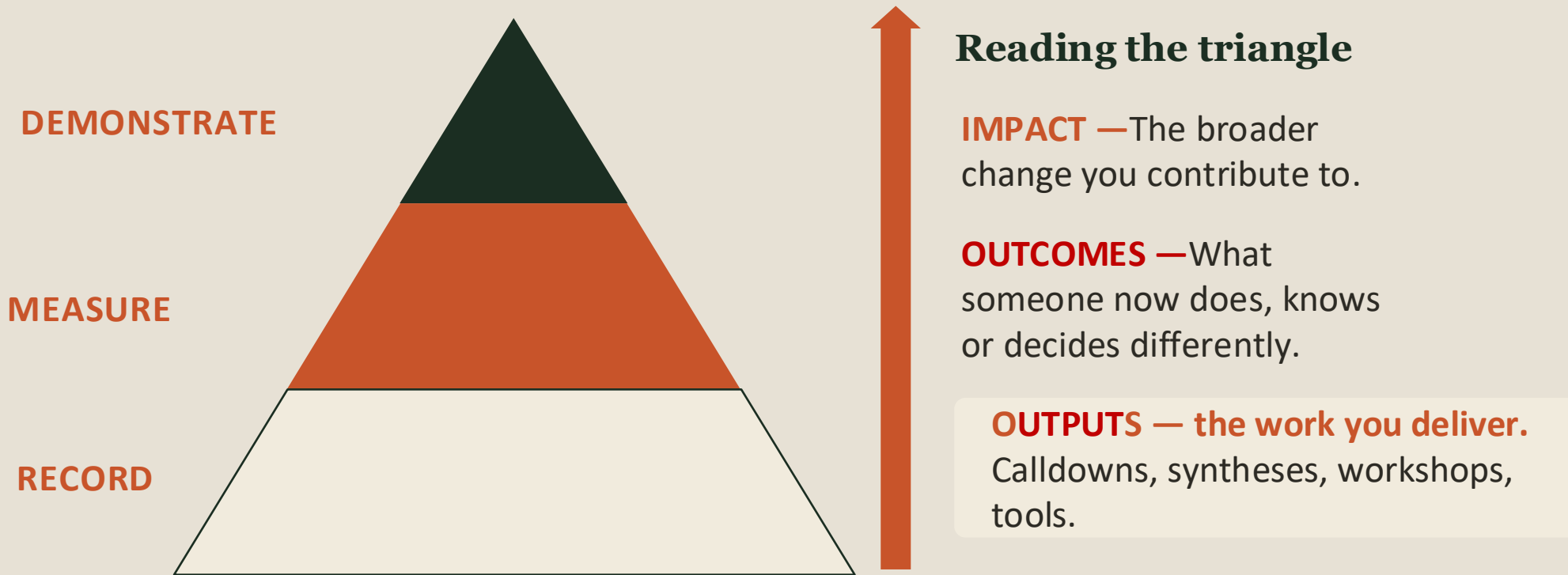
Why the change happens.

- Makes the causal assumptions explicit.
- Built backwards from the change you want.
- Accounts for context and outside factors.
- Best for strategy, funder narratives, complex programmes.

Bottom line: they overlap — both map inputs to impact. The theory of change goes further: it says why, and names the assumptions.

The CES planning triangle

Build from the bottom up — outputs to outcomes to impact, recording to measuring to demonstrating.



CES Planning Triangle© — Charities Evaluation Services, adopted by the Big Lottery Fund.

Contribution analysis

WORKED EXAMPLE · A TOWN ROAD-SAFETY CAMPAIGN

1

The question

Did the “Slow Down” campaign contribute to the 20% fall in accidents — when a new speed camera, safer cars and a mild winter all coincided?

2

Assumptions

People see the campaign → become more aware → drive more slowly → fewer accidents. Each link is now something that can be checked.

3

Gather evidence

Survey: most drivers recall it. Roadside data: speeds dropped. And accidents fell most near schools — exactly where the campaign focused.

4

Test assumptions

Awareness only counts if it changed behaviour, not just attitudes — and the speed measurements confirm driving actually shifted.

5

Weigh the alternatives

Camera covers one junction, but the fall was town-wide. National trend was only –5% (here –20%).

SO WHAT CAN WE CLAIM?

We can’t prove the campaign *caused* the drop. But the assumptions held, and none of the obvious alternatives fit the pattern — so a credible case for **contribution** is made.

And — But — Therefore

The art is in the BUT — it forces you to name the tension, not paper over it.

AND	Establish the baseline. Context, facts, alignment with what people already know.
BUT	Introduce the catalyst. The friction, the tension, the gap, the thing that isn't working.
THEREFORE	Provide the adaptive response. What the work did about it, and what changed as a result.

WORKED EXAMPLE

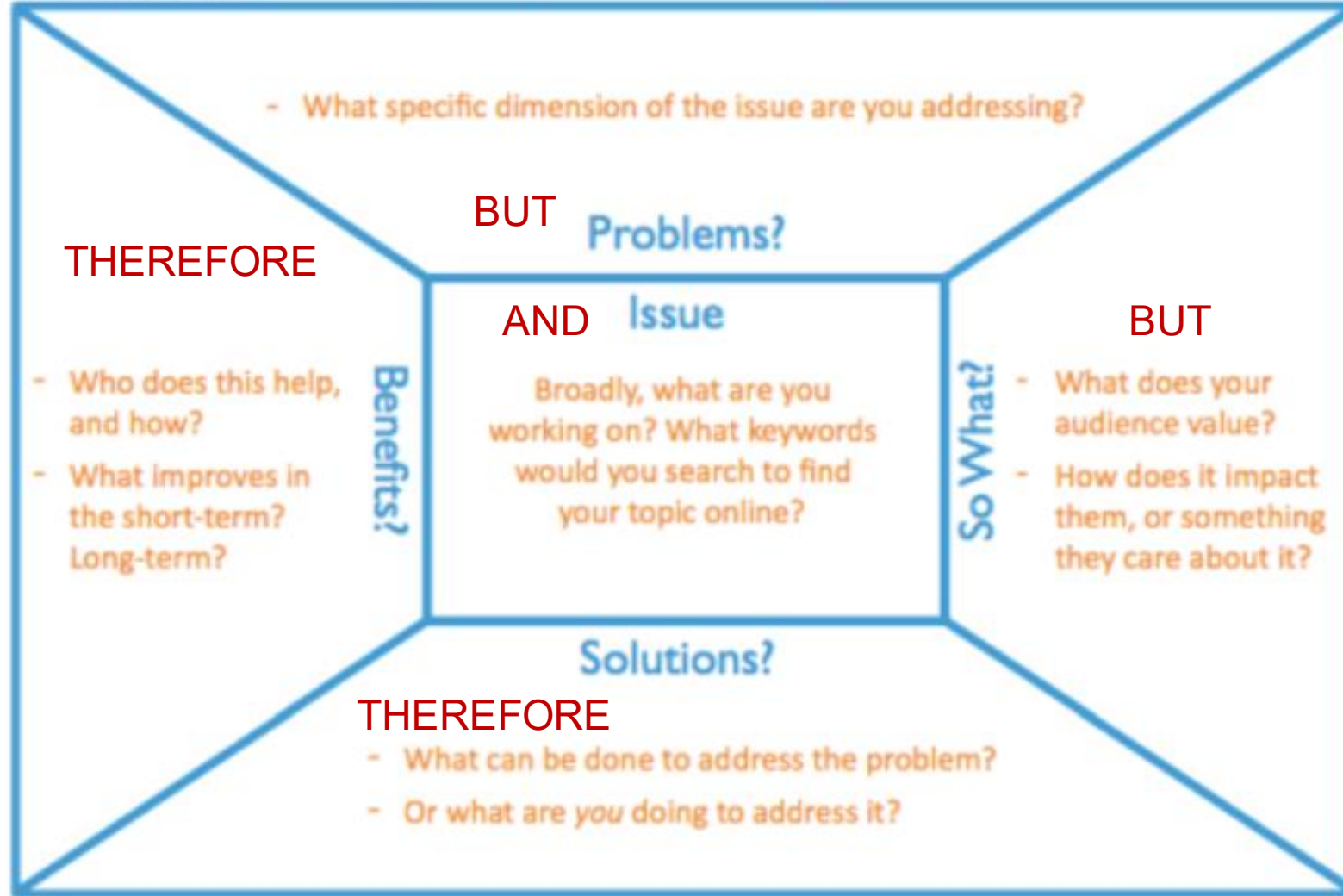
AND ... the policy landscape required integrated land-use metrics across climate, biodiversity and water

AND the policy makers needed recommendations for a framework within three months.

BUT ...regional delivery teams lacked localised indicators they could use in planning conversations;
researchers needed more than this time to develop new indicators

THEREFORE ...the Hub/APC co-created a translated mapping framework with planning teams, now in use in three regions and being adapted for a fourth, by drawing on available expertise and data, peer-reviewed evidence, using mixed methods and robust evidence synthesis approaches and modelling

AND Audience: Who is impacted by this? Who can change this? Who cares about this?



FRAMEWORKS – RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (REF) ADVICE

Interpretation → Claim of Impact of a specific WORK on a government-led process – Break it down to separate, specific claims

Argument → What WORK was carried out to achieve the claim

Data → Demonstrate what changed because of the WORK, e.g. Policy informed by MY WORK in place, Problem eliminated etc.



Flavour → Quotes: 'We (USER or BENEFICIARY) at this department or in this sector use the recommendations or dataset or framework etc. of this WORK'

Which framework for which audience?

Audience	Best framework(s)	What they need from you
REF panel	<i>Contribution WITH Attribution</i>	Reach and significance; clearly evidenced underpinning research.
Funder	<i>Theory of change</i>	Plausible logic of change; how learning will be captured.
Policymaker	<i>ABT + signals</i>	What problem this answers; what's defensible; what to do with it. Honest about attribution; full about contribution; learning visible.
Practitioner	<i>Logic model + tools developed</i>	What it does in practice; how to use it; what changes for them.
Comms / public	<i>ABT, single example</i>	One vivid story; one beneficiary; one shift.

What makes a good impact story?

Five questions every strong impact story answers — your checklist before you start writing.

01

What problem existed?

The context and the gap — why this work was needed.

02

What did we do?

The activity and output, briefly. Not the whole method.

03

What changed?

The outcome: what someone now does, knows or decides differently.

04

How do we know?

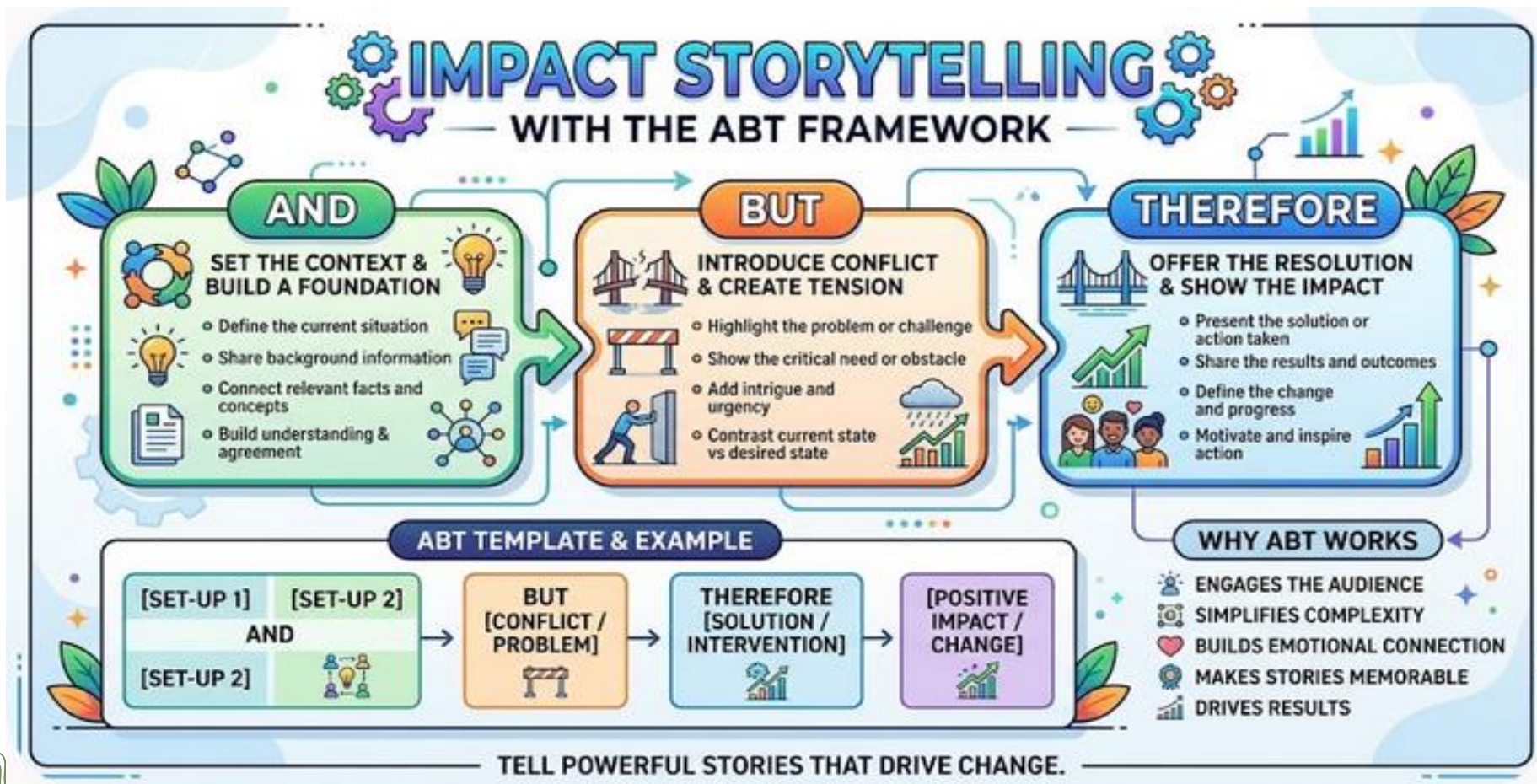
The evidence and signals — what you can point to and defend.

05

Why does it matter?

The significance: who benefits, who uses and how, and what is at stake if not implemented .

Draft an impact narrative for one calldown



Note: AI (Gemini) was used to pull together the ideas discussed at the Impact Storytelling workshop held in 2-3 June 2026 at CPRE, London

Concluding remarks

01

**Outputs aren't outcomes,
aren't impact**
— and users aren't beneficiaries.

02

**Most impact work is
hidden**
Six ways of working to enhance
potential for impact.

03

Credibility beats overclaim
Contribution is usually more
defensible than attribution. Name
the tension.

04

Three ways to connect
Informing, facilitating, co-creating
— which one you are in shapes
what impact is possible.

05

Signals come before proof
Reuse, follow-ups, changed
language, lasting relationships:
notice them early and capture
them.

06

**Match framework to
audience**
Logic model, theory of change,
contribution, ABT — same
evidence, different framings.

Two questions

01

What did you learn today that you did not know this morning?

02

Which storytelling framework(s) would you like to use?



Thank you
Web: LUNZHub.com



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