THE RESEARCH UTILISATION NEXUS: PUTTING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE.
AN EXAMINATION OF RESEARCH UTILISATION IN A CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE CONTEXT IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own, except as acknowledged in the text.

I also declare that this material has not been submitted, either in part or full, for a previous degree at the University of Sydney or any other university.

Catherine Jane Thomas

Date: 3 March 2011
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Abstract

Evidence-based practice and policy is a relatively new concept in a human service perspective. There is literature on the broad concept of translating such an approach from the medical field to a human service setting, but there is little literature of an evidence-based approach in a child welfare context. The aim of the research was to establish how managers, practitioners and policy-makers in a child welfare context in New South Wales use research to inform practice and policy-making. This thesis addresses an absence of academic literature both nationally and internationally on the topic, and adds to the understanding of the influences on the uptake of evidence-based practice and policy-making.

The research was undertaken by a single case study approach over the period 2007 – 2010. The case study generated both qualitative and quantitative information (via document analysis, focus groups, manager surveys and semi-structured interviews) that was examined in an intensive manner.

This thesis argues that firstly, there are determinants in the three spheres of influence (individual, work environment, and organisational) that impact on research utilisation within the case study organisation; that these three spheres need to be working in conjunction with each other to optimise the environment for research use, and that the organisational sphere of influence is the most integral to ensuring this occurs as it provides the platform or framework for the other spheres of influence to operate in.

Secondly, that the uses of research (instrumental, conceptual and symbolic) are used simultaneously within the case study organisation; they are not static or mutually exclusive; they are dynamic. It is also argued that there is a possible fourth use type of research use which is ‘wider influence’.

Thirdly, the application of research and expert knowledge generally falls into three key areas of informing direct practice outcomes, development work, and professional development practices. This assists the practitioner and policy-maker to legitimise their decision-making and professional judgement in both policy and practice settings, and finally, a new ‘typology of research users’ is proposed.
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1 INTRODUCTION

There has been a significant shift from undertaking research for the gain of general information to undertaking research for political or policy development purposes\(^1\). Research in a social policy sense is used to identify the evidence-base behind actions that are taken or practices that are implemented. The agenda of research has changed to that of a governance framework, or from a ‘science push model’ to that of a ‘demand pull model’ that is solution focussed, identifies alternate actions for specific problems and takes into consideration the organisational and political contexts or interests that are the drivers of the research\(^2\).

Governments are the key funders of social policy and the agents of institutional reforms, priority setting, and funding and resource allocations\(^3\). This has had a significant impact on the purpose of research, and research infrastructure; and requires a response to a more diverse range of stakeholders than the traditional science research model. It also requires increased collaboration and identification of emerging opportunities between institutions such as government, academia, and private institutions that are now more involved in public sector policy formulation and service delivery. With this context in play, it becomes evident that these drivers impact on child welfare practice as a social policy function.

The principles of research use in practice and policy have spread to a wide range of professions and disciplines including human services and have been attributed to political pressure for evidence that practice interventions work; justification of research funding and greater public accountability; increasing quantities of research data and the ease of access to it\(^4\).

The child welfare field is increasingly held accountable for results of services and interventions provided to children and families\(^5\). Tomison\(^6\) argues that the development of programs and changes in the child welfare and child protection field has by tradition been

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\(^1\)Chalip, 1985: 61; OECD, 2003 ; Donovan, 2005 ; Pruett, 2007
\(^2\)Landry, Amara, et al., 2001a
\(^3\)OECD, 2003
\(^4\)NSW Department of Community Services, 2007a
\(^5\)Kessler, Gira, et al., 2005
\(^6\)Tomison, 2002
the result of crisis driven change reforms and not based on a well considered approach taking into account evidence and knowledge of what works.

Child deaths and regular adverse media coverage on a variety of aspects of child protection (leading many workers and services to feel that when making decisions or taking action they are ‘damned if they do, damned if they don’t’) have helped to create a climate where it is at times more important to be seen to be making some form of response to alleviate concerns, rather than taking the time to plan a considered response. As a result, changes to policy and practice have often not resulted from the careful consideration of evidence-based-practice.

Further issues arise where there are policy makers and service planners demanding evidence of need rather than considering what actions should occur once an identified need has been established. This according to Liabo suggests that an evidence-based approach needs to be considered and implemented at all levels, not just at conceptual or policy identification level, but also the practice implementation level of service delivery to address what works in responding to the identified needs. It is recognised that social policy issues and initiatives are “driven by a range of agendas at different levels of government and service planning”, and therefore it is imperative that all levels work toward being responsive in an evidence-informed way.

Evidence-based practice and policy, or the use of research in practice and policy development is a relatively new concept in a human service perspective. It has been adapted from the medical field, however, even though there is literature on the broad concept of translating such an approach to a human service or social work setting – there is little scholarly research of an evidence-based approach in a child welfare context, and even less scholarly research on whether such an evidence-based approach is actually used in policy and practice. This presents a gap in the knowledge of the field of research utilisation and the necessity to explain whether certain factors or influences help or hinder the use of research.

7 Ibid.
8 Liabo, 2005
9 Ibid.
10 Human services are those services that assist in the welfare of individuals, families and communities such as child welfare, family support, housing, employment, and social care based services.
There are also specific challenges in a child welfare practice context that renders it different to other fields in the human services area such as the criminal justice and adult care settings. Firstly, this practice context includes the conflicting nature of both the voluntary and involuntary legislative basis for action and removal of children where there is known risk of harm. It requires the engagement and provision of services to both the child and the parents, not just a focus on the child. It requires the provision of services and decision-making that is not point in time related but rather has an impact on whole of life well-being and development. The practice context also requires the provision of community based facilities and services to strengthen communities where there is no direct involvement with families to provide those universal support and prevention services that furnish families with skills in order to limit engagement with child protection services. The child welfare practice context is not a singular focus on the child but on the parenting and broader supports for that child. It has a far reaching association with other key areas such as education, health, and housing and cannot be viewed in isolation. There is also the challenge of where the ‘State’ by the virtue of removal, is the guardian and parent of children, and is not only responsible for their wellbeing and safety, but for providing a pathway that supports and develops the individual to be successful as an adult in society. It is vitally important therefore that decisions made are considered, informed and based on evidence and knowledge of what works to ensure the best possible outcomes.

1.1  Background: the competing strands of modernism and the synergy with evidence-based practice - a new way of working

In 2006, the New South Wales (NSW) Government undertook a process to develop a State Plan to provide a new direction for the State which included the identification of an evidence-based approach to policy and practice to assist in delivering better services\textsuperscript{11}. A key theme of the State Plan is to deliver improved services; a priority is to reduce the rate of child abuse and neglect across NSW. Therefore we would expect that research is utilised (in the form of an evidence-based approach) in service planning, policy development and practice in NSW. What is not demonstrated in the available literature is whether this evidence-based approach actually occurs, particularly at a service delivery level in NSW.

\textsuperscript{11} NSW Premiers, 2006
There has also been a distinct shift from ‘government to governance’\textsuperscript{12}, which has been strongly associated with the New Public Management\textsuperscript{13} (NPM) movement. The politicisation of research and knowledge generation has been a key tool in the knowledge-based or evidence-based approach to governance\textsuperscript{14}.

An evidence-based approach to governance could be understood as a way to lessen confusion, provide the facts, and to inform policy-making and direction. Research, information, and knowledge may also affect the effectiveness and efficiency of agenda setting, decision-making, and policy delivery. Research also has a role in contributing to community expectation of policy implementation and service delivery as described by Cameron below.

\begin{quote}
The community has a right to be assured that the programs to which funding is applied have a clear and relevant purpose, that programs are being run efficiently and effectively (are providing value for money) and that the highest standard of ethics are being maintained\textsuperscript{15}.
\end{quote}

Determining what works can lead to informed governance, transparency, and accountability; however, it may also lead to the politicisation of research funding and create an environment where research becomes a political weapon, that is, it is used and presented to take a particular view (whether this is biased or not)\textsuperscript{16}. There is also a requirement for governments to increase trust, provide access to information and have fuller participation in policy-making. The OECD acknowledges the latter as a way of promoting ethical public administration practices and leadership.

\begin{quote}
Governments must ensure that information is complete, objective, reliable, relevant, easy to find and to understand\textsuperscript{17}.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} OECD, 2002; Hupe and Hill, 2007
\textsuperscript{13} Davies, 2003; Cameron, 2004; Taylor and Kelly, 2006; Hupe and Hill, 2007; Norton, 2007
\textsuperscript{14} Henig, 2008
\textsuperscript{15} Cameron, 2004
\textsuperscript{16} Henig, 2008; Learmonth, 2008
\textsuperscript{17} OECD, 2002
Having access to information is important; however, for information to be meaningful to inform policy and process, the information would be reflective of research and evidence-based. The politicisation of research funding to generate useable knowledge has seen research being used to narrow points of disagreement in the public arena and produce the notion of an ‘informed democracy’\(^\text{18}\) where a level of intellectual engagement with citizens is taking place. No longer is research or knowledge generation seen as just a scientific approach. Social science research is concerned with increasing social knowledge and implicitly the impact or consequences of decisions, work practices and policy directions. Shonkoff argues, “in the domain of human services, policy determines how much you have to work with and science can provide guidance on how to use limited resources wisely”\(^\text{19}\). It could also be argued that science and/or established knowledge underpins how policy is deliberated and formed, that is, it provides the basis for realistic and achievable outcomes and a basis for accountability.

The question of whether an evidenced-based approach either negates or erodes the democratic public policy process or in turn is required in order to advocate for ‘what works’\(^\text{20}\) is a significant one. Informed democracy\(^\text{21}\) would require an evidenced-based approach to advocate for, or demonstrate the delivery of policy and practice options. A notion of accountability may lead to the selection of options that are not the most desirable or evidence-based to the community at large, but rather used as a process that reaffirms accountability in ensuring the delivery of outputs and outcomes\(^\text{22}\).

It is argued by Moore that there is a change “in the political discourse of government programs. They have increased the appetite of the political process for fact-based arguments about the extent to which government programs achieve their stated objectives or serve the general interest”\(^\text{23}\). This could be reflective of either existing or new program and policy areas. It is argued by Newman\(^\text{24}\) however, that such an evidence-based approach which assists with decision-making, accountability and governance should not negate the notion of responsiveness, nor should it negate responsibility in the delivery of service

\(^{18}\) Henig, 2008
\(^{19}\) Shonkoff, 2000
\(^{20}\) See O'Flynn, 2007 Learmonth, 2008
\(^{21}\) Shonkoff, 2000
\(^{22}\) O'Flynn, 2007
\(^{23}\) Moore, 1995
\(^{24}\) Newman, 2004
options (new or existing) and outcomes. This is also articulated by other authors such as Laforest and Orsini\textsuperscript{25}, and Sullivan and Taylor\textsuperscript{26}. They suggest that an evidence-based approach should not just be for the purposes of political and public accountability mechanisms, or for the purposes of having evidence generally available, but to provide a platform for providing a balanced view, an opportunity to bring organisations and key stakeholders to the ‘table’ to inform that view, and for the ongoing learning and development capabilities of government and organisations.

Key to the implementation of neo-liberal practices and new public management in the last few decades was the attempt to devolve existing structures of bureaucracy. “New Zealand and Australia… undertook significant public sector change to break from the bureaucratic paradigm of public administration”\textsuperscript{27}. A direct result of this devolution of the public sector and government into a new public management model was the emergence of private sector market concepts such as privatisation, market forces, increased autonomy, and accountability and decision-making being decentralised\textsuperscript{28}. Alford suggests that such an approach “devalues citizenship”\textsuperscript{29}, however, with requirement for the public sector being more accountable from the bottom-up, more effective engagement, responsiveness and innovation was forthcoming\textsuperscript{30}, and therefore an increase placed on the value of citizenship.

Another key impact of NPM is the requirement to justify public interventions as to why they should be public and not private. A significant issue according to Denhardt and Denhardt\textsuperscript{31} is that the ideology of privatisation erodes one of the key functions of democracy, that is the ability to correct market imperfections and to provide a safety net. Therefore the argument for interventions to remain public is a critical one. An evidenced-based approach in this situation is seen as a mechanism for demonstrating the value of public vs. private interventions.

\textsuperscript{25} Laforest and Orsini, 2005
\textsuperscript{26} Sullivan and Taylor, 2006
\textsuperscript{27} O’Flynn, 2007
\textsuperscript{28} See McDonald, 2003; Taylor and Kelly, 2006; Budd, 2007; Norton, 2007
\textsuperscript{29} Alford, 2002
\textsuperscript{30} Norton, 2007
\textsuperscript{31} Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003
Analysts of public sector reform such as Kelly, Mulgan and Muers\textsuperscript{32} suggest a range of weaknesses in the NPM approach to government performance such as cost efficiency over other considerations such as efficiency of output over what the public really wanted, difficulty in specifying service quality vs. service inputs, mimicking organisational and financial systems used by private business, reduced discretion of front line workers, and only small level improvements rather than larger scale innovations. Kelly et al argue that these issues detract from the core purposes of delivery of services “and the ethical responsibility to protect the interests of the next generation of citizens”\textsuperscript{33}.

Factors such as what core public service looks like (including both size and function) raises questions regarding what the legitimate functions of government are and what services it should provide, what skill set, competencies and capabilities are required of public servants to deliver the policies of the government. It also raises the notion of a change in how core public service business is developed and delivered where government has moved away from a monopoly on policy development and service delivery to more of a role of influencing and steering. This also results in the constant change of what public service looks like and delivers.

The well documented criticisms of the NPM approach by analysts such as Kelly, Mulgan and Muers, Alford, Dunleavy, and Self (in Orchard)\textsuperscript{34} influence the call for an approach whereby programs and practices delivered are based on evidence of what works. The evidence-based practice and policy movement is such a mechanism for overcoming the issue and could be used to inform public sector reform and policy development. The impact of NPM and the subsequent public sector reform, by the very nature of how public sector organisations change, has contributed to a new way of policy making process which is connecting evidence and research in policy making and service delivery options. It is also concerned with the shift from the ‘science push model’ to that of a ‘demand pull model’ giving credibility to understanding what works and embedding that into the policy process. No longer is policy development and implementation undertaken without purpose, context and an evidence-base.

\textsuperscript{32} Moore, 1995; Kelly, Mulgan, et al., 2002
\textsuperscript{33} Kelly, Mulgan, et al., 2002
\textsuperscript{34} Dunleavy 1994 ; Orchard 1998 ; Alford 2002
This is vitally important when considering the broader context of the constant changes to structures, agencies and the public sector as a whole. The new policy-process that is evidenced-informed can provide the ‘constant’ in ensuring effective policy and service options to meet community need and expectation regardless of what agency, structure and the public sector looks like. Whether legitimatisation or de-legitimisation of government, the fundamental notion of government to governance (efficiency, effectiveness and accountability) and the continued provision of public value are significant. Consideration and analysis of the state’s capacity to undertake policy making functions, to develop and implement priorities and goals is fundamental to the legitimacy of government and its role in meta-governance.

The challenge to constantly refine and deliver quality services that are responsive to users are identified as a key component in delivering public value35, and Moore contends “that public managers should work to achieve the legislatively mandated goals and objectives of their organisations as efficiently and effectively as they can”36. It could be argued that evidence-based or informed knowledge and research should impact on the delivery of services that provide public value and assist in determining what works and what does not work. There is also the interplay between being effective and efficient and also being accountable for the expenditure of resources. This may impact where either undertaking research to gauge what works may be too expensive, or the options that are determined from the research may be too expensive to implement.

In the context of delivering child welfare and child protection services, the public value delivered is different where the exchange for service is not one that provides ‘private value’37, but rather where rights are removed from parents and guardians. Such services are seen as society safety nets where the public value is seen or gauged in the outcomes and futures of children who should be free from harm. This in itself is the basis of the public value delivered by a number and range of public sector organisations (particularly statutory agencies such as child protection, welfare and corrections agencies); it is not an economic exchange but one of coercive practices that benefits the community and future generations.

35 Moore, 1994; Moore, 1995; Alford, 2002; Kelly, Mulgan, et al., 2002; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2003; Smith, 2004
36 Moore, 1995
37 See Alford, 2002
The current public service sector, under the guise of NPM has been given much more autonomy, but at the same time much more accountability in a world of increasing demand for services with decreasing resource availability. No longer are policy roll-outs driven by a lack of an evidence-base – they are seen as an economic function where outcomes must outweigh or legitimise the investment, and maximise value. This should be “shaped by experience and evidence of what works”38. This is reason enough for governments and public sector agencies to consider the value and worth of an evidence-based or informed approach to policy-making and practice (or service delivery). Both the political and public service arenas are increasing the demand for knowledge and knowledge production to assist in such an approach39 and they are increasingly relying on evidence and analysis in the political environment where politicians are required to make decisive judgements that are more transparent40.

In further consideration of NPM, the principles of collaboration and joined-up service delivery emerge. This focus was not only to streamline duplication and/or provide one point of entry to service delivery (and produce resource efficiency savings), but to consider the potential benefit of knowledge production, management and sharing that could occur across government, and identify useable knowledge and evidence that was already held within the sector. NPM and the subsequent public sector reform also established a culture of shared knowledge, service improvement, and instigating the importance of an organisational learning environment which embraced an evidenced-informed way of working. This is discussed by Currie, Waring and Finn below.

Consistent with the desire to improve the quality of the public services through new forms of governance and service-realignment, we see an increased policy drive to counter the entrenched interests within the public sector by encouraging organisations and professions to move away from ‘silo’ or ‘tribal’ behaviour towards joined-up thinking and collaborating across boundaries. In particular, there is interest in the contribution that effective management of knowledge across organisational and professional boundaries can make to improve public services41.

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38 Kelly, Mulgan, et al., 2002
39 Maynard, 2007
40 Banks, 2009
41 Currie, Waring, et al., 2008
With the shift in public sector management practices, the notion of informed democracy, citizens that are engaged, and resource use needing to be more transparent (and accounted for), an evidence-based approach to the development and delivery of government human services programs and policy is critical. Even more critical is for programs such as those delivered by statutory child protection agencies, which are legislatively mandated, to provide services that are based on the concept of what works and providing maximum public value.

This overview in the change in the governance of services and policy development which has been informed by a NPM context is important. It signifies the requirement for my research to consider how research utilisation and an evidence-based approach to practice and policy-making are actually being implemented. The case study in this thesis will consider this in a public sector child welfare practice context in NSW.

1.2 Context for the research

There is a growing momentum in implementing evidence-based practice and policy in the child welfare sector, and more broadly the social care sector in Australia and internationally\(^{42}\). What is not evident from the literature are studies that evaluate how (or in what role) research, knowledge and information is used to inform decision-making in practice and policy making. Studies are more focused on how to access research rather than the uptake or utilisation of research\(^{43}\). The literature suggests that there is a need to capture data on both the uptake and utilisation of research (or how and why it is used) in a child welfare context.

In the world of increased electronic communications such as the Internet, there are vast avenues available for research and information accessibility and dissemination. This may enable increased access to information and “more open research-based practice and policy debates”\(^{44}\), however, this also presents challenges. For example, access to the internet may

\(^{42}\) Huberman, 1994; Sheldon and Chilvers, 2000; Sanderson, 2002; Tomison, 2002; Marston and Watts, 2003; Nutley, Davies, et al., 2003; Walter, Nutley, et al., 2003b; Barrett, 2004; Nutley, Davies, et al., 2004; O’Toole Jr, 2004; Scott, Lewig, et al., 2005; Stevens, Liabo, et al., 2005; Lewig, Arney, et al., 2006

\(^{43}\) Sheldon and Chilvers, 2000; Lewig, Arney, et al., 2006

\(^{44}\) NSW Department of Community Services, 2007a
result in gathering material of little quality or with no evidence-base; and for individuals in workplace; the critical appraisal of material to assess quality of information could be absent. It is argued that individual factors such as age, qualification/education, attitudes towards research, and professional experience, as well as contextual factors such as supervision/support, time, resources, access, organisational culture and work role (autonomy), impact on effective research utilisation.

The catalyst for the proposed research is that there is a gap in the literature on assessing the uptake of research utilisation in policy making and practice in the social care setting. The literature indicates that research utilisation and evidence-based practice and policy-making in a social care setting would suggest good practice - this is known. What is not known is how this actually happens in practice.

1.3 The research question: How does research influence practice and policy in a child welfare context in NSW

The aim of this thesis (by using a case study method) is to establish how practitioners, managers and policy-makers⁴⁵ in a child welfare context in NSW use research to inform practice and policy-making. That is, my focus is on the use of research and evidence-based knowledge, and information utilisation. The thesis examines how practitioners and policy-makers in the NSW child welfare sector⁴⁶ utilise research in their daily work practices and what influences this. It will focus on practitioners and policy-makers use of readily available quality research and evidence-based information as opposed to the implementation of reports from high level research or processes such as inquiries or special commissions of inquiry. The thesis will investigate this gap in the knowledge of how research utilisation in the government/public service sector context occurs.

⁴⁵ Practitioner = front line child welfare workers. Managers = supervisors of practitioners. Policy-makers are officers and managers that undertake policy development work or manage policy project work.

⁴⁶ Statutory child welfare services in NSW are delivered by the NSW Government.
The thesis examines the uses of research by practitioners and policy-makers – whether it is for instrumental, conceptual or symbolic purposes. Stetler\textsuperscript{47} outlined three types of research utilisation.

*Instrumental use is defined as using research in explicit and direct ways for example, to help determine a clinical or practice decision. In contrast, conceptual use involves using research in less defined ways, for example to change thinking or a source of new ideas. Symbolic use refers to the use of research to persuade or to support a position or practice\textsuperscript{48}.*

The research will also specifically look at three ‘spheres of influence’ that may impact on the uptake of research or evidence-based knowledge – these are individual factors, environmental factors, and the agency or organisational factors (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Intersection of ‘spheres of influence’

The three spheres of influence relate to the various aspects of practice and policy making that will be examined in the case study organisation. The individual or micro level, the workplace environment or the meso level, and the organisational level which examines the macro or institutional level of the Agency. Simply, the spheres of influence can be viewed as the micro-level which considers individual attributes and personal development, meso-level which is group or team work perspectives (communities of practice), and macro-level

\textsuperscript{47} Stetler, 1994

\textsuperscript{48} NSW Department of Community Services, 2007a
such as organisational systems \(^{49}\). It is important to examine how the three spheres or the micro, meso and macro interconnect and influence\(^{50}\) environments for research and knowledge utilisation.

The thesis has a focus on how the spheres of influence interplay with each other. It also recognises that merely having an availability of evidence-based materials will not necessarily lead to the uptake of research. Other factors do in fact come into play. For example, the information literacy levels of individuals and the ability to undertake critical inquiry, and the organisational ethos or culture.

Issues to be further explored and investigated within the research include:

A. for what purposes are practitioners, managers and policy-makers presently using research, that is, instrumental, conceptual or symbolic uses?

B. how do factors such as individual, environmental and organisational factors contribute to the use of research?
   1) are all three spheres (individual, environmental and organisational) of influence on research utilisation dynamic and mutually exclusive?
   2) is research utilisation at optimum when all three spheres of influence (individual, environmental and organisational) are in play?

C. is there a difference between rural and metropolitan staff regarding research and evidence-based knowledge utilisation, that is, do contextual influences such as support, time, access, and organisational culture negatively affect research utilisation more so in rural and remote locations than metropolitan locations?

\(^{49}\) Cacioppe and Edwards, 2005, also see Potts, Foster, et al., 2004; Freyens, 2008
\(^{50}\) Triggs and John, 2004
1.4 Organisation of thesis

The thesis contains the following chapters. Four chapters are results chapters and will be based on the discussion of the data collected within the case study organisation.

Chapter 2 – Putting research into practice

This chapter covers key theories, definitions, and concepts that underpin the research question. This chapter will look at three particular theories which are information processing, evidence-based practice and policy, and organisational theory.

Information processing theory\textsuperscript{51} is important to the consideration of how research and knowledge that is sourced is used to assist with professional judgement and decision-making in the delivery of policy and practice. This also is relevant in considering what is deemed to be usable information and knowledge, and how this in turn relates to the creation of further knowledge, knowledge production and transfer. Evidence-based practice and policy theory\textsuperscript{52} provides a platform for the consideration of concepts such as instrumental, conceptual or symbolic uses of research and knowledge. It also allows examination of the barriers and enablers to research use, research utilisation and the connection to an evidence-based approach to policy and practice, as well as how practice informs research rather than research just informing practice.

Organisational theory\textsuperscript{53} is relevant as it explores key concepts such as how organisational behaviour, organisational learning, continuous professional development, leadership and culture enable and impact on a new way of undertaking policy development and implementation which is evidenced-informed. It is relevant to the research as it provides the basis for understanding the structures, functions and the ethos of organisations in promoting an environment and infrastructure to support an evidence-based approach to policy and service delivery.

\textsuperscript{51} See works by Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; George and Bennett, 2005; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005
\textsuperscript{52} See works by Walter, I., Nutley, S, and Davies, H., and Stetler
\textsuperscript{53} See works by Argyris, C., & Schon, D. And Elkjaer, B.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter provides the methodology, data collection and research methods in detail. A mixed method qualitative approach was used which included document analysis, focus groups, short surveys and semi-structured interviews. Discussion of the limitations and delimitations occurs, and a profile of the agency that is the focus of the case study is given. The chapter also considers the research participants attributes to give some contextual basis for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 – Assessing the individual factors that impact on research utilisation in a child welfare context in NSW

This chapter is the first of four chapters of the case study chapters that examines how the micro or individual contexts and factors such as information literacy, influence on professional judgement, attitude towards use of research in practice, professional experience, practitioner competence and expertise, and critical thinking and inquiry impact on the use of research and other evidence-based information and knowledge in a child protection setting (information processing theory). Of particular importance to the chapter is the notion of a new way of working, that is evidence-based, and whether this has an impact.

Chapter 5 – Assessing the work environment and other contextual factors that impact on research utilisation in a child welfare context in NSW

This chapter examines the environmental workplace or meso factors that can influence the use of research such as support, time, access to information, research and knowledge, and the resources that are available (evidence-based practice and policy theory). The chapter will also examine the impact of policy and procedure, and the rules and responsibilities on research utilisation in practice and policy-making within the case study organisation. This chapter will also address whether there is a accessibility issue to utilising research and expert-knowledge, that is do metropolitan staff have better access to research and greater participation in research activities than regional and rural staff, and whether environmental factors play a part in this.
Chapter 6 – Assessing the organisational factors that impact on research utilisation in a child welfare context in NSW

This chapter will examine the organisational or macro factors that impact on the agency and evidence-based practice. This chapter specifically examines the organisational factors that influence the use of research such as organisational culture and how it supports certain approaches such as evidence-based practice and policy-making, and/or whether it is a tool to bring about change (organisational theory). Other considerations include how the organisation sets parameters for practice and policy-making (rules, roles and responsibilities, and autonomy) as well as the impact of leadership.

Chapter 7 – Explaining the impact of the ‘spheres of influence’ and uses of research in a child welfare context in NSW

This chapter examines how the three levels or ‘spheres of influence’ (individual, environmental and organisational) impact and interact on the use of research and evidence-based practice. The chapter examines whether the factors of influence can co-exist, whether they are mutually exclusive or have fusion, and whether they are static or dynamic (or whether this is dependent on context and condition). The chapter also examines the uses of research (instrumental, conceptual and symbolic) and whether the use of research provides a legitimisation of the practitioners/policy-maker’s view. As with the spheres of influence, the uses of research will be examined to see whether they can co-exist, whether they are mutually exclusive or have fusion and whether they are static or dynamic or can they be used at different times for different reasons.

A new ‘typology of research users’ is proposed in this chapter with the classification of the semi-structured interview participants (named the ‘everyday research users’ cohort) against the typology. This provides a new contribution to theory regarding evidence-based practice and policy making.

Chapter 8 – Conclusions

This chapter is the final and summation chapter of the thesis. The chapter will examine key messages from the research and revisit the primary and subsequent research questions. The chapter will also examine the use of evidence-based practice in a child welfare setting and what factors are barriers to the access and use of evidence-based research, information and knowledge, and what factors are enablers and contribute to evidence-based practice and research utilisation.
1.5 Conclusion

Evidence-based practice and policy development is a new phenomenon to the social science or child welfare setting. The research and subsequent thesis provides new research and considers (or assesses) how and why staff at various levels and in different work settings access, use, analyse, critically evaluate and apply the research to their daily work environments. In an environment of increasing accountability and evidence-informed practice and policy agendas, the thesis provides insight into how research, information and expert knowledge utilisation occurs within a public service organisation and in particular a statutory child protection agency which is mandated by legislation. The research and thesis establish whether such an operating environment greatly affects the ability to have a research utilisation culture, and how different factors such as the individual, work environment and the broader organisational factors impact. The thesis also considers research user characteristics and applications in proposing a new ‘typology of research user’ developed from the data collected across all research cohorts which provides a new contribution to theory and the field of research utilisation and evidence-informed practice.
2 PUTTING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the relevant literature that relates to the research and field of study. It provides an overview of the key theories, definitions, and concepts that underpin the research question and provides the framework for the following results chapters in building the understanding of research utilisation within the case study organisation at the micro, meso and macro level. It maps the key literature which is available from a range of fields in research and knowledge utilisation. These fields include the social care and welfare fields, health and medical fields, field of organisational study, education, criminal justice, intellectual capital and knowledge management, and public sector management and governance. I firstly consider the literature that underpins the individual sphere of influence (micro level) such as information processing theory. The role of professional judgement and decision-making relating to evidence-based practice and policy development is explored, and then the focus turns to the exploration of the concepts of useable information and knowledge production transfer, knowledge management and information literacy. I then consider the nature of research and research usage which impacts on all three spheres of influence. Literature on the barriers and enablers to research utilisation across a range of fields is identified and discussed.

Research utilisation and evidence-based practice theory (meso level) is discussed as are the key concepts such as research utilisation and evidence-based practice that informs the environmental sphere of influence – the workplace. Discussion occurs on how research is used in the practice context and whether practice influences or informs research. Finally discussion surrounding the relevant literature to the macro level or the organisational sphere of influence (organisational theory) is presented. This incorporates key notions and concepts of organisational learning, how organisational culture, structure and leadership influences and impacts on an evidence-informed approach to practice and policy.

Whilst there is a growing body of work in evidence-based practice and research utilisation, there is still minimal literature that directly relates to the child welfare arena. It was therefore imperative that relevant literature from other fields was explored to provide
direction and insight. The other fields of literature provide the opportunity to consider synergies of practice with other types of human service agencies such as the health and education sectors regarding research utilisation, in particular issues of barriers and enablers. There will be significant application of the literature to the various case study chapters, however, it is important to identify and provide an overview of the key literature in relation to research utilisation and evidence-based practice in this chapter.

2.2 Relevant fields of literature

There is very little Australian literature on the subject of research utilisation with the majority coming from the United Kingdom or United States. In considering the literature, it is important to note that the systems of governance in the United Kingdom, and the subsequent service provision, are more closely aligned to the Australian system than that of the United States, therefore a large component of the literature was sourced from the United Kingdom. This is important to acknowledge as research is context specific and the United Kingdom literature is more easily transferable into the Australian context.

Related to the research question is the change in public sector management practices (and therefore the public service sector that is responsible for the delivery of services in NSW). This is relevant as the change in the governance practices has highlighted the need for accountability, transparency, engagement and participation. Further to the public service reforms is the notion of delivering the best possible outcomes and public value\(^{54}\). This has an impact on the use of research in a child welfare practice context in NSW. These concepts and notions of neo-liberal public sector management practices and governance, and the New Public Management (NPM) movement have been raised and discussed in Chapter 1 and as a result will not be restated in this chapter, however, these notions provide a platform and catalyst for an evidence-informed way of working in a public sector context. Other key areas of the literature were identified as relevant to the research area and broadly covered the following areas of information processing theory, evidence-based practice and policy theory, organisational theory, and knowledge management which are represented in Table 2.1.

\(^{54}\) Wilkins, 2002
Table 2.1 Relevant fields of literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of influence</th>
<th>Key literature</th>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Information processing theory</strong></td>
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<td>• professional judgement and decision-making</td>
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<td>• critical inquiry/thinking</td>
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<td>• usable information and knowledge</td>
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<td>• knowledge production and transfer</td>
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<td>Individual (micro)</td>
<td><strong>Knowledge management</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• information literacy</td>
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<td>• knowledge production, management and transfer</td>
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<td>• dissemination</td>
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<td><strong>Barriers and enablers to research use</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental (meso)</td>
<td><strong>Evidence-based practice and policy theory</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• instrumental, conceptual or symbolic uses</td>
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<td>• research utilisation and evidence-based practice</td>
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<td><strong>Barriers and enablers to research use</strong></td>
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<td>Organisational (macro)</td>
<td><strong>Organisational theory</strong></td>
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<td>• governance of public research</td>
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<td><strong>Barriers and enablers to research use</strong></td>
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**Information processing theory**

Information and knowledge impacts on the decision-maker and policy-maker in a number of ways; “information has the power to shock, disrupt, and destabilise”\(^{55}\). Information processing theory considers such impacts and processes for decision-making, policy and agenda-setting. Information processing theory relates to the research question by questioning how research and information fit in such a process of decision-making\(^{56}\) - is it for change/action, or for defending change/action, or for maintaining the status quo? The

\(^{55}\) Jones and Baumgartner, 2005

\(^{56}\) Also see Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; Bachrach and Baratz, 1970 on decision-making.
role of agenda setting in policy formulation and implementation impacts on practice, and
information processing and decision-making have a direct impact on agenda setting. Other
considerations include how the concepts of useable knowledge\(^{57}\), critical thinking and
inquiry\(^{58}\) (which suggests that thinking is not static or separate from action), and
information literacy\(^{59}\) play a role. “A decision maker needs two kinds of information: an
understanding of the problem and knowledge of the possible solutions\(^{60}\).

Information-processing theory concerns choices, the weighing up of information, and
trade-offs. It is applicable in this thesis to understanding the use of research and evidence-
based information and knowledge by practitioners and policy-makers. It also lends itself to
broader concepts of how professional judgement, the attitude of individuals to using an
evidence-based approach to their work, and professional experience impact on research
and evidence-based information and knowledge usage in the workplace by individuals.

**Professional judgement and decision-making**

Research or evidence-based information is only one aspect that influences professional
judgement and decision-making. The evidence-informed practitioner examines the
evidence-based information in the context of a particular case, and integrates this with their
practice wisdom and the views of service users to inform their professional judgement.

_Specific judgements should be informed by a variety of types of evidence and made
on the basis of a synthesis of this informational input and other considerations,
which might be ethical, policy-based, resource-based or intuitive\(^{61}\)._

Decision-making is a complex concept and process and a range of factors interplay such as
power, authority, influence, manipulation and force which have a direct impact on decision
or non-decision-making\(^{62}\). This is important to acknowledge when considering the analysis
undertaken in my case study, in particular questions of how and why practitioners and
policy makers use research to influence and inform their decision making, and the barriers

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\(^{57}\) George and Bennett, 2005  
\(^{58}\) Crotty, 1998  
\(^{59}\) Fennessy, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2002; Bundy, 2004; No-author, 2004; Nutley, Davies, et al., 2004; Kirton and
Barham, 2005; Spender, 2006  
\(^{60}\) Jones and Baumgartner, 2005  
\(^{61}\) Phillips, 2006  
\(^{62}\) Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; Bachrach and Baratz, 1970
or factors that constrain either research use or decision making authority are important to understand. Decision-making in an organisation also needs to be considered within the context of autonomy of the individual (delegation), rules, responsibilities and policy and procedures. Whilst there has been considerable literature on the inflexibility and difficulty of changing street-level practice in public organisations, Foldy and Buckley\textsuperscript{63} articulate that by providing learning opportunities for workers which include opportunities for reflection, engagement with knowledge and evidence, and clear direction, this aids in changing practice (thus changes to the work environment), and positive decision-making. While this may not overcome levels of autonomy and discretion in decision-making in the workplace, it does facilitate an environment of job commitment and satisfaction and promotes increased levels of critical reflection and professional judgement.

This raises the role of “professional expertise in the exercise of discretion”\textsuperscript{64}, that guidance needs to occur at all levels to ensure that decision-making remains in the realms of accountability. Direction is provided to ensure the best possible decisions are made to reflect the required outcomes. A ‘pure’ evidence-based practice model\textsuperscript{65} may reduce the autonomy of the professional minimising the capacity to utilise professional judgement by prescribing what interventions need to occur and dismissing the individual contexts that surround the required interventions. Therefore it is argued that practice wisdom and judgement needs to be included to effect meaningful decision-making by the practitioner and policy maker. This is affirmed by Otto and Ziegler\textsuperscript{66} who concluded that evidence-based social work practice needs to be based on empirically valid knowledge not just evidence and research, and Gilgun\textsuperscript{67} concluded that social work or social care practices relied on information and sources from the four areas of research and theory, practice wisdom, practitioner values as a professional and views and values of the client. There is a range of usable knowledge and sources available to the practitioner and policy maker, with authors\textsuperscript{68} such as Hoefer and Jordan, and McKenna, Cutcliffe et al, suggesting that practice wisdom (from practitioners and policy makers on the ground) on the hierarchy of evidence is relegated to a lower status level than meta-analysis and random controlled trials.

\textsuperscript{63} Foldy and Buckley, 2010
\textsuperscript{64} Newman, 2002
\textsuperscript{65} Lambert, Gordon, et al., 2006
\textsuperscript{66} Otto and Ziegler, 2008
\textsuperscript{67} Gilgun, 2005
\textsuperscript{68} McKenna, Cutcliffe, et al., 2000; Hoefer and Jordan, 2008
However, practice wisdom does have a role to play in an evidence-informed approach to practice application and outcomes.

*Policy-makers and managers increasingly require access to high quality evidence syntheses that include research and non-research evidence, and both qualitative and quantitative research findings*\(^{69}\).

This in turn raises the issue of how individuals and organisation synthesise information, research and knowledge into usable formats that aid in the decision-making and professional judgement of practitioners and policy makers.

**Usable information and knowledge – knowledge production and transfer, knowledge management and information literacy**

There is a requirement that information and knowledge is converted into something that is ‘useable knowledge’\(^{70}\) that practitioners and policy makers require and need, and that is transferrable and applicable to the front-line of service provision, and authors such as George and Bennett, and Shonkoff, have discussed in their literature the gaps between theory and practice or the application of knowledge across science (academia), policy and practice\(^{71}\).

*Good generic knowledge enables a practitioner to increase the chances of making the right decision about whether and how to employ a particular strategy. Generic knowledge is most useful when it identifies conditions, processes, and causal mechanisms that link the use of each strategy to variance in its outcome*\(^{72}\).

It is recognised that much literature is scholarly based and not necessarily practice influenced. Information written in an academic format may not be easily read or analysed by practitioners. This is potentially a barrier to the uptake of research in a practice and policy context and therefore becomes a concern for practitioners and policy makers. Ensuring research, evidence and knowledge has an impact on the policy making, practice

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\(^{69}\) Mays, Pope, et al., 2005  
\(^{70}\) George and Bennett, 2005  
\(^{71}\) Shonkoff, 2000; George and Bennett, 2005  
\(^{72}\) George and Bennett, 2005
and service delivery aspects of an organisation is fundamental. This is what Nutley, Davies and Walter describes as ensuring that organisations and government have developed ways to learn from the diffusion of innovations73.

There are opportunities for learning from other fields of study such as organisational learning and change, and knowledge management74 to assist in the understanding and conceptualisation of how research utilisation processes may work and succeed in social care based organisations. For instance, how knowledge management processes and practices may assist in providing the data or evidence that supports or underpins an evidence-informed way of working. Other fields of work such as the area of intellectual capital promotes the growth of intellectual wealth within organisations by suggesting that it is necessary to develop the organisational platforms and infrastructures that can promote the social capital value of the organisation as well as the intellectual development and growth75. It is necessary to recognise that knowledge production and its relationship to evidence-based practice also relates to the internal capabilities of knowledge creation and capability. It is also associated with how organisations can be utilising that knowledge to promote the learning organisation striving for continuous improvement. “...knowledge management, a discipline that has emerged focusing on how organisations can generate, communicate and leverage their intellectual assets”76.

The concept of a ‘knowledge value chain’77 that considers key aspects of knowledge such as knowledge analysis (what do we have to know and what do we know), knowledge development, knowledge transfer, knowledge application, and knowledge evaluation is an important one. The knowledge value chain gives importance to the notion that knowledge is not stagnant. It is a constantly evolving process which has many facets and the knowledge value chain highlights the active processes that are involved in using knowledge in practice. It is imperative to understand the different types and levels of knowledge and expertise within an organisation (individual, team/workplace and organisational knowledge) and how this interplays with other research and evidence in

73 Nutley, Davies, et al., 2002a
74 Nutley, Davies, et al., 2004
75 Karp, 2003
76 Mullen, Bledsoe, et al., 2008
77 Iske and Boersma, 2005
organisational learning, evidence-informed practice, and in developing policy and practice outcomes.

*...knowledge is not an inert object to be “sent” and “received”, but a fluid set of understandings shaped by those who originate it and by those who use it. Knowledge use, then, is conceived as an active learning process*\(^{78}\).

The importance of understanding the various sources of evidence, research and knowledge and the suggested ‘hierarchy of evidence’ that sits alongside that may create challenges or barriers to knowledge production and transfer for workers into the workplace. Even though there has been the identification of a range of checklists and guidance tools\(^ {79}\) that are provided to assist practitioners and policy makers with transfer and application, there will be ongoing differences in the interpretation of the various sources of research and evidence regarding the importance, originality and transferability of the information to the practice and policy setting\(^ {80}\).

*One of the consequences of the evidence-based movement has been the restatement of the importance of research and critical appraisal skills within the policy process*\(^ {81}\).

It is clear from the growing volume of available information and research, that information literacy and knowledge management is critical to the success of practitioners and policy-makers in making sense of available information. Barriers to gaining or searching for information include issues such as end users not knowing what information is available, they have difficulty determining the quality, credibility and accuracy of the information, the information they seek is too hard to find, they are unable to compare across information alternatives, and they lack sufficient information\(^ {82}\). These factors directly contribute to the ability to use research and evidence-based information in the workplace. Information literacy skills provide the platform for lifelong learning to “effectively learn, create new

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\(^{78}\) NCDDR, 1996
\(^{79}\) Funk, Champagne, et al., 1991b; Funk, Champagne, et al., 1991a; Macwilliam, Maggs, et al., 2003
\(^{80}\) Sempik, Becker, et al., 2007
\(^{81}\) Schofield and Sausman, 2004
\(^{82}\) O'Sullivan, 2002
knowledge, solve problems and make decisions”83. In examining the notion of research utilisation, or putting research into practice, information literacy is a core skill to effect the identification and uptake of appropriate research and knowledge. This needs to be considered in the light of any strategy to better inform evidence-based practice.

This is also coupled with the recognition of the various learning styles of individuals within organisations. Having a skill set that will assist in reducing the research to practice gap is necessary84, however, having the understanding that different individuals learn and develop in different ways also needs to be recognised. The various styles of both educators and the individual learner requires the consideration of different learning strategies and methodologies85. This is also important to the process of dissemination and translation of research and evidence material which is made available for and on behalf of organisations.

**Barriers and enablers to research use**

Strategies to promote effective utilisation of research require an awareness of factors that facilitate or impede this process. Hughes, McNeish et al.s86 explored views regarding the barriers to using research in practice and were classified into two main areas. **Practice-based factors** which included a general lack of training (which incorporated a lack of training in critical appraisal skills), an organisational culture that does not adequately support and value professional development, and the requirement for positive leadership. **Research-based factors** included a lack of time and money, timing where research may not be contemporary or current to the priorities of practitioners or policymakers, research not being presented engaging and useful ways, lack of availability and accessibility to research materials within organisations, and translation of research issues arising if findings are conflicting.

There is considerable discussion and literature on barriers to research utilisation including what Shonkoff87 describes the “cultural gaps” between the research, policy and practice arenas and it is reported that these arenas represent three different cultures88. The distinct

83 Bundy, 2004
84 Maynard, 2007; Gredig and Sommerfeld, 2008; Maynard, 2010
85 Akella, 2010 discusses Kolb’s experiential learning theory and its application.
86 Hughes, McNeish, et al., 2000
87 Shonkoff, 2000
88 Ibid; Walter, Nutley, et al., 2003a
cultures provide a hindrance or barrier to research utilisation and evidence-informed practice and policy making, for example research is often not practitioner friendly, and therefore difficult to translate into practice. At the same time practitioners may not invest in the time to critically evaluate materials that would provide feedback and insight to researchers on what makes research more useful and easier to translate and apply. Policy makers, as suggested by Innavaer, Vist et al., do not consistently access and utilise research in the policy making process and as a result, this is a barrier for practitioners due to operational policy and procedure not being contemporary. This may be compounded by organisational and contextual factors such as limited resources which may directly impact on effective research utilisation processes. Commonalities in the identification of barriers to research use are seen across a number of different fields such as health and nursing.

Manuel, Mullen et al also identified commonality of barriers to that of the other fields in the context of evidence-based practice in the social work practice environment and considered them in the categories of individual, organisational and system based factors.

**Evidenced-based practice and policy theory**

Consideration of evidence-based practice and policy theory provides the background for how and why there has been a change in the focus of research from a scientific and/or medical model to a social science model. There are still tensions with this change as it is not clear that the translation of a medical model of evidence-based practice to the social science arena is either appropriate or able to be generalised into that field of practice. This approach to the research question provides a pathway to examine why there has been a push for evidence-based practice in a child welfare context or more broadly in a government and/or human service context. This theoretical approach will also provide a pathway to consider the environmental contexts that impact on the use of research in practice and policy-making such as time, access and support. There are key practices that assist in the effective impacts of research utilisation. These are: research must be translated, enthusiasm (on the part of the organisation or program and the users),

89 Kessler, Gira, et al., 2005
90 Innvaer, Vist, et al., 2002
91 Hughes, McNeish, et al., 2000; Bryar, Closs, et al., 2003
92 Funk, Champagne, et al., 1991b; Funk, Champagne, et al., 1991a; McCaughan, Thompson, et al., 2002; McCleary and Brown, 2003; Hutchinson and Johnston, 2006
93 Manuel, Mullen, et al., 2009
contextual analysis, credibility, leadership, support and integration\textsuperscript{95}. Some of these key practices directly interface with those concepts identified in organisational theory and this includes how leadership and the broader organisation plays a role in facilitating effective research utilisation practices.

**Research utilisation & evidence-based practice**

There is no commonly accepted definition of research utilisation and examination of how research is used in practice often fails to provide a clear description of ‘research utilisation’\textsuperscript{96}. Walter, Nutley and Davis\textsuperscript{97} argue there is a need to investigate how ‘research use’ is best defined and measured and in some instances research utilisation has simply been considered the implementation or translation of research into practice\textsuperscript{98}. Others have attempted to establish ways in which research is used in practice with Stetler\textsuperscript{99} outlining three types of research utilisation; instrumental use, conceptual use and symbolic use. Nutley, Walter and Davies\textsuperscript{100} also put forward seven different ‘meanings’ of research use which have been adapted from Weiss\textsuperscript{101}. An abridged version is displayed in Table 2.2 below. It is important to recognise these different ‘meanings of research use’ to understand the contexts and drivers of research use particularly in a public sector setting.

| 1. **The knowledge-driven model.** Basic research identifies knowledge of potential value to the policy or practice community. |
| 2. **The problem-solving model.** Research helps policy makers find a solution to a particular problem. |
| 3. **The interactive model.** Policy makers actively and interactively search for information to help support their work, drawing on a multiple sources of information |
| 4. **The political model.** Where political opinions are long standing and fixed, or where interests have firmly coalesced, research is unlikely to have a direct influence. |
| 5. **The tactical model.** Sometimes the findings from research are irrelevant: what matters is that research is being done. |
| 6. **The enlightenment model.** Over time, research will have a gradual and cumulative influence on the public policy sphere. |
| 7. **Research as a part of the intellectual enterprise of society.** New policy interest in an issue may be stimulated by a wider social concern, and policy makers offer funds for its further research. |

\textsuperscript{95} Walter, Nutley, et al., 2003b
\textsuperscript{96} NSW Department of Community Services, 2007a
\textsuperscript{97} Walter, Nutley, et al., 2005 also see Nutley, 2009
\textsuperscript{98} Hutchinson and Johnston, 2006
\textsuperscript{99} Stetler, 1994
\textsuperscript{100} Nutley, Walter, et al., 2007
\textsuperscript{101} Weiss 1970 cited in Ibid.
The types of research put forward by Stetler are more practically orientated, whereas those put forward by Nutley et al based on Weiss take a strategic view of how research use may impact more broadly in the policy arena. For the purposes of this thesis, Stetler’s model of research use is applied as it provides a pathway to examine how practitioners and policy-makers use research directly in their day to day practice. However, it is important to acknowledge the research is used for different purposes and in different ways. The Weiss model indicates that research may have no effect or produce no desired outcome such as in the political or tactical models. It is hoped that over time research will be used for more than problem solving and for the generation of knowledge that may have some relevance (knowledge-driven model, problem solving model, interactive model, intellectual enterprise), to that where it will have an cumulative impact (the enlightenment model) where knowledge is generated that builds on previous knowledge and evidence of what works to influence policy agenda and outcomes. The rational-empirical model of practice as described above is the preferred model considered within this thesis. That is, information that is contextual, relevant and transferable to the field of practice is core to research utilisation practices, not just the dissemination of information.

The process of research utilisation to effect practice change is neither straightforward nor simple\textsuperscript{102}. There are many factors that influence how research is utilised, and there is acknowledgement that research utilisation is different to the dissemination of research\textsuperscript{103}. The dissemination of research and information alone is not sufficient to cause practice change. A process where there is engagement with the research is required. This is reiterated by Nutley, Walter and Davies.

The assumption is that with effective dissemination, behaviour change will simply follow. Similar support for dissemination strategies come from cognitive theories of rational information seeking and decision-making. According to the rational-empirical model, information must be presented to practitioners in such a way as to enable them to engage with it intellectually. This engagement in turn provides the motivation for applying knowledge locally and thus instigating change\textsuperscript{104}.

\textsuperscript{102} Parahoo, 2000  
\textsuperscript{103} Hughes, McNeish, et al., 2000; Huston, 2005  
\textsuperscript{104} Walter, Nutley, et al., 2003b
An alternative term to research utilisation in the literature is ‘evidence-based practice’ which has developed from the medical field. Evidence-based practice is defined as “the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients”\(^{105}\). Whilst recognised in the medical field, translation of the concept to a child welfare context has not emerged to a significant extent and gives rise to the notion of the inability to directly transfer or generalise research and evidence to practice situations. The child welfare sector therefore may consider having a research or evidence orientated or informed approach to practice and policy making\(^{106}\). Evidence-based practice, however, is broader than the concept of research utilisation. Evidence-based practice considers research as one component that influences an outcome or decision, and research may not be the most important component\(^{107}\) to influence a decision. Research sits alongside policy and procedural frameworks including resources, service user’s preferences, and the practitioner’s expertise in evidence-based decision-making. Other information and types of knowledge may lead to an evidence-informed approach to practice and policy making which takes into consideration the practice wisdom and professional judgement of the individual\(^{108}\).

*The advantage of this different emphasis is that one can draw on a wider range of things when making an assessment about service developments – experiential knowledge, commonsense, practice wisdom, user perspectives – rather than simply statistical correlations, important though these can be\(^{109}\).*

This is further articulated by McKenna, Cutcliffe et al\(^{110}\) in suggesting that there is perhaps a ‘hierarchy of evidence’ with meta analysis and random control trials being at Level 1 (the golden standard of evidence), and reports and opinion from respected authorities at Level 5. All are significant in informing practice – a practice that is research-based or informed as opposed to a purely evidence-based approach.

\(^{105}\) Sackett, Rosenberg, et al., 1996  
\(^{106}\) Lomas and Brown, 2009  
\(^{107}\) Hughes, McNeish, et al., 2000  
\(^{108}\) Arney, Bromfield, et al., 2009; Buckley and Whelan, 2009  
\(^{109}\) Lewis, 1998  
\(^{110}\) McKenna, Cutcliffe, et al., 2000
Research use in a practice context: the nature of research in a social care setting

There are many different reasons as to why and how practitioners and policy-makers use research. It could be for the development of a policy position or subsequent service delivery options, program interventions, or to challenge and bid for resources. Underpinning this however, is the notion of the application of an evidence base which assists to determine what policies and programs work and why.\textsuperscript{111}

\textit{Evidence-based practice has slowly developed into a workable equation providing clear steps to support practitioners in clinical based decision-making. As professionals are becoming more accountable for the care they give within clinical governance structures and processes, the need to use robust research findings effectively is crucial}\textsuperscript{112}.

The literature highlights that there is a growing engagement of using research evidence in decision-making for policy development and practice reasons.\textsuperscript{113} Davies, Nutley et al argue that even though there is a progression towards an evidence-informed approach in the policy and practice arenas, there is not enough emphasis on “what matters is what works in what context”\textsuperscript{114}, and while there is an increasing interest in using research in policy and practice, it is unknown how extensively this is occurring in the child welfare area. There is however, an increase in focus on the identification of factors which can minimise any “research-to-practice” gap.\textsuperscript{115}

Practice informing research – what do practitioners want from research: the nature of evidence

The literature covered so far has primarily been concerned with the notion of research informing practice and policy. What is omitted is the influence that practice in turn has on the development of research agendas and ongoing practice and policy improvement. There is a flow of information and knowledge in both directions between the production of research and evidence-based information and knowledge, and the use of such (see Figure 2.1).

\textsuperscript{111} Lochman, 2006
\textsuperscript{112} McKenna, Ashton, et al., 2004
\textsuperscript{113} Lewig, Arney, et al., 2006
\textsuperscript{114} Davies, Nutley, et al., 2000
\textsuperscript{115} Lochman, 2006; NSW Department of Community Services, 2007a
This notion or concept also gives relevance to the change from a scientific pull model to a demand driven model of research and the requirement of what Shonkoff\textsuperscript{116} describes as the interaction between the various cultures of science, policy and practice. This is also articulated by authors such as Cnaan and Ditcher, and Pollio\textsuperscript{117}. They highlight that the ‘science’ side of evidence-based practice should not inhibit the development or promotion of the ‘art’ side of social care in translating the evidence and research into unique client systems and interactions, as well as evolving further evidence and knowledge. However, it is recognised that the shift to a more science based approach to social work is positive. In addition, it is important for the integration of ‘what works’ not only into program and policy development and outcomes, but also into the training and professional educational components of practitioner development.

\textit{The rise of evidence-based practice movement provides the field with a wonderful opportunity to dramatically increase the extent to which professional activities in the realms of policy and practice can be more solidly grounded in scientific research}\textsuperscript{118}.

The rise in an evidence-based approach in social work situations should not be purely based on the research evidence and the role of critical reflection is paramount to ensure effective decision-making processes. Plath\textsuperscript{119} argues that social care workers should not be put in a position whereby they are made to choose between either research evidence or critical reflection – but that a broader framework for decision-making is required. There is

\textsuperscript{116} Shonkoff, 2000
\textsuperscript{117} Pollio, 2006; Cnaan and Dichter, 2008
\textsuperscript{118} Thyer, 2008
\textsuperscript{119} Plath, 2006
a shift from a pure science based approach from the quantifiable demonstration of need (or required outputs) based on statistical application to one that is more outcomes focussed\textsuperscript{120}.

What is highlighted is the requirement for practice leaders to actively influence research agendas and the development and testing of program and practice models to ensure that there is, what Stevens, Liabo et al describe as, the “‘fit’ between funded research and practitioner questions”\textsuperscript{121} and reduce the research-to-practice gap. This is a significant issue in the implementation of an evidence-based approach to social work or social welfare fields. The unique nature of relationships and client interventions do not necessarily suggest that a certain action will always result in a certain outcome as may be the understanding in the medical based models of evidence-based practice. In the field of social work (or social welfare and social care), evidence-based or informed practice has developed as a solution-focussed approach to address practice based issues and applications, testing what works (or conversely what is harmful) and integrating this with clients needs, knowledge and preferences\textsuperscript{122}. This shift in application of evidence from social statistics to taking into consideration the broader capture of knowledge and expertise is generally regarded as an appropriate foundation for informing practice and policy making in both the social care and public sector arenas\textsuperscript{123}. Davies and Nutley\textsuperscript{124} (as did McKenna, Cutcliffe et al\textsuperscript{125}) also suggest that there is a ‘hierarchy of evidence’ that needs to be taken into consideration when forming a position or action, and that it would be neglectful not to recognise the value of practice wisdom of practitioners who undertake the street level work.

Consideration that different types of evidence are required for different purposes\textsuperscript{126} needs to be examined. For example at the policy level different types of evidence and research are sourced or are required to develop a position, or justify a particular allocation of resources or policy direction. The type of evidence required for practitioners relates more to what to do and how to go about doing it. Further to this, Kitson, Harvey and McCormack argue that in order to have a successful translation of evidence and/or research

\textsuperscript{120} Neylan, 2008
\textsuperscript{121} Stevens, Liabo, et al., 2009
\textsuperscript{122} Soydan, 2008
\textsuperscript{123} Whittaker, Greene, et al., 2006
\textsuperscript{124} Davies and Nutley, 2002
\textsuperscript{125} McKenna, Cutcliffe, et al., 2000
\textsuperscript{126} Davies, Nutley, et al., 2000
into the practice and policy context, it is necessary to understand the nature of the evidence being used, the context or environment into which it is being translated, and also identification of the process that will facilitate that translation of research to practice\textsuperscript{127}. It is recognised by Jenson\textsuperscript{128} that evidence and knowledge are distinct, however, knowledge from a variety of sources does not necessarily erode an evidence-based approach, rather it is another facet in connecting science to social interventions. The synthesis of a diverse range of research and knowledge bases creates a dilemma for the practitioner and policy maker in deciphering the hierarchy of evidence, and the value to allocate to the individual sources of evidence and research\textsuperscript{129}. There is a requirement for skills to critically appraise and apply (or translate) research into practice and to fundamentally evaluate what “constitutes valid evidence”\textsuperscript{130}.

This is particularly highlighted with the recognition of a lack of neutrality in policy tools and instruments, and therefore a lack of neutrality in the implementation of policy\textsuperscript{131} suggesting a linear process. The practitioner and policy maker cannot assume that certain policy instruments are selected to best suit the nature of the issue or problem. Therefore the inclusion of a diverse range of evidence and knowledge needs to be considered when determining the appropriate pathway or action for the individual on the ground. Walker\textsuperscript{132} goes further to suggest that this is a ‘real’ issue and that policy politics need to be separated from the democratic process of delivering required outcomes. This applies in the thesis when considering how and what research is accessed and used by practitioners and policy makers. That is, how research and knowledge is considered and appraised taking into consideration the policy instrument or methodological foundation of the research (whether this be a singular or many pieces of information), how critical thinking and inquiry is applied, and how the information is used in professional judgement and decision-making processes.

\textsuperscript{127} Kitson, Harvey, et al., 1998  
\textsuperscript{128} Jenson, 2005  
\textsuperscript{129} Popay, 2006  
\textsuperscript{130} Glasby, Walshe, et al., 2007  
\textsuperscript{131} Peters, 2002  
\textsuperscript{132} Walker, 2007
**Organisational theory**

Organisational theory provides an overarching backdrop to the research question. It is particularly useful in considering organisational learning or the learning organisation\(^{133}\). “If theorists of organisational learning seek to be of use to practitioners, they must somehow link organisational learning to the practitioner’s thoughts and actions”\(^{134}\).

The key focus on organisational theory is to consider the synergy of fit of evidence-based practice and policy-making with organisational theory, and in particular to consider how key aspects of organisation impacts on research utilisation\(^{135}\). For example how organisational culture such as influence, power, authority and control impact on individual practitioner and policy makers utilising research and knowledge, and how these relate to the organisational sphere of influence of research utilisation. Organisational theory also provides an opportunity to examine the role of organisational culture in supporting certain approaches to the delivery of services, whether leadership plays a role, and how the notion of continuous professional development is viewed within an organisation. The notion of practice interface with learning is also important within the organisational context raising such questions such as is organisational learning a global term that captures everything but delivers nothing in practice – how does this relate to the introduction of, and maintenance of a evidence-based approach to practice and policy making. This subsequently provides a platform to examine organisational change – the purpose and impact of change and whether this is linked to notions of continuous improvement, best practice, and evidence-based practice approaches. Understanding how organisations adapt and develop to conditions of change, whether this internally or external driven is a feature of responsiveness and flexibility of an organisation. It also highlights how structure and processes can either facilitate or inhibit change. This in an evidence-informed context is paramount – not only to consider whether evidence informs change, but how leadership and culture facilitate that change (or not).

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\(^{133}\) See Argyris and Schon, 1974; Argyris, 1977; Argyris, 1991; Argyris, 1995; Argyris and Schon, 1996; Argyris, 1997; Argyris, 2002; Argyris, 2004; Elkjaer, 2004

\(^{134}\) Argyris and Schon, 1974

\(^{135}\) See Hatch, 1993; Cahill, 1997; Hatch, 1997; Easterby-Smith, Antonacopoulou, et al., 2004; Elkjaer, 2004; Smith, 2004a; Smith, 2004b; Phillips, 2006, Jones, 2004; Austin and Claassen, 2008a; Austin and Claassen, 2008b
There are significant challenges that face social care organisations in the implementation and delivery of evidence-informed approaches. There is little literature (as recognised by Mullen, Shlonsky et al\textsuperscript{136}) that exists on the facilitation of such models into organisations and the transfer of knowledge. Whilst the literature accessed indicates a positive outlook for an evidence-informed approach in social care organisations in delivering quality practices and policies, it is also recognised that an evidence-based or informed practice approach complements the professional values of social work and social care fields of practice. It also contributes to the notion of lifelong learning of the practitioner\textsuperscript{137}.

Traditionally the literature on organisational learning and the learning organisation has primarily focussed not only on the individual’s ability to learn but also the ability to see the organisation as a large system\textsuperscript{138}. The concept of organisational learning in recent times has considered the synergy between continuous professional development (CPD) and evidence-based practice\textsuperscript{139}.

The concepts of CPD and EBP were developed in response to similar professional imperatives: an ethos that emphasises the obligations to maintain competence; the need to respond effectively to expanding and shifting fields of knowledge; and an increased climate of regulation and accountability\textsuperscript{140}.

Organisational learning is also concerned with the acquisition of organisational knowledge via organisational inquiry that informs practice which can result in new ways of working and performance improvement\textsuperscript{141}. Organisational theory and organisational learning concepts also give light to different styles and types of learning and communication within organisations such as whether it is double loop (educative) or single-loop (corrective) based\textsuperscript{142} and further sets the platform to explore whether there are linear processes in play within the case study organisation or a top down approach to culture and communication.

\textsuperscript{136} Mullen, Shlonsky, et al., 2005
\textsuperscript{137} Gambrill, 2003; Mullen, Shlonsky, et al., 2005
\textsuperscript{138} See Argyris and Schon, 1974; Argyris, 1977; Argyris, 1991; Hatch, 1993; Argyris, 1995; Argyris and Schon, 1996; Argyris, 1997; Hatch, 1997; Argyris, 2002; Argyris, 2004; Elkjaer, 2004; Phillips, 2006
\textsuperscript{139} Phillips, 2006
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Argyris and Schon, 1974
\textsuperscript{142} Argyris, 1977
Authors such as Pollitt\textsuperscript{143} suggest that evidence, data and measurement are also key to organisational design, performance and learning where data is utilised to fashion change. This also relates to the requirements of public sector organisations to demonstrate that they are in fact ‘good’ public services. This sits hand in hand with organisational learning as it suggests a culture of constant evaluation, refinement and change.

The development of a research culture is imperative and part of the foundation of the learning organisation. Tomison\textsuperscript{144} argues that a research culture needs to be established within organisations where research is valued and actively pursued internally and externally, however, a research culture by itself is not enough and Tomison suggests that alongside a research culture is the need for a culture of evidence-based practice.

2.3 \textit{Key considerations}

There are key considerations that need to be taken from the literature presented. What has been established is that there is minimal literature on the subject of research utilisation or evidence-based (or informed) practice in a child welfare setting and there is even less literature based within an Australian public sector context, let alone an Australian public sector child welfare context. There is literature, however, on the influence and implementation of New Public Management ideas which highlights the need for a more accountable and transparent way of working that produces policies and programs that are both evidence-informed and of public value to the community which provides the foundation for an evidence-informed approach (as discussed in Chapter 1).

An evidence-based approach encompasses a range of evidence, research and knowledge that interacts with the professional skills and abilities of the individual worker to synthesise the information in order to transfer and apply it to practice and policy situations. The shift to a more scientific method of an evidence-informed approach such as that employed in the medical field has had a positive translation to the social care/social work field, however, the majority of research and evaluation to date on the subject has been more around the accessibility and dissemination of research as opposed to how and why research is utilised.

\textsuperscript{143} Pollitt, 2000
\textsuperscript{144} Tomison, 2002
in practice and policy making. The application of a ‘purest’ evidenced-based model, such as found in medical setting, may not be as beneficial to a social science setting. It could be perceived as being too prescriptive and not allowing the practitioner and policy-maker to instil professional judgement, and not take into account other unique factors and influences that relate to the specific problem at hand. This considered, it would suggest that an evidence-informed (or research-informed or knowledge informed) approach would be most applicable to a social science setting as long as the research-to-practice gap is addressed. This could occur by the influencing of research agendas by practitioners and policy makers, and the engagement by practice leaders with the researchers and academics. This would aid in the ability to produce the research and evidence in formats that were both relevant and applicable to the various fields of practice, and address hierarchy of evidence issues.

Understanding decision-making processes and professional judgement is key in facilitating an appropriate skill set which recognises information literacy and knowledge management, and the subsequent ability to create and deploy useable knowledge. It is also important to take into account the reason and purposes for why individuals use research and the role the individual has in engaging with research, evidence and knowledge. It is also important to acknowledge that different forms of evidence, research and knowledge are required for different uses and users.

The commonality of the identified barriers to research utilisation and evidence-based practice across the fields of study and the subsequent development of checklists and tools to overcome such barriers may prove to be of some benefit, however, unless there is an examination of the factors holistically, it suggests that the continuing implementation of an evidence-informed approach into social care based organisations (public sector or otherwise) may be greeted with difficulty and on-going challenges.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter analyses key research which is available across a number of fields that relate to research utilisation and evidence-based practice. The chapter explores key theories and concepts that underpin the research question and subsequent areas for exploration. Based
on existing analysis, the approach taken for this thesis is that research utilisation is a process which involves much more than end point dissemination and receipt of information. It also includes the instrumental, conceptual and symbolic use of research information. It is important to differentiate between access to information and the application of that information to the practice context. The ultimate goal of research utilisation initiatives should be that evidence-based research and knowledge is used in an informed, aware and appropriate manner that leads to appropriate and improved outcomes for clients. As there is this distinct lack of analysis on how and why individuals actually engage with research and evidence (that is the purpose or role they play in utilising research and evidence), I will examine this gap in the literature and specifically address the lack of typology of research users (as opposed to research use) and present such in the thesis.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research was undertaken by a single case study approach and provides data on the utilisation of research by practitioners, managers and policy-makers in the child welfare context in New South Wales (NSW). The research assisted to identify how practitioners, managers and policy-makers in a child welfare context in NSW use research to inform practice and policy-making - that is research and evidence-based knowledge and information utilisation.

The research examined the uses of research by managers, practitioners and policy-makers – whether it is for instrumental, conceptual or symbolic purposes. The research specifically looked at three ‘spheres of influence’ that may impact on the uptake of research or evidence-based knowledge – these are individual, the environmental or workplace factors and the broader agency or organisational factors. Examination of whether the uses of research are seen as mutually exclusive or intersect with each other occurred, as did the examination of the three ‘spheres of influence’ – whether one is considered to have more impact or is more important than the other, and whether they are mutually exclusive or not.

The results of the research will greatly improve the ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses, or barriers and enablers of research utilisation in the human services/welfare practice settings. The results of the research will address the identified gaps in national and international literature of the concept of evidence-based practice in a social science or human service environment.

The research question, how does research influence practice and policy in a child welfare context in NSW, raised sub-questions to be explored and investigated within the research. These included:

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145 Stetler, 1994
A. for what purposes are practitioners, managers and policy-makers presently using research, that is, instrumental, conceptual or symbolic uses?

B. how do factors such as individual, environmental and organisational factors contribute to the use of research?
   i) are all three spheres (individual, environmental and organisational) of influence on research utilisation dynamic and mutually exclusive?
   ii) is research utilisation at optimum when all three spheres of influence (individual, environmental and organisational) are in play?

C. is there a difference between rural and metropolitan staff regarding research and evidence-based knowledge utilisation, that is, do contextual influences such as support, time, access, and organisational culture negatively affect research utilisation more so in rural and remote locations than metropolitan locations?

3.2 Profile of the nominated case study agency: Community Services

The organisation in focus is Community Services, an agency of the NSW Department of Human Services. Community Services was formerly known as the NSW Department of Community Services or DoCS. It is the largest statutory child welfare agency in Australia. The head office for the agency is based in Ashfield, Sydney. Community Services employed 4,553 full-time and part-time staff as at 30 June 2009 with women making up 83 percent of the workforce. The net cost of services for 2008/09 totalled $1.416 billion.

The core business of the agency is to:

- help protect and care for children and young people and support their families
- provide and fund accommodation and support services for children and young people who need to live away from their families (foster care)

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146 In New South Wales the Government has responsibility for the provision of statutory child protection services.
147 NSW Department of Community Services, 2009
• regulate child care by licensing and monitoring compliance
• fund and regulate adoption services
• fund support services to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
• help people separated from their families to trace their records
• coordinate services to meet the basic welfare and recovery needs of people affected by natural and other disasters\textsuperscript{148}.

The performance summary of Community Service during between 2005/06 to 2008/09 financial years is displayed below in Box 3.1\textsuperscript{149}.

Box 3.1 Performance Summary DoCS Annual Report 2008/09

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Service delivery & 2008/09 & 2007/08 & 2006/07 & 2005/06 \\
\hline
Total budget provided & $1.349 billion & $1.295 billion & $1.129 billion & $1.014 billion \\
\hline
Total child protection reports & 309,676 & 303,121 & 266,033 & 241,003 \\
\hline
Rate per 1,000 of children and young people who were subject of a report & 68.5 & 61.0 & 78.8 & 68.6 \\
\hline
Reports referred to a community services centre or Joint Investigation Response Team (JIRT) for further assessment & 226,946 & 209,015 & 201,206 & 163,842 \\
\hline
Number of JIRT referrals accepted & 3,400 & 3,160 & 3,023 & 3,332 \\
\hline
Children and young people in out-of-home care & 16,534 & 14,667 & 12,712 & 10,623 \\
\hline
Rate per 1,000 of children and young people in out-of-home care & 10.2 & 9.1 & 8.1 & 6.7 \\
\hline
Annual real expenditure per child in out-of-home care & $33,433 & $31,628 & $28,698 & $27,856 \\
\hline
Calls to Domestic Violence Line & 23,061 & 22,285 & 22,342 & 22,294 \\
\hline
Number of funded children’s services & 1,583 & 1,509 & 1,619 & 1,641 \\
\hline
Estimated funded places per day & 45,477 & 45,957 & 46,088 & 46,132 \\
\hline
Licensed children’s services & 3,440 & 3,419 & 3,341 & 3,336 \\
\hline
Estimated licensed places per day & 154,351 & 150,776 & 146,120 & 138,646 \\
\hline
Number of children aged 0–5 years who attended funded, licensed children’s services in NSW & 87,476 & 66,797 & 68,859 & 69,691 \\
\hline
Number of children from low income families for whom childcare fees were reduced\textsuperscript{*} & 23,978 & 11,617 & 10,843 & 12,435 \\
\hline

\multicolumn{5}{|l|}{\textsuperscript{*}Survey during one week in September each year.}
\end{tabular}
\caption{Service delivery performance summary}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{148} Community Services, 2010
\textsuperscript{149} NSW Department of Community Services, 2009
The Agency has a central structure for policy making and administration, and a decentralised structure for the management of operations. It has seven operational regions (Metro Central, Metro South West, Metro West, Hunter Central Coast, Northern, Western and Southern) that encompass the entire state (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Operational regions of the case study organisation

These regions have high-level management structures that are responsible for the delivery of client related services via business units located in major population centres. The funding and accountability mechanism for managing complementary services through other government and non-government service providers is also managed via the seven operational regions. The Agency has over 85 Community Service Centres (CSCs) that provide service on a local geographical level within the seven operational regions. The CSCs respond to reports that have been deemed as meeting risk of significant harm thresholds that sit within their catchment areas. The Agency also has a central state-wide intake system, which is staffed 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. This call centre is the initial contact point for all reports of concern for the welfare of children in New South Wales.

For the purpose of the case study and to give context, the following definitions apply.

Practitioners are the front line child welfare workers and/or are case worker specialists.

Managers are the supervisors of practitioners, policy and project officers.

Policy-makers are officers and managers that undertake policy development work or manage policy project work.

Community Services is an agency that has an existing research culture. The Agency has a dedicated Research and Evaluation Unit, Economics and Statistics Unit, and a Research to Practice Program that undertakes research that is relevant to the Agency and translates it into usable information. This could be for the purposes of economic modelling for submissions to Treasury, or to gain an understanding of program components to assist in deciding whether programs should or should not be implemented on a state-wide basis. It

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150 Community Services, 2010a
could also be to provide evidenced-based materials that could assist managers, practitioners and policy makers within the Agency.

The Agency’s Research to Practice Program is the only initiative of its type in Australia regarding child welfare practice and consists of a very small number of staff (a Manager and four staff at various levels) which is supported by the larger Research and Evaluation Unit. The Research to Practice Program delivers a variety of Research to Practice products and initiatives including the development of a Research to Practice Seminar Series and Executive Seminar Series, and a state-wide Research Network (established with cross functional and cross locational representatives from each region and Head Office Directorate). The Program also supports key corporate functions such as conferences.

The aims of the Research to Practice Program\textsuperscript{151} are:

- To raise awareness about the importance of research amongst staff and stakeholders.
- To promote more effective and productive interaction between researchers, policy makers, educators and practitioners through the implementation of a number of Research in Practice strategies.
- To disseminate research undertaken by, and for the Agency to relevant target audiences.
- To provide information and advice based on the latest research evidence and best practice, for early intervention and prevention, out-of-home care, child protection and parenting.
- To inform and improve consistency of practice.

The Research to Practice Program delivers a range of Research to Practice products. \textit{Research to Practice Notes} are targeted summaries of larger internally commissioned research reports or purpose written notes usually four to six pages long that relate the research to the Agency’s context. \textit{Research to Practice Updates} include a snapshot and summary of current research of evidence-based material (such as refereed journal articles) that relate to the core business streams of the Agency. These are generally circulated bi-monthly. \textit{Quality Website Fact Sheets} provide a list of verified evidence-based websites where staff can find relevant material to their workplace. \textit{Seminar Kits and Notes} which

\textsuperscript{151} NSW Department of Community Services, 2004
are the DVD recordings of the Research to Practice Program Seminar Series. They also contain additional further readings and summary notes like the Research to Practice Notes that give a snapshot or summary of the research that was presented.

The 2004 Research to Practice framework or policy paper highlights a range of outputs for the production of products such as the requirement of four seminars per year. From the documentation analysed the Program is producing a much higher quantity of outputs\textsuperscript{152} than was originally envisaged, however, it is fundamental to ensure that the program is making a positive impact with high quality materials.

The issue of sustainability/return on investment for the Research to Practice Program is difficult to calculate on a sophisticated level without undertaking a full evaluation on the impact of the program. What is evidenced from the documentation available regarding outputs is that the Program is producing a high quality and a significantly large quantity of products that outstrips the original prescribed outputs. What needs to be gauged is the impact of the Research to Practice Program on practice and policy development. More fundamentally, it is necessary to establish a longitudinal approach to determine behavioural and attitudinal change to practice. A robust evaluation of the Program is yet to occur, however, systems are being developed and implemented for components of the Program such as the Seminar Evaluation Report\textsuperscript{153}.

The Research to Practice Program has been consolidating its role and position in Community Services through building linkages internally with other units. The Research to Practice Program initially was working in a linear model; however, with the development and progression of the Program, it now works in close collaboration with other key educative program areas within the Agency such as the Professional Development and Quality Assurance, and the Learning and Development Programs.

\textbf{Figure 3.2 Interrelationship for a professional workforce in the case study agency}

\textsuperscript{152} NSW Department of Community Services, 2005a; NSW Department of Community Services, 2005b; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006g; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006h; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006i; NSW Department of Community Services, 2007b

\textsuperscript{153} NSW Department of Community Services, 2007b
This critical shift in the operating environment not only enhances the presence of the Research to Practice Program, but also recognises the pivotal role the Program plays in the professionalisation of the Agency’s workforce in a broader sense. Whilst the shift is considered positive, it is not clear at this time whether it has impacted on the overall uptake of research which informs practice.

During the data collection phase of this research, the case study agency went through a considerable time of change and restructure in response to the Special Commission of Inquiry into NSW Child Protection Services that commenced in late 2007. The Special Commission of Inquiry (see Keep Them Safe website www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au) resulted in the Agency undertaking a major reform program that impacted directly on my research. For example, a large number of pivotal staff based in Head Office were restructured/downsized by way of voluntary redundancy and natural attrition processes (that is no renewal of temporary based positions at the point of contract expiration). Focus was on the amalgamation of the then NSW Department of Community Services into the new NSW Department of Human Services which occurred 1 July 2009, and also a focus on streamlining backroom administrative functions to achieve government efficiency savings.

This impacted on the coordination in undertaking the research and delayed the approval required from the Agency to undertake the research. It also delayed some data collection processes and timeframes.
3.3 Case study approach

The research was undertaken via a single case study approach over the period 2007 - 2010. The case study approach holds considerable influence in social science and behavioural science research settings\(^{154}\). Case studies provide an in-depth consideration of the research topic via a number of methods such as focus groups, semi-structured in-depth interviews, observation and ethnography.

Case studies can also generate both qualitative and quantitative information that can be examined in an intensive manner. Whilst case studies may not lead to general observations or representations of the broader population groups, they do provide an in-depth examination or a multiplicity of critical information that relates to a specific case. Whilst there is criticism of the single case approach, key authors\(^{155}\) in the field of case study methodology advocate that such an approach is useful in theory development and testing, and reduces variance. This is key to why I undertook such an approach. There are multiple observations in this case study from directors, managers, practitioners and policy-makers in the nominated agency. Through the analysis of the qualitative data collected and reporting it throughout the thesis, I contribute to the development of new theory on research utilisation.

\[\text{The attractiveness of case studies is that data on a wide range of variables can be collected on a single group, institution or policy area. A relatively completed account of the phenomena can thus be achieved. This enables the research to argue convincingly about the relationships between variables and present causal explanations for events and processes}^{156}.\]

As the research focus is on one agency (or institution or policy setting) it is argued that the outlined methodological approach is the appropriate approach to take as it provides multiple sources of data from multiple stakeholders. The organisation that is the focus of the research has various facets and complexities. These include the organisation being one agency of a broader human services department, field versus head office roles and program

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\(^{154}\) Burnham, Gilland, et al., 2004; George and Bennett, 2005; Stewart, Shamdasani, et al., 2007

\(^{155}\) Crotty, 1998; Marsh and Stoker, 2002; Burnham, Gilland, et al., 2004; George and Bennett, 2005; Stewart, Shamdasani, et al., 2007

\(^{156}\) Burnham, Gilland, et al., 2004: 55
areas, rural versus metropolitan positions, and the sheer enormity of the organisation itself. This led to choosing a methodology that was social science based where multiple methods could be used to ascertain meaningful data.

The qualitative case study approach in this research was useful to understand in more depth, the key factors and contexts that impact on individuals in different locations and program areas. The case study method was preferred over a standard quantitative approach, as the latter would not have generated specific examples of how factors and context impact on the utilisation of research on policy and practice.

Initially, consideration was given to undertake a further stage of data collection involving a mass electronic quantitative survey which was to be distributed to the catchment population. However, this was considered superfluous in light of the data collected in the focus groups, manager surveys and semi-structured interviews, as it would not provide the required depth of responses. Ethnography or observation of how research and resources are stored and accessed was also considered in local Community Service Centres but again was reconsidered due to the crisis driven nature of the work of the agency and the fact that all staff have electronic access to a vast number of research resources. The processes of ethnography in this case study would not provide a true reflection of how, what and why staff accessed and used research or expert knowledge in their practices.

After consideration of the above, the purpose of the research was to undertake an in-depth case study to establish how practitioners, managers and policy-makers in a child welfare context in NSW use research and evidence-based knowledge to inform practice and policy-making (information utilisation) and for what purpose. The research investigated this gap in the knowledge of research utilisation in the government/public service sector context. The case study also examined what helps and hinders the use of research within the case study agency. The research for this case study focussed on managers, practitioners and policy-makers use of readily available quality research and evidence-based information as opposed to the implementation of reports from high level research or processes such as inquiries or special commissions of inquiry. This decision was made given the currency of a Special Commission of Inquiry and the associated plans by the Agency for reform and change.
3.4 Data collection method/research methods – a mixed method approach

Primary research (qualitative) was undertaken to address the gap in research presented in the literature in the child welfare field. A mixed method approach\textsuperscript{157} of document analysis, focus groups, consultation, a voluntary administered survey, and semi-structured individual interviews were utilised in a staged data collection process. The process of document analysis, focus groups and consultation was held in 2007 – 2008. These methods were used to consider the broader institutional or organisational context of the case study agency to examine the research culture and whether the existing Research to Practice Program was making a difference to research awareness and utilisation within the organisation. The mixed method and qualitative approach undertaken in my research provided the opportunity to experience the views and perceptions of individuals within the case study organisation on different levels. This included focus group participants interacting dynamically as they discuss their research utilisation practices, managers expressing their views by documenting them, and the exploration of individual views on a one to one basis via the semi-structured interview process. By approaching the research (and the organisation) in different ways and with different research instruments, it advanced the understanding of research utilisation within the case study organisation.

Document analysis

It was imperative that research in the form of document analysis occurred around the institutional context of the organisation to establish whether there was a culture of research use and to determine the extent this was embedded in policy and corporate documentation. During 2007 – 2008 I accessed a variety of documents that related to the case study organisation. In total there were 20 reports\textsuperscript{158} or papers accessed (see table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Sources for document analysis

\textsuperscript{157} Crotty, 1998; Marsh and Stoker, 2002; Burnham, Gilland, et al., 2004; George and Bennett, 2005
\textsuperscript{158} NSW Department of Community Services, 2004; NSW Department of Community Services, 2005; NSW Department of Community Services, 2005a; NSW Department of Community Services, 2005b; NSW Department of Community Services, 2005c; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006a; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006b; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006c; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006d; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006e; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006f; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006g; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006h; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006i; NSW Department of Community Services, 2007; NSW Department of Community Services, 2007a; NSW Department of Community Services, 2007b; NSW Department of Community Services, 2008; NSW Department of Community Services, 2008a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FRAMEWORK PAPERS</th>
<th>MINUTES/REPORTS</th>
<th>CORPORATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research agenda 2006-2009</td>
<td>Minutes of DoCS research network meeting 30 September 2005</td>
<td>Annual report 2006/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing, appraising and applying research to inform practice (in preparation 2006)</td>
<td>Minutes of DoCS research network meeting 20 April 2006</td>
<td>Annual Report 2007/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Guide: Accessing and using research and evidence-based information (2008a)</td>
<td>Minutes of DoCS research network meeting 14 December 2006</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DoCS research report 2005/06.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DoCS quarterly research report: December 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research to practice seminars: Evaluation report 2007</td>
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What was established from the corporate documents\(^\text{159}\) was a real investment by the organisation into a demonstrated practice and policy shift which is evidence-based both through the establishment of an Economics Unit but also a Research to Practice Program. The shift towards establishing the foundations of research utilisation and evidence-based practice is clearly articulated in the corporate plans and directions with the outcomes of the Research to Practice Program and other research activity reported on frequently via annual reports or research reports. Significant to note is the Research Agenda\(^\text{160}\) which clearly stipulates the need to undertake contextually relevant research that reflects the core business of the Agency, not only as evaluative research but also longitudinal research to inform the evidence-base of how the Agency delivers its core business. This intent is clearly articulated through planning, policy, procedure and practice development processes.

There is also a clear intent throughout the documentation of review and refinement, of establishing an effective research culture and reporting to a variety of sources including a Research Advisory Council. The Research Advisory Council membership consists of

\(^{159}\) NSW Department of Community Services, 2005; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006a; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006b

\(^{160}\) NSW Department of Community Services, 2006a
leading academics in the child welfare field and key research centres such as the Social Policy Research Centre (University of NSW).

Regarding the Research to Practice Program; from the documentation sourced, the challenge is to continuously improve the Research to Practice Program, building on the existing strengths to ensure it is innovative and providing value to those who access it. Currently there is a lack of sophistication surrounding the data that would gauge return on investment and therefore ultimately influence practice/client outcomes. It is a not a worthwhile exercise at this time to undertake a unit costing exercise for the development of products as this is purely output driven and the internal documents clearly articulate success at exceeding outputs within the allocated resources. However, a robust evaluation and benchmarking exercise is required to ensure the Research to Practice Program is providing a positive return on investment, a positive impact across all areas of the Agency, a high quality contribution to evidence based decision-making/practice and therefore better client outcomes, and an environment which continues to be cutting edge in the field of child welfare. The Research to Practice Program is accountable and transparent within a results and service plan and accountability context. However, to assist the continuing evaluation of the Program and to ensure the sustainability of the Program an effective quantitative and qualitative process must be developed of a longitudinal nature (particularly relating to the impact on practice behaviours and change).

Despite the extensive review and discussion on the Research to Practice Program, this is but one vehicle that promotes research utilisation within the Agency. It would be remiss to consider a case study on research utilisation within the Agency and not acknowledge the existence of the program as a critical strategy to promote a research culture and research utilisation. It is however, also vital to acknowledge the existence of other mechanisms such as the commitment in the corporate or institutional culture to an evidence-based way of undertaking and delivering service. This is as evidenced through the document analysis, and demonstrated via other resource areas such as a fully functional internal library service which is accessible state-wide to all staff. The Library is operated as an academic library, however, on a smaller scale.

The document analysis process provided the institutional context to the research and raised questions for further consideration and investigation such as whether there had a been a
shift at a practice level both in an operational and policy sense regarding research utilisation within the organisation, and whether there had been an increase in the understanding of the nature of how staff access and use research and expert knowledge via the Research to Practice Program and other mechanisms.

Given the questions, further research by way of focus groups was undertaken to explore the questions.

**Focus Groups**

A strategy to gain information from the field and to understand the potential impact on the shift to a research culture and research agenda, and the Research to Practice Program was to undertake focus groups. Focus group methodology was chosen and undertaken as it was a dynamic process with groups of like individuals discussing and debating issues surrounding research utilisation. The focus groups included staff from the Research Network, and the following program areas of Child & Family practitioners, Partnership and Planning, Professional Development and Quality Assurance (PDQA)/Operations, and Learning and Development. The focus groups were held in Head Office in March and April 2007. The initial focus group was held with the Research Network and further staff were sourced by nomination by the Research Network members. The focus groups represented the full range of positions, were representative of both regional and metropolitan, both new and longer-term staff, and some responses were gained from Aboriginal and multicultural staff members.

There were a total of 67 participants across the nine focus groups (which were held by program type grouping as outlined above). Multiple focus groups were held for the Research Network (n=19) and the Practitioners Group (n=21) due to the large number of participants (see table 3.2 below). Data from the focus groups was captured by manual recording sheets and then manually coded into themes and concepts.

| Table 3.2 Focus groups overview |

161 Child and Family practitioners are those staff at all levels that work broadly in the program area – child protection, out of home care, early intervention and prevention. Partnership and Planning are those staff who manage funding, service agreements and the interface with the broad complementary service system. PDQA/Operations staff are those who undertake quality improvement and compliance work. Learning and Development staff undertake the development and delivery of curriculum for child and family staff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS GROUP</th>
<th>PROGRAM AREA</th>
<th>n=</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Research Network</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>Practitioners</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Partnership &amp; Planning</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>PDQA/Operations (Head Office)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Learning &amp; Development</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus groups were asked questions pertaining to whether access to research is important and why, how and when research was accessed, what types of research were accessed, and whether research is used to inform practice and policy development. Focus group participants were also asked about factors that help or hinder access to and use of research, and finally whether the Research to Practice Program was making an impact on practice and policy. These questions were asked to get a basic understanding of whether staff in the organisation actually were aware of the shift to a research and evidence-based culture and whether the strategies being employed by the agency were having any impact.

The responses to these questions laid the foundations for more in-depth research in the following data collection phases to determine how staff understand key concepts of evidence-base practice and expert knowledge, how to identify the skills and attributes of ‘competent research users’, how the different contexts in the Agency (individual, work environment and organisational culture) impact on research utilisation, how staff use research and for what purpose, and to identify barriers and enablers to research utilisation, (and to also consider these across the different contexts).

**Consultation - NSW Parenting & Research Centre and the Agency Research Advisory Committee**

The next research stage was to present to both the NSW Parenting & Research Centre and the Research Advisory Council the findings and preliminary conclusions or recommendations from the focus groups. This was to gain feedback to the validity of the findings from their observations and reporting requirements. The results of the focus groups and document analysis provided the impetus and research questions for the

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162 See Appendix 1
collection of data for a more in-depth focus on the employees within the organisation resulting in an additional two stages of research – the manager survey and semi-structured interviews. Specifically, the additional data collections were to establish a core understanding of how staff in the case study organisation utilised research and expert knowledge to inform their work practices.

**Manager Surveys**

The manager survey was building on the previous focus group work of what type of research is used (hierarchy of evidence) and how staff access research. However, it was also significantly examining the three ‘spheres of influence’ and how this impacts on staff and their utilisation of research and expert knowledge in practice and policy making. Preliminary data for why staff use research was obtained to start building information and data towards the uses of research and whether it is for instrumental, conceptual or symbolic purposes. The responses to these surveys by managers are based on their ‘observations’ of staff and some of their own personal experiences regarding access and frequency of use of research in the work place and therefore not directly comparable to the responses given by the semi-structured interview participants which were ‘actual reports of frequency’ of use (see Chapter 4).

Senior Managers and Directors in identified localities (a mix of Head Office based, metropolitan and rural based) were asked to identify those staff (including middle and senior managers) they deemed to be exceptional evidence-based practitioners and the attributes or skill set of those staff. The data collected was analysed in its own right to determine a manager’s view (factors or variables) of what makes an exceptional evidence-based practitioner or policy-maker. The distribution list\(^{163}\) for the manager survey was established by identifying the total number of Directors Child & Family and Directors Practice Standards for the nominated operational regions of Metro West, Metro Central, Northern and Western; and the key operational program Director positions in the Agency’s Head Office.

Four operational regions (two rural and two metropolitan) and Head Office were chosen in order to gain an appropriate sample group. The rural regions of Northern and Western were

\(^{163}\) See distribution list at Appendix 2
chosen as they are the two largest geographic regions and cover the more remote and isolated locations in the state.

The Research Coordinator of the Parenting and Research Centre (the Agency) coordinated the distribution and return of the self-administered survey to the entire population (20) of relevant managers for this research in the nominated locations. This facilitated the voluntary undertaking of the survey. The surveys\textsuperscript{164} were distributed 23 June 2009 directly from the Agency to the identified distribution list. A follow-up request for the completion and return of the surveys occurred 16 September 2009, with the final survey being returned 17 September 2009. Surveys were returned either by hard copy and/or in electronic formats. Initially nine out of 20 survey responses from the identified locations (45\% response rate) was achieved. A further response was received from a field location (not identified) from the target group of Professional Development and Quality Assurance Director positions. This response was also included giving 10 responses in total. It is reasonable to ascertain that the survey was returned from the targeted population and therefore a final response rate of 50\% was attained.

The general purpose of the manager survey was to establish from a supervisor’s perspective what skills and attributes were required in their staff in order for them to be considered ‘competent research users’ - that is, were they able to access, search, identify, analyse and critically evaluate research and expert knowledge and information, and then be able to consider that material and apply to practice and/or professional judgement. It is critical to understand this concept of a ‘competent research user’ in order to better understand factors and variables that may help and hinder research utilisation. Exploration of the various ‘spheres of influence’ and what helps and hinders research utilisation in each of those spheres was to ascertain the commonalities of factors across the spheres. It also explored whether certain factors were unique to a particular sphere or environment and differential responses between rural, metropolitan and Head Office participants which would assist with theory development.

Questions surrounding the types of research and expert information and knowledge that are sourced, how staff access this, and the frequency of access were asked to gain an understanding of whether the material sourced is evidence-based within itself - that is, can

\textsuperscript{164} See survey attached at Appendix 3
be tested and qualified such as refereed journal articles, meta analysis and systemic reviews. It was also to consider the notion that research utilisation is more than just the ability to access information due to having information technology available, and more than just the dissemination of information165. Source of the information has considerable impact on the legitimacy of the outcome of the use of the material. The question concerning the main reasons for using research, for example to assist in casework issues or to assist in policy development, was to establish when and how research is used and whether research is used instrumentally, conceptually or symbolically.

Throughout the thesis, this cohort who responded to the manager survey will be referred to as the ‘managers’.

Semi-Structured Interviews
Data collection in this stage involved the in-depth interviews of 15 individual staff identified in the manager survey across the three categories of staff (practitioners, managers and policy-makers), and was cross-functional (structure) and cross-locational (Head Office, rural and metropolitan). Throughout the thesis, this cohort of semi-structured interview participants will be known as the ‘everyday research users’.

It was important to take this direction in interviewing identified research users in order to actively engage with the research question of how research utilisation informs and influences practice and policy making within the Agency. The necessity of an existing understanding of general research utilisation concepts was required to give validity to responses, and the opportunity to discuss the interview questions in depth with practitioners and policy makers. The interviews examined the deeper issues of barriers and enablers (or helps and hindrances) to research utilisation, and harnessed factors that may provide differences in research utilisation between rural and metropolitan staff. The semi-structured interviews were designed to examine all of the proposed research questions in detail. The interview questions also explicitly explored the individual sphere of influence where concepts of information literacy and confidence impacted or not on the individual skill base, and therefore research utilisation.

The sampling was purposive to gain a broad representation of case study organisation. In essence, the sample was selected under a ‘snowball sampling’ process\textsuperscript{166} where the participants from the manager survey identified potential candidates for interview. The names of the individuals nominated were collated into the groups of Head Office, metropolitan, and rural/remote. From those lists every third name was selected for an interview until five individuals were selected from each group. If consent was not given to participate, further selection according to the above method occurred until there were five consenting individuals in each group. There is significant data collected in this stage with 15 consents to participate given after a total of 18 approaches to participate in the research were made (83\% response rate). All participants approached in the Head Office cohort consented to participate (five out of five or 100\%), five out of the seven approached in the nominated rural and remote locations achieved a participation rate of 71\% and for the metropolitan areas where five out of six approached translated into participation (83\%).

The interviews were semi-structured with a set of predefined questions\textsuperscript{167} as a reference guide to ensure all interviews covered the same material, but were also spontaneous or flexible within the guiding questions to be able to probe into the information provided. The interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed and re-identified. All of the interviews occurred between 1 December 2009 and 11 February 2010. Due to the vast distances some interviews occurred via the telephone whilst others were held on a face to face basis. The interview schedule is in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 Interview schedule – everyday research users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>INTERVIEWED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>HO1</td>
<td>1/12/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HO2</td>
<td>16/12/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HO3</td>
<td>9/12/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HO4</td>
<td>7/12/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HO5</td>
<td>13/1/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural and Remote</td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>31/12/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>5/2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R3</td>
<td>13/1/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R4</td>
<td>19/1/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R5</td>
<td>22/1/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>14/1/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>21/1/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M3</td>
<td>28/1/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{166} Devine, 2002; Burnham, Gilland, et al., 2004

\textsuperscript{167} See semi-structured interview questions at Appendix 4
The breakdown of the participants for the everyday research users in Figure 3.3 shows that there were in total four managers, eight practitioners and three project or policy staff who participated in the semi-structured interviews stage. This is again representative of the overall Agency structure.

The purpose of the questions for the semi-structured interviews was to explore key concepts and definitions with the participants across the ‘spheres of influence’, that is the individual, practice or work environment and in the organisational context. The everyday research users were asked to provide their own definitions to key concepts such as what is expert knowledge in relation to evidence-based practice, what is evidence-based practice, and whether expert knowledge was the same as research. They were also asked similar questions that were asked in the manager survey regarding what type of research or expert knowledge is accessed, how it is accessed and the frequency of access.

The question surrounding the individual skill base set the parameters for discussion and responses to the use of research in a conceptual, symbolic or instrumental way and whether the uses of research are dynamic or mutually exclusive. Questions were also posed to gain insight into the everyday research user’s knowledge of, and skill set in, knowledge management and information literacy, and provided the basis for consideration of how these concepts impacted on research utilisation. Questions regarding the practice and organisational environment considered the factors that help and hinder the use of research, evidence-based information or expert knowledge. These questions also assisted the facilitation and identification of the barriers and enablers.
The semi-structured interviews posed questions that provided insight into the potential attitudinal and practice changes of the everyday research users given the availability of research and other evidence-based materials within the Agency. Everyday research users were also asked to give their own practice examples to highlight where there had been change in the Agency’s practice, their immediate work environment and own practices towards an evidence-informed approach. Finally questions surrounding the interaction of the various ‘spheres of influence’ were put to the everyday research users to again gauge whether the spheres worked in isolation of each other, and whether one sphere had more impact or was more important when looking at enabling research utilisation.

**Key considerations**

There were a range of further critical factors that needed consideration whilst undertaking this research. These factors may have either a positive or negative impact but need to be stated in the context of delimitations and limitations to the research process.

Firstly, there was a range of critical considerations highlighted in developing the research design and methodology such as the willingness of individuals to engage and participate in the survey and interviews for data collection. Due to the nature of the surveys being voluntary and self-administered, this was an issue given that the survey was targeting senior managers within the case study organisation that was going through a time of major change and restructure. There was a likelihood of a very small return rate. The nominated sample size of the data collection particularly for the manager survey and semi-structured interviews did not provide everyone in the agency with the opportunity to participate in the data collection processes; however, purposive (pointed or targeted) sampling was identified to gain representation of the broader organisation. This resulted in the research excluding staff from the call-centre due to the discrete nature of the work (preliminary assessments of risk of significant harm). This work is the front end work of the organisation where the call-centre receives the reports regarding harm to children and applies a standard decision making tool for assessment purposes. These staff however, were not excluded from the focus group stage and several participated in that stage.

The research also excluded units that provided administrative assistance to core business such as finance, corporate human resources and related corporate services functions. This
is not a reflection on the importance of the work that these staff provide, but a pragmatic decision.

The inability to access corporate systems due to unverified and incomplete data, particularly in the case of training and other corporate HR systems also impacted on the decision not to proceed with a mass questionnaire to the broader organisation. Without having access to valid and accurate systems it would be extremely difficult to ensure validity of the larger cohort in terms of position, program area of work, and other relevant factors such as length of service etc (which was also demographic information that was collected in both the manager survey and the semi-structured interview data collection processes). It therefore would not assist in analysis purposes nor the building of a broader picture of the case study organisation.

The naturally higher population of females within the Agency and the naturally higher proportion of practitioners to managers and policy-makers in the organisational structure were also considered as critical factors in gaining an appropriate sample group and the possible overrepresentation in the sample/data when designing the research methodology. However, this sample group was representative of the overall make up of the agency.

3.5  Data Analysis:

The data collected from these processes was analysed (using the qualitative NVivo software\(^{168}\)) thematically to identify a range of factors that are barriers and enablers to research utilisation - that is establishing key concepts from the responses given and then capturing the responses provided in the survey and the semi-structured interviews into the established concepts or themes. It was imperative that all of the stages of data collection were captured separately in order to analyse the data by cohort and by stage. This allowed for a more inclusive analysis across the data collection methods. Further analysis occurred regarding the three ‘spheres of influence’ (organisational, environmental and individual contexts) as well as the uses of research (instrumental, conceptual or symbolic) based on the responses from the study participants.

\(^{168}\) NVivo is a qualitative software program that is licensed by QSR International. The program assists with the management and coding of information. For more information refer to Bazeley, 2007.
The manager survey and the semi-structured interviews collected demographic data which identified the individuals’ age, gender, location, tertiary qualification, Indigenous status, NESB status, length of time in the agency, type of work undertaken by the individual for the Agency, and time elapsed since last qualification. This demographic data was common across both the manager survey and semi-structured interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>KEY CONCEPTS/QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Document Analysis | The document analysis provides the institutional or organisational context surrounding the establishment of, and commitment to a culture of research within the case study organisation. The document analysis also provides evidence of the mechanisms or strategies to implement an evidence-based way of working across policy development and the practice environment. | What is the institutional context?  
What are the mechanisms/strategies to promote evidence-based practice and research utilisation?  
Are these mechanisms/strategies meeting targets/having an impact? |
| Focus Groups    | The focus groups provide basic data regarding knowledge of the research culture within the case study organisation and whether research use was important. The focus groups provide initial data on the barriers and enablers of research utilisation.                                                                                      | Do staff use research in their practice?  
Is it important?  
What are barriers and enablers to research use?  
Are the strategies/mechanisms for promoting an evidence-based making an impact? |
| Consultation    | Provides feedback to key areas within the case study organisation (NSW Parenting & Research Centre, and the Agency’s Research Advisory Council), for validation of key findings.                                                                                                          | Key barriers and enablers.  
Impact of the strategies/mechanisms for promoting an evidence-based within the case study organisation. |
Manager
Surveys

This data identifies the staff for the purpose of the semi-structured interviews, and should be analysed in its own right to determine manager’s views (factors or variables) of what makes an exceptional evidence-based practitioner or policy-maker, how, what, when, frequency of access, and the key purpose or focus when using research. It will also discover factors that help or hinder research utilisation on an individual, work environment and organisational level.

Attributes of competent research users.

Uses of research – how, what, why and when.

‘Spheres of influence’ – barriers and enablers.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This data establishes core definitions and concepts and exploration of questions such as if you need expert information where would you get it, how do you use this expert information (instrumentally, conceptually, symbolically), what helps and hinders use of research, how do the ‘spheres of influence’ impact? Exploration of possible attitudinal and practice change to the availability of research.

This data provides core data for comparison across a range of areas and staff groups e.g. practitioners, policy-makers and managers. This stage also included concept exploration and other common areas to both the manager survey and the semi-structured interviews such as source of research, type of research used and frequency of access.

Key concepts/definitions of expert knowledge and evidence-based practice.

Impact of information literacy and knowledge management skills (individual skills).

Uses of research – how, what, why and when

• Instrumental
• Conceptual
• Symbolic.

‘Spheres of influence’ – barriers and enablers.

Mutuality or isolation of the ‘spheres of influence’, and mutually or isolation of the uses of research.

Practice examples and participants observation of change in individual practice, work environment and the broader organisation.

3.6 Position of Researcher to case study organisation

As an employee of the case study organisation, I have a unique insight or view point on the operations, policy and culture of the Agency. This unique insight provided the catalyst as to why undertaking the research was useful and potentially how it could inform continuous improvement processes and new strategies in addressing the research utilisation nexus in the child welfare field. Having held positions within the case study organisation across the spectrum of program areas (operational, project/policy and research programs) provided a genuine understanding of the operational environment of the Agency and therefore, I believe, an additional validity to the interpretation of data collected. This is balanced with
work in other government and non-government agencies in NSW and a government agency in the Australian Capital Territory.

As an employee of the case study organisation, the critical considerations of independence and subjectivity to the research and data collection processes were paramount. There is no direct relationship, such as supervisor/employee to the participant population, nor is the research an evaluation of any existing program area.

To overcome any possible perception of lack of independence, a simultaneous ethics approval process was entered into with Community Services to demonstrate independence. It was a requirement that both the University of Sydney and Community Services approval processes were met prior to undertaking any data collection processes. A Research Agreement was issued by Community Services and jointly signed by the University of Sydney, Community Services and myself as the researcher.

To further necessitate that independence, the research methodology chosen was to promote independent thought and response to the questions posed. For example, the participants in the manager survey were undertaking a voluntary self administered survey that covered the total population of Directors for the nominated locations and was coordinated by the Research Unit Coordinator. The Directors also nominated the staff (in their survey responses) for the semi-structured interviews. There was no interaction between the participants or participants and myself as the researcher until the interview selection process commenced and individuals nominated were approached to gain consent.

A challenge was that I was previously the Manager Practice Research within the Research Unit of the Agency based in Head Office and managed the state-wide Research to Practice Program, and I am currently in an operations based position in Western Region. This created some difficulties in the semi-structured interviews as participants in providing their answers would at times not elaborate or go into detail in their responses due to their perception of my previous work and knowledge of concepts within the research utilisation field etc. This was overcome by stating the independent nature of the research being undertaken, the value placed on the participants responses, and the probing of responses.
Throughout the research I was very cognisant of the perception of bias from participants due to my previous and current positions or employment with Community Services. I was critically reflective of any such perception and I undertook with every effort to consider the data collected and the processes of collection in a critical way and on its own merits. This was the reasoning for a mixed methodology approach that gathered information in a number of ways and in a number of formats from different individuals and processes. This stance was also the case when undertaking data analysis and forming conclusions. The process of providing feedback of the research undertaken via a consultation process to various forums and groups was a method of testing my data capture, analysis and findings. This process to engage with people independently of the research was put into place as a safeguard to ensure the integrity of the research and that there was no possibility of biasing or influencing the responses received. Considering the similarity of the results across the different cohorts under different methodologies provided another way to test bias (mine and the participants) and the validity of the data.

### 3.7 Demographic Data

The following data in Table 3.5 provides an attribute summary of those participants in the manager survey and semi-structured interviews. The table displays the totality of the participant’s attributes, as the same data collection process for the demographic information was undertaken in both of those stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Aboriginality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Currently studying</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Length of time working for CS</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>NESB</th>
<th>Type of work</th>
<th>Years since qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager HO1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Project work</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager M1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager M2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager R1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>51-60 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager R2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>51-60 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>6-5 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager R3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>51-60 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

169 All participants are coded by cohort and location eg Manager or Everyday Research User then location and number. Locations are coded as HO = Head Office, M = Metro, R = Rural. Some positions are centralised Head Office positions but may be located in other areas and vice versa.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Program Level</th>
<th>Years of Education</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Fieldwork</th>
<th>Years of Fieldwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager R4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>16+ years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Project work</td>
<td>16+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager R5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager R6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager R7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User HO1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>51-60 years</td>
<td>Yes Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Project work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User HO2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>21-30 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Project work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User HO3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Project work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User HO4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User HO5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User M1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User M2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User M3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>21-30 years</td>
<td>No Male</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User M4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>Yes Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User M5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User R1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>Yes Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User R2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>Yes Female</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User R3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>No Female</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16+ years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User R4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>Yes Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Research User R5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>21-30 years</td>
<td>No Male</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to discuss the attributes of the participants at this point as it provides the foundation and context for the discussions and findings in the following chapters. Basic demographic information such as program stream, position and location was collected on a voluntary basis for the focus groups. All participants of the focus groups nominated the relevant program stream they were in, however, the data collection of location and position at times was not complete, and therefore an in-depth discussion of the attributes and demographics of those participants is not discussed. However, there was no limitation on the location of the participants, and the focus groups did contain participants from other
regions to those nominated for data collection in the manager survey and semi-structured interviews stages.

There were in total 25 participants of which 12 were rural based and 13 were metropolitan based (six participants were in metropolitan Community Service Centres and seven participants from Head Office based positions). Of the 25 participants, 10 participated in the manager survey and 15 participated in semi-structured interview data collection processes. In totality, 17 participants identified as undertaking fieldwork which was at various levels for example management, caseworker, casework specialist, as opposed to project/policy work or other work relating to accountability or performance improvement processes. Fieldwork incorporates all the program streams that relate directly to the Child and Family Program (C&F) and client contact such as child protection, out of home care, early intervention and prevention. Fieldwork also incorporated the casework specialist roles under the Professional Development and Quality Assurance Program (PDQA). The majority of rural participants, 12 out of 13 indicated they undertook fieldwork with one identifying project work. There was an identified gender bias towards female participants (22 female to 3 male participants), however this is reflective of the current workforce of the case study agency\textsuperscript{170}.

For the manager survey data collection, there were seven rural participants with four from the Professional Development and Quality Assurance Program, two from the Child and Family Program and one from a project based program. For the semi-structured interview data collection, there were five individuals from each Head Office, metropolitan and rural locations. As demonstrated in Figure 3.4, the majority of participants are from the PDQA program and the C&F program areas which reflect the current workforce of the Agency - that is there are more operational based positions as opposed to project or policy based positions as previously discussed.

\textbf{Figure 3.4 Program streams semi-structured interview data collection}

\textsuperscript{170} See previous discussion on the profile of the case study organisation.
Two participants identified as being Aboriginal. These two participants were based in rural locations. Two participants identified from being non-English speaking background one each from rural and metropolitan locations. The rural participant in both the Aboriginal and non-English speaking background was the same individual.

The distribution of age of participants indicated the majority fell into the 41-50 year age range with a total of 13 participants. Six of these participated in the manager survey and seven participated in the semi-structured interviews. This data would generally suggest a mature workforce; however, the demographic data included 10 manager survey responses which by default would suggest some time in the workforce prior to going into a more senior position. Therefore the analysis of this particular information may not be reflective of the entire agency, but important in considering overall perspectives and responses to subsequent questions and information gathered.

Figure 3.5 Frequency of age distribution

Figure 3.5 shows the frequency of age distribution for the entire research population and also provides a breakdown of age distribution frequencies for both the manager survey and semi-structured interviews.
All participants held formal tertiary qualifications with 10 having undergraduate degrees, 14 holding postgraduate qualifications and one participant holding a diploma level qualification in child care. Significant is the level of postgraduate qualifications in the 41-50 year range, and in the 51-60 year range as demonstrated in Figure 3.6 below. This may however, equate to the stage of the individual in their professional career and may relate to both similar trends in other workforces, and to the previous discussion above regarding maturity of workforce.

Figure 3.6 Frequency of age by level of qualification

Time since last qualification for rural location is distributed across all the value ranges; however, the highest proportion of the participants (12 of the 25) stated that the time elapsed since gaining their qualifications was between 0-5 years. This is important when considering the use and uptake of research, expert knowledge and evidence-based materials and whether currency of study positively impacts on the skills required to be an effective and competent research user.

Figure 3.7 Frequency of time elapse since last qualification by location

Further to the existing qualification base, 6 out of the 25 participants are currently pursuing further study with the majority of those based in rural locations (see Figure 3.8 below). For rural participants this is significant information whereby formal education processes are used as a key strategy to maintain professional and contemporary knowledge of the
industry due to a lack of opportunity to attend metropolitan based conferences, professional development activities and other fora.

Figure 3.8 Frequency of location by currency of undertaking further study

In considering length of time working within the case study organisation, the data indicated that the participants from the rural locations were working for the case study organisation for the longest periods of time. This could equate to a range of reasons, most prominent being the lack of opportunity to seek or source other employment.

Significantly, rural staff have representation in all of the length of time periods; there is a lack of representation from metropolitan staff in the 11-15 year period, and lack of representation of Head Office in the 16+ years representation.

Figure 3.9 Frequency of length of time working for Agency by location

The data from the demographic information highlights the level of post graduate qualifications of participants particularly in fieldwork, and more so in the project work areas. ‘Other’ work refers to governance and accountability type where the work is neither project nor field based; or in the professional development area which is education/training based that reflects fieldwork practice.
Of note in Figure 3.10 below is that the majority of staff who work in project based work (five out of six) held postgraduate qualifications, suggesting a higher educational skill base is attracted to that type of work.

![Figure 3.10 Frequency of type of work to level of qualification](chart.png)

### 3.8 Conclusion

The foundation of the qualitative research undertaken by a mixed method approach in a single case study was to gain the perceptions of staff. It was also designed for them to give voice to the translation of an evidence-based practice paradigm, traditionally found in a medical model rather than that of the social science field.

In the following chapters I will present my analysis of data from the primary research that has been undertaken.
4 ASSESSING THE INDIVIDUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON RESEARCH UTILISATION IN A CHILD WELFARE CONTEXT IN NSW

4.1 Introduction

A key component of the research was to explore how the ‘spheres of influence’ impacted or not on the uptake of research utilisation. This chapter examines the micro or individual sphere of influence. How individual experiences, contexts and resources such as information literacy skills, knowledge management, and attitude towards use of research in practice impacts on the use of research and other evidence-based information and knowledge is examined. The chapter focuses on information processing theory and the concepts that sit within that theory such as how research utilisation interacts with professional experience, practitioner competence and expertise, including professional judgement, critical thinking and inquiry in a child protection setting. Of particular importance to the chapter is the notion of a new way of working, that is, in an evidence-based way, and whether this concept itself has had an impact on the individual worker in the case study agency.

The chapter discusses the skills and attributes of a competent research user, and factors that hinder or enable the individual with research utilisation within the case study organisation. It specifically explores the views of research participants on key concepts of expert knowledge, research, evidence-based practice, information literacy and knowledge management. The chapter also considers how the key concepts or skills of information literacy and knowledge management impact on an individual’s confidence in identifying, accessing, appraising and using research and expert knowledge in their practice and thus then the impact on research utilisation. The chapter also looks at how individuals access research, the frequency of access, the types of research accessed, and considers whether there is, or has been an observable change in the individual’s practice with the availability of research and expert knowledge and therefore a shift towards evidence-based practice.
It is argued in this chapter that capability of the individual is paramount to the ability to access and utilise expert knowledge and research, and therefore is necessary for effective knowledge management, knowledge creation and translation of information into practice and policy-making. The data considered within this chapter and following chapters includes data sets and responses from the focus groups, the managers and the everyday research users. However, the focus for this chapter is the individual context.

4.2 Skills and attributes of a competent research user – observations from Managers

In establishing how and why staff were accessing and using research and expert knowledge in their practices, it was imperative to ascertain what the actual skills and attributes were that contributed to an individual being a competent research user. These views were provided according to the observations of the managers. The managers provided 13 categories of responses to the question please list the traits and skills that you believe make these staff research use competent as outlined below in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Skills and attributes of a competent research user – managers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Frequency Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Agency Library Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to reference literature/written comprehsion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of appropriate quality material/information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/curiosity/open minded to undertake research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal skills/articulation of research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to apply research/incorporate into work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous research use/exposure to research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT savvy/able to search databases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to analyse/critical evaluate material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents to the focus groups, manager survey and the semi-structured interviews usually provided more than one response to each question and therefore the results are considered by frequency of mention or commonality of theme (count) and presented according to the count. The aggregate number of responses is typically higher than the number of respondents.
Even though there was a diversity of responses that broadly fell into 13 categories, the responses relate to the three key areas of:

1. individual applied skill base
   - high level of literacy
   - being able to search
   - able to analyse and appraise material
   - able to apply and translate research and information
   - able to articulate research
   - identification of quality materials
   - written comprehension of materials

2. background
   - previous research experience
   - tertiary qualifications

3. professional approach
   - awareness of Agency Library and other sources of access
   - motivation/curiosity
   - pragmatic
   - professionalism.

Significantly, the area that was most reported by the managers was that of having the appropriate individual applied skill base in order to be a competent research user. The skill or attribute identified most frequently was that of staff being able to analyse and critically evaluate research and evidence-based information, that is, to be able to effectively judge research and/or information to determine whether it has appropriate validity and applicability to practice\(^\text{172}\). All five participants from the Professional Development and Quality Assurance program area nominated this as a key skill. This finding is not considered unusual for this occupational group as they are a key specialist program area that coach and support staff to improve practice and perceive this skill as fundamental to an evidence-informed way of practice and effective decision-making.

\(^{172}\) NSW Department of Community Services, 2008a
This notion of effective critical appraisal (a significant aspect of the individual applied skill base) was reported much more frequently than basic concepts of high level of literacy (one count reported from the Project area) and tertiary qualifications (one count reported by the Child & Family Program area) which may assist in providing underpinning frameworks and knowledge to facilitate research use. Both of these participants were rurally based which may indicate the importance of having access to external and tertiary education sources for accessing research as an alternative avenue to the research that is generated by the Agency, and other formal mechanisms such as the Agency’s seminar series that is not readily or frequently available to rural areas.

Some key responses identified from the managers below indicate that for staff to be competent research users, it is not just a simple process of identifying an issue, gathering and evaluating a singular piece of material or information, but rather being able to consider a range of dimensions and not just take the research or expert knowledge outcomes at face value. The managers clearly articulate the need for consideration of the materials to be understood and translated in the context of the practice environment and with professional judgement (an individual applied skill).

“Able to zoom both in and out of detail – look broadly and then look back in”.
Manager R6.

“Ability to critically analyse a range of research papers on the same topic”.
Manager M1.

“Ability to critically evaluate and analyse the material gathered”.
Manager HO1.

Also of significance was the theme surrounding the use of technology (competency) and being able to appropriately search library databases. This was reported more frequently than the ability to apply and use research and the ability to identify appropriate quality material, for example refereed journal articles. Again this theme fell into the individual applied skill base.
What can be determined from these responses is that an individual applied skill base of critical analysis and information technology competency or readiness, is required to effectively use research, expert knowledge and evidence-based material in the practice environment of staff. What is interesting in the results is the recognition of analytical skills, but very little recognition of how the research is actually put into practice and the necessary skills to do so. Key authors\textsuperscript{173} such as Rubin, Roberts and Yeager, Evans and Hardy in the social work field, and Nutley, Walter and Davies in the broader social care setting, clearly advocate for the need to be able to critically appraise the research, evidence and information sourced, and to be able to effectively integrate this learned knowledge into practice. Authors\textsuperscript{174} from the nursing and medical fields also relate the same concepts and strategies to enhance the ability of staff to appropriately access, identify and critically appraise research.

The Agency in 2008\textsuperscript{175} produced a guidance tool (\textit{Practice Guide: Accessing and using research and evidence-based information}) to assist staff in accessing, critically evaluating and applying research to practice. This guidance tool was rolled-out with a training package and made available state-wide to increase the competence of staff in their research use.

The category that was considered important by the managers but not reported as frequently was that of a professional approach to research use which includes motivation and/or belief and attitude towards such. Managers in their responses emphasised the difference between the applied skill base, background and professional approach of individuals. Managers predominately formed a view based on their observations that although all three key areas were important, the background and professional approach of an individual worker held less influence in a research utilisation situation than the individual applied skill base, or that the link between having an applied skill based, previous research experience (background) and a professional approach was not made by managers.

\textsuperscript{173} Davies, Nutley, et al., 2000; Newman, 2002; Booth, Booth, et al., 2003; Nutley, Walter, et al., 2003; Vermeersch and Beavers, 2004; Roberts and Yeager, 2006; Nutley, Walter, et al., 2007; Rubin and Parrish, 2007; Rubin, 2008; Evans and Hardy, 2010

\textsuperscript{174} Forbes and Griffiths, 2002; Grandage, Slawson, et al., 2002; McCleary and Brown, 2002; Taylor, Dempster, et al., 2003; French, 2005

\textsuperscript{175} NSW Department of Community Services, 2008a
Beliefs and attitude towards research use was considered critical by Estabrooks et al.\textsuperscript{176} as one of the key individual determinants of research and expert knowledge utilisation. In the data collected in my case study, whilst it was reported as being important to some participants, the lower frequency of reporting suggests that either it is not considered as an important factor for the managers, or that there is a given (or broadly accepted understanding) that staff do in fact have a strong belief and motivation for research use in their practice by this group.

4.3 Understanding concepts of expert knowledge and evidence-based practice

The dominant understanding in the literature of evidence-based practice is that the knowledge sourced to inform practice is no longer that of just published research (hierarchy of evidence). Some authors such as Petr\textsuperscript{177} argue that evidence-based practice is a process whereas ‘knowledge-based practices’ consider the broader issues and perspective of professional judgement and practice as complementing the process of evidence-based practice. Williams and Glasby\textsuperscript{178}, and Arney, Bromfield, Lewig and Holzer\textsuperscript{179} take a similar stance and suggest evidence-based practice comprises of a range of knowledges broader than traditional research and includes those outlined below.

- Research
- Practitioner knowledge
- Organisational knowledge
- User knowledge
- Policy community knowledge
- Expert knowledge of individuals, groups and networks
- Economic knowledge
- Family/parenting knowledge\textsuperscript{179}.

To examine this concept further the everyday research users were asked how they would define expert knowledge in the context of the case study agency. The participants provided

\textsuperscript{176} Estabrooks, Floyd, et al., 2003  
\textsuperscript{177} Petr, 2009  
\textsuperscript{178} Williams and Glasby, 2010  
\textsuperscript{179} Arney, Bromfield, et al., 2009
21 responses that were summarised into four key areas as demonstrated in Figure 4.2 below. The responses were broadly similar to those outlined above by Arney et al. The participants clearly articulated the difference between the sourcing of knowledge and having practitioner knowledge and/or utilising professional judgement.

Figure 4.2 Views on expert knowledge - everyday research users

There were no distinct trends or pattern to the responses in Figure 4.2. There were participants from all location groups (rural, metropolitan and Head Office) represented in each of the three responses that were reported most frequently. What was evident from those three areas was the distinction between experience and evidence supported by research and others, and knowledge and professional judgement from experience and research. The latter implying the importance of how expert knowledge informs professional judgement, but it is not a substitute for it. One participant believed that expert knowledge could be both acknowledged on a formal and informal level; formally via specialist units that are available within the Agency and informally through peer networks and team based interactions.

“Well, I guess probably in a number of ways. One would be so very formally. It would be somebody who's worked and written in the area and who is perceived by their peers to have expert knowledge. So they've published and peer reviewed and all that sort of stuff and is endorsed by either individuals or organisations that I've already given that respect to...So that's one way and then there would be more informal areas where there will be people that I have working relationships with and had discussed ideas or information with them and that and respected their opinion (sic)”. Everyday research user M1.
The responses relating to practice specific or a working knowledge of practice and theory was highlighted by participants as a key factor in validating the integrity of the expertise and relevancy to the program area or issue at hand. One participant likened this validity or integrity to going to see their doctor - ensuring they have an appropriate background to provide you with sound information.

“Someone that has a working knowledge of theories or practices in place, so for example in a specialist role like we’ve drawn - well, like me and the CSC that I sit in... and use the drug and expertise unit quite a lot, and they're people that have been working in the field, that have tertiary education in the field and stuff like that. I don't know, it's kind of like when you go to the doctor you want to know that they've got some kind of background behind so that they're able to give you sound information (sic)”. Everyday research user M4.

How is expert knowledge different to research?
All of the everyday research users considered expert knowledge as a blend or combination of a variety of knowledges including research. They refuted the notion that expert knowledge is the same as research - neither is a substitute for each other. There is a requirement to have experience and knowledge that complements or builds on published research and evidence to inform the basis of expert knowledge. This theme was consistent across all of the participants and the following perspective of an everyday research user summarises the general view of the cohort.

“I think you can add to your expert knowledge through research but I don’t see them as the same thing or even necessarily going hand-in-hand..... So I’d certainly see them as different things but complementing each other”. Everyday research user HO4.

This also concurs with Bender and Fish’s view that:

Expertise is a specialised, deep knowledge and understanding in a certain field, which is far above average. Any individual with expertise is able to create uniquely new knowledge and solutions in his/her field of expertise. In this sense expertise is gained through experience, training and education and is built up from scratch.
over a long period of time by an individual and importantly remains with that person.\footnote{Bender and Fish, 2000}

Key to the participants’ view of expert knowledge was the relationship of the information or knowledge to the issue at hand; that is having relevancy to both the policy and practice setting. The theme of ‘currency’ of expert knowledge received one count (see Figure 4.2), however, this also related to relevancy. Whilst only one participant nominated ‘currency’ of knowledge and expertise as important, it could be accepted that in essence, having expert knowledge and or experience implies currency within itself. In stating this, however, it does raise the issue that staff within the case study Agency may automatically assume a level of currency of the various research and expertise units/specialist staff. This falls back to the need to critically appraise the validity and relevancy of all sources of materials to test the quality and integrity of the source.

Generally the everyday research users reinforced the broader concept of expert knowledge as having a variety of facets or various sources of knowledge that can interact, and all contribute to a position ultimately to inform decision-making and assisting with professional judgement. Expressed below is one participant’s view of a person who has expert knowledge and outlines the intersection of a range of information and experiences such as research, other available evidence, direct practice experience, and other issues or knowledges that the broader practice and community sector brings.

“So it would be based on practice in terms of the work that that person’s been doing; so it’s not just sort of an understanding of the current research and the available evidence, but also based on their experiences and understanding of the sector”. Everyday research user HO5.

Further to the understanding of expert knowledge, the everyday research users were asked for their views on evidence-based practice, that is, what evidence-based practice was and the synergy of this to their work. It was clearly articulated, as seen in Figure 4.3 below, that evidence-based practice is an action, practice or outcome that has been tried, tested, backed-up and supported by research and practice in delivering outcomes (that can be
demonstrated – what works and why). This then affirms the view that evidence-based practice is in fact a process like the existing research suggests.

Figure 4.3 Views on evidence-based practice - everyday research users

A key response to the understanding of evidence-based practice put forward by one participant was again the notion of currency of information and data.

“Well I suppose I touched on it in that first one, but being able to use again current, well data's a word, but information to build the argument based on research methods that are recognised by the professional discipline you're working in (sic)”. Everyday research user HO1.

The notion of evidence-based practice as being very specific to the topic, question or outcomes was also raised by one participant.

“…..for me evidence-based means very clear, very specific things you must gather or questions you must know some answers to”. Everyday research user R3.

This notion is reiterated by a number of authors such as Rubin, and Vermeersch and Beavers who suggest the refinement of the practice or research question posed is just as critical to the information to be sourced and analysed. Without the clear description of the problem or issue at hand, it is difficult to search for the relevant answers. Vermeersch and Beavers in their 2004 journal article clearly define steps that are required to be taken to enhance evidence-based clinical practice in a medical setting; however, this is just as relevant to the social science or social care setting.

181 Rubin, 2008
182 Vermeersch and Beavers, 2004
Step 1: Do I have a well-defined clinical problem? This is the most fundamental and crucial question for the clinician. The clinical problem of interest (phenomenon) must be labelled (concept) and defined so as to find an appropriate measurement tool.

What is clear from the data presented from the everyday research users is that evidence-based practice in the social science setting is not a stagnant and singular practice but a process that requires knowledge interactions from various sources and the necessary skill of the individual to be able to critically appraise and relate the knowledge to the practice setting via use of their own professional judgement.

4.4 Knowledge management and information literacy

The previous section highlighted the interactions of a range of knowledge bases in undertaking the process of evidence-based practice. These included research, and the need for an individual skill base of being able to access, critically appraise and translate expert knowledge and research into practice (a competent research user). This nexus or connection raises questions regarding the fundamental skills of the individual in information literacy and knowledge management, that is, how does the individual learn or undertake to access, assess, store and utilise knowledge, research and information. Is information literacy of the workforce and workplace an important concept to assist and promote the research and expert knowledge utilisation in the workplace?

The answer must be ‘yes’, since an information literate workforce that can locate, evaluate and effectively use information is the key to the success of many organisations....in companies where information and new knowledge is seen as providing a competitive edge in business or in service provision, information management or the process involved in handling information are essential to productivity and performance for both the company and its customers.

183 Ibid.
184 Kirton and Barham, 2005
Authors such as Gira, Kessler, and Poertner185, and Lawler and Bison 186 strongly argue that the dissemination of information alone is not adequate and that practitioners need to develop a range of skills to be able access, appraise and use the information, research and knowledge that is freely available to them. This is also reported by Armstrong, Waters et al187 reiterating the push from dissemination as a method of transferring knowledge to one of translation and exchange. The research undertaken in this case study examined this particular point. The everyday research users were asked a number of questions that related to whether they had received any formal training or exposure to information literacy, how they would rate their information literacy skill level, and finally, how this impacted on their confidence to source, evaluate and use expert knowledge and research in the workplace.

Figure 4.4 Information literacy and knowledge management training and exposure - everyday research users

The majority of participants in Figure 4.4 had received no formal training in information literacy and information or knowledge management. These participants (such as the participant below) were fundamentally self taught through the process of completing tertiary education, and by using tools and practice guides (such as that produced by the Agency) that had been made available to assist in their quests for sourcing and using expert knowledge and research.

“Thinking back, I don’t think I’ve had any specific training, but there are a number of tools on our agency website that I’ve used in the past. We’ve got basically a research practice guide. It’s more aimed towards people who are working in the field or working in a practice based kind of area, but in the past I’ve read that and

185 Gira, Kessler, et al., 2004
186 Lawler and Bilson, 2004
187 Armstrong, Waters, et al., 2006
found that very useful in understanding how I can utilise research in my day to day work”. Everyday research user HO5.

Of the minority of participants that have received some level of formal training, the key training was formal training in an academic environment such as introduction to Library sessions, how to use Library search engines and databases, and basic Library short courses on how to interpret and cite literature whilst undertaking undergraduate qualifications. This training did not include training in critical inquiry, rather basic analysis in interpreting literature. It was also reported by these participants (see example below) that as well as academic-based training, they also participated in Agency specific training in a formal or organised way such as the practice solution sessions which are dedicated weekly training and development time for frontline staff.

“Academic-based. More recently, in the last few years, there was - the specialist here in our region had run a session for us around how to critically analyse - it was very practical, how to find the site on DoCS online, what to look for and then, I guess, some concepts around how to critically analyse what you read (sic)”. Everyday research user M5.

There is a delineation between ‘informal’ training and no training or being self taught. This is significant as it raises the issues of not only the lack of formal training, but the lack of ‘informal’ training and on the job training/coaching that would assist staff to be more information literate and in turn possibly more productive and efficient in the work place\textsuperscript{188}.

Other considerations include the divide between research and practice. Marsh and Fisher, and Herie and Martin\textsuperscript{189} argue that there is a continuing divide between social work research and social work practice and there is a lack of capability of practitioners to be information literate or information savvy. This also can be detrimental not only to the use of existing information, expert knowledge and research, but also to the creation of new knowledge that is reflective or informative of practice. Therefore being information literate in the workplace is not only about having a skill set that enables the individual to consider

\textsuperscript{188} O’Sullivan, 2002; Kirton and Barham, 2005
\textsuperscript{189} Herie and Martin, 2002; Marsh and Fisher, 2008
and use knowledge and research, but also provides a capability to develop and promote new knowledge that is pertinent to the context of the practitioner and of the organisation.

Thompson, McCaughan et al also argue that the generation of new knowledge should be supported centrally or at the organisational level as staff, or practitioners, are the primary sources of useful clinical information\(^{190}\). This further suggests the need for information literate workers and competent research users, and further consideration of how the Agency also accesses the service users contribution to knowledge and research (as outlined by Beresford\(^{191}\)). This is vital to determining new knowledge, service options at a practice level, and the development of policy and programs for the broader Agency.

**Self rating of information literacy and knowledge management skills**

The everyday research users were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 – 10 regarding their level of information literacy and knowledge management skills. They were then asked *does having these skills give you confidence in using research in your work? How so?* The rating of the scale (see Figure 4.5) was very basic providing only three indicative levels of skills on the scale with participants asked to rank themselves with a number based on the scale and provide the reasons why they ranked themselves in a particular way.

Figure 4.5 Information literacy and knowledge management self rating scale – everyday research users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale:</th>
<th>0 = no skill base at all – no confidence in skills</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 = moderate skill base – just confident of skills</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10 = excellent skill base – extremely confident to use skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 4.6 demonstrates that the eight participants rated themselves at seven on the scale, with a further four participants rating themselves at eight on the scale.

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\(^{190}\) Thompson, McCaughan, et al., 2001

\(^{191}\) Beresford, 2007
This indicates that the majority of participants interviewed, regardless of the level or type of training they had undertaken in information literacy and knowledge management felt that they were generally confident and competent in their skill base. All Head Office based staff rated or ranked themselves at levels seven or eight on the scale, as described by one participant below.

“I’d probably put it at a six or seven, and when I think about it, yeah probably up there at a seven. I think that it’s a skill that you have a natural ability for but it’s also something that, after years of doing it, you can get more skilled or learn how to do it better. Which I certainly have over the years and as I say, I’ve got a real thirst for information, I love information. I love reading and digesting and I like to think that the analysing, whilst it mightn’t be as good as the consumption of information, I think I’ve also got the ability to analyse and filter out what’s useful and relevant (sic)”. Everyday research user HO4.

Similar to the previous discussion in Chapter 3 in the section on demographics (which outlined that the majority of Head Office/project and policy based staff had postgraduate qualifications and therefore a higher educational skill base), the self rating exercise also suggests that the higher educational skill base of the individuals in those positions contributed to an overall higher self-rating of those individuals regarding their information literacy and knowledge management skills.
Regarding levels of confidence in their own information literacy and knowledge management skills to access, utilise and translate research and expert knowledge into their practice, the everyday research users reported that there was no negative impact on having those skills in relation to their confidence to use their skills. In fact 13 out of the 15 participants articulated that regardless of their skill level, having some skill as described above provided the confidence to pursue expert knowledge and research to assist them in their practice, with only two participants suggesting that this was only sometimes the case.

Two individuals described that ‘only sometimes’ they had confidence. One was a participant from a rural locality (male) who was relatively new to the Agency whose lack of confidence was related to not knowing where to start to look for materials as he was still learning about the Agency and what it had to offer. The other participant who reported ‘only sometimes’ having confidence levels was a Head Office participant (female) where a change in environment or program area impacted directly due to acquainting herself with different topics of interest and potential lack of corporate knowledge on the topic. This impacted on her understanding of what the question is that needs to be posed and considered, and the subsequent information that needed to be sourced. This was due to a different perspective of subject area or topic coming from the field, which is very practice orientated, to Head Office which has more of a strategic policy/project focus. This lack of confidence at times seems to be situational and linked to an understanding of the role the person holds and context specific to that role.

One rural participant expressed that having confidence in her skills and ability not only assists her in undertaking her role as a specialist but in turn had a flow on effect through case consultations and coaching other staff to either facilitate the progression of a matter or to locate appropriate evidence-based information and knowledge. She also clearly states her trust in the expertise of others.

“It gives me confidence in doing case consultations and being able to link the research with the cases. I just find, like our intranet, the research to practice, the majority of the research, even the notes, they're easy to understand. Some other research - I know there's some good research on the net but I'd rather work with research that's been already tested and that's endorsed by the department (sic)”.
Everyday research user R4.
The participant also alluded to the materials that are produced and/or endorsed by the Agency as quality materials that took some effort or investment of time away for the practitioner from having to search out for certain research and evidence-based information. This participant and other participants clearly agreed that materials such as those produced by the Research to Practice Program and Research Centre greatly assisted in undertaking their role by knowing where to quickly access materials that had already been validated, and were relevant to the context and function of the Agency. This doesn’t however suggest that these are the only materials that staff utilise within the Agency.

What is clear is that information literacy and knowledge management skills are broader than just the ability to critically appraise a source of information. These skills are critical to developing capability of knowledge dissemination, transfer and creation within an organisation or as Fennessy\textsuperscript{192} expresses, knowledge management is also about the deployment of knowledge in the organisation which aids knowledge capture and management. This is also demonstrated through the views of the everyday research users. That is, applied skills in the area of information literacy improve their ability to search for and apply quality materials to assist with knowledge transfer (and creation) through accessing specialist staff and units within the Agency.

Knowledge management and sharing measures (which include training in the fundamental skills in information literacy, as well as the provision of guidance tools and specific training in utilising research) also aid in the benefits to clients via improved decision-making and efficiency, and productivity of individual staff members\textsuperscript{193} (which can be demonstrated by the everyday users self ranking of their skill level and associated confidence levels).

4.5 **Attitude towards use of research in practice**

What has been established is that there is a need for an information literate workforce that has a range of skills (including knowledge management) that assist in research utilisation and an evidenced-based approach to undertaking work. Even though this is crucially

\textsuperscript{192} Fennessy, 2000

\textsuperscript{193} Chong, Holden, et al., 2000; Bose, 2004
important, fundamental to the core of the research (and in examining the case study organisation) is assessing the attitude of staff towards research and expert knowledge usage in their practice and policy-making. Do staff think using research is important to their work and practices? Do staff actually access and use research regardless of their skills and abilities in information literacy and knowledge management?

Previously, as outlined in Chapter 3 (Methodology), it was established via the document analysis that the Agency has adopted an evidence-based approach to service delivery and has put strategies in place to actively encourage staff in utilising research and other expert knowledge within the workplace. What this research considered via various data collection processes was whether (or not) there is a positive attitude of staff to utilising research or undertaking an evidence-based approach. Initially the focus group cohort were asked whether access to research was important and this was followed up by the discussion of whether staff use research to inform their practice.

Is access to research important?

As can be seen from Figure 4.7 below, no program areas reported negatively regarding the importance of access to research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Area</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>Sometimes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Development</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Dev &amp; QA/Ops</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships &amp; Planning</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C&amp;F Practitioners</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Network</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Partnerships and Planning stream or program area which has the mandate for the management of the funding stream, procurement and service funding agreement process was the only stream to indicate 100% (10 out of 10 staff) that research was important. This
strengthens the notion of the various program streams wanting to utilise research and the need for the Agency to ensure there is the capacity to develop and have access to a wide source of program or stream relevant research across the agency. Interestingly the two key areas relevant to training and building the required competencies to undertake the work of the organisation (Learning and Development, and Professional Development & Quality Assurance) were the areas that reported most frequently that research was only important sometimes. This may not indicate negatively as other sources of expert knowledge and information based on practice may be utilised, however, it does raise the potential question of the currency of the curriculum and the underpinning evidence of practice standards.

Participants in focus groups often spoke of access to research as important to inform and assist with practice, to maintain a contemporary understanding of the field for both the individual and for curriculum development, but most importantly various focus group members identified the connection between research and delivering high quality and targeted support to clients or service users of the Agency.

“To inform practice discourse...important to validate decision-making around policy and research informs practice change (sic)”. Research Network Focus Group participant.

“It assists with providing children and families with a high quality of service”. Child & Family Practitioner Focus Group participant.

“It is essential for Learning & Development staff to have easy access to research to ensure that information that is delivered to training participants is the most current and relevant”. Learning & Development Focus Group participant.

The participant’s view directly above (Learning and Development), is in contrast to the previous discussion about the use of research being only sometimes important by this program area. This confirms that the data in Figure 4.7 is not necessarily a negative indication to research use as other information and knowledge sources may be accessed. What was observed throughout the focus groups was a positive view or attitude towards research within the case study organisation, and that staff openly accepted that there was a research and expert knowledge culture and this played a role in their individual practices.
Do staff access and use research?

To further explore whether research is important, the discussion of whether staff actually use research to inform their work is necessary. There is a difference between a positive attitude to research use and actual research use. The majority of staff in the majority of the program areas or streams indicated that they do utilise research, however, it is the staff within the Child and Family Program area that would only use research sometimes. This needs to be considered in the context of a statutory child protection practice context where some practices and procedures are a ‘given’, or mandated given the legislative operational environment. The responses below indicate that research is accessed and used both for a specific purpose (project or context specific) and also because it is available (planned calendar of events such as research seminars).

“I usually access research for a specific purpose, i.e. when I am scoping a particular project or issue. I also access research because it is available”. Professional Development & Quality Assurance Focus Group participant (Head Office).

“When I’m looking at a new project or reviewing an existing project. If I don’t know much about a subject I’ll look up some research to help me understand it better (sic)”. Partnerships & Planning Focus Group participant (Bankstown).

A full examination of how staff within the case study organisation utilise research within their practice context (that is for conceptual, instrumental or symbolic uses) will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Even though staff reported using research and expert knowledge to inform their practice and decision-making, this thesis did not examine how staff rated or ranked the various information sources against each other (potentially via a hierarchy of evidence model) or how they combined the information to result in what Jones and Baumgartner\(^{194}\) describe as the juggling and combining of sources into something relevant to action (or inaction).

\(^{194}\) Jones and Baumgartner, 2005
Given the above, it could be argued that there is a genuine belief that research is important and a genuine willingness to use research (and expert knowledge) within the case study organisation. It can be surmised that there is generally a positive attitude of staff across the various program areas towards research utilisation and therefore an appearance of a positive connection to an evidence-based approach within the workplace of the case study organisation.

**How frequently do staff source research or expert knowledge?**

Managers were asked to provide an account based on their observations of the type of staff who access research and expert knowledge and the frequency of access. The results of these observations are at Figure 4.8 below. The results suggest that staff of all program streams utilise research on a weekly basis, however, some staff groups such as the Casework Specialists, Managers and Directors (who tend to undertake functions of coaching and supervision) accessed research and expert knowledge more frequently with three of the managers reporting that the Casework Specialists access research more frequently than twice a week. This again relates to their role within the organisation of utilising research and information in coaching and developing staff in their day to day practice.

![Figure 4.8 Types of staff who access research and frequency – managers](image)

Managers also highlighted that the longer term employees were less inclined to access research and an evidence-base due to the perception that their work experience (expert knowledge) may outweigh current research. Conversely, newer employees tended to be high-end research users as it assisted them to get up to speed to enable them to effectively undertake the roles and duties of the positions they held.
Contributing to newer employees being more high-end research users is the expectation of the Agency of being research and evidence-informed (as articulated at case worker development training), and the shift of the organisation of only employing individuals with appropriate qualifications (minimum three year degrees with the exemption of Indigenous staff). This shift of qualification level would suggest that the majority of staff have had access to research and evidence-based processes during the course of their educational studies, either formally or informally. The newer group of staff with mandatory minimal qualifications may be more accepting of such an evidence-informed culture or approach to the workplace due to their previous exposure to research utilisation.

It was indicated by one supervisor that one of their staff never accessed research and this was in the area of project work. This result is concerning given the general nature and mandate of the case study organisation to be evidenced-based; however, this may be an isolated occurrence.

The everyday research users were also asked report their actual level or frequency of access to research and/or expert knowledge. The results of this information were considered by frequency of reported access by location of the participant as outlined in Figure 4.9 below. This is different to the responses of the managers who provide observations of research use by program area.

The majority of rural staff stated that they accessed research on a weekly basis (this was predominantly electronic based access to research), with metropolitan staff indicating that they either accessed research and expert knowledge more often than twice a week, or less
frequently (for example monthly or if only required). Metropolitan staff were the only cohort to respond to accessing research and expert information only if required (see response below) and Head Office staff were the only cohort to report accessing research twice a week. There was no indication as to why some metropolitan staff only accessed research when required, however, it was clear that the nature of the policy makers role was to develop policy options based on evidence of what works and therefore tended to be higher users of research and expert knowledge.

“I would only use it when I'm stuck in a rut and I don't know what to do”. Everyday research user M3.

Whilst the managers and everyday research users responses are not directly comparable (as one is observation and categories by program areas and the other a self report categorised by location), the participant quote above was the only clear contrast to the observation of managers suggesting that newer staff are high-end users of research. The participant is a young staff member (male) who has been with the Agency for less than five years. However, even though this participant is a minimal research and expert-knowledge user, it is clearly reported that if the need arises the participant would in fact use research and evidence-based material to assist in the direction and decision-making of his practice. What is not articulated is the role of his manager in supporting his research use, or whether his supervisor would be considered an access point to assist.

These results of both the managers and everyday research users have synergy to those published by Buckley and Whelan195 who were examining the key issues that impact on research utilisation in Irish Children’s Services. Of interest in the Irish study was that the researchers were additionally trying to ascertain whether staff had information technology access (also similar to earlier Australian studies196). The case study organisation in my research has information technology and other strategies in place to assist in the uptake of research to inform practice. Despite this difference – the majority of staff in both studies often accessed research to inform practice and this indicates the general shift towards an evidence-based or informed approach in social care settings.

195 Buckley and Whelan, 2009
What was discovered in the reported frequencies of accessing research and expert knowledge by the everyday research users was that there is little differentiation on the frequency of staff accessing research based on location. The results suggest that 100% (15 out of 15 staff) access research and expert knowledge in their work at some point of time. However, it needs to be reiterated that most access to research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation is by way of technology use and the Agency’s Library document delivery systems. This result does not consider (at this point) the face to face research translation and delivery mechanisms such as seminars.

**How staff are accessing and sourcing research and expert knowledge**

Within the case study organisation staff frequently access research and other expert knowledge to inform their practice and policy-making. It is also important to understand how these staff access these materials and the source of the materials, that is whether staff are predominantly sourcing internally generated materials, or are sourcing both internally and externally generated materials and knowledge. Earlier analysis demonstrated that research utilisation is more than just the dissemination of information and having access to information technology such as a desktop computer to be able to access electronic information. As the Agency in focus has such strategies in place it is important to test whether the information and source material being utilised is generated internally or made available internally, versus utilisation of, and access to externally based materials. Key to the staff accessing and sourcing research is the internal Research to Practice Program which was reported most frequently as the highest source for both the managers and the everyday research users (see Figure 4.10 and Figure 4.11).

![Figure 4.10 How staff access and source research and expert knowledge - managers](image-url)
The results of the managers indicates that five out of the eight responses provided are internally based mechanisms for accessing and sourcing research and expert knowledge and included three out of the top four most frequently reported. These were Agency online - Research to Practice, Professional Development and Quality Assurance, and Learning and Development. Regarding the Professional Development and Learning and Development aspects above, it was recognised earlier in this chapter that these two groups in the focus group cohort were the groups that reported that research and expert knowledge usage in practice and policy development was only important sometimes - yet it appears from the responses of both the managers and everyday research users that staff do hold the integrity of documentation and actions of those program areas highly, believing that their practices are evidence-informed.

Similarly with the everyday research users, six out of the nine responses indicated they were accessing and sourcing internal research and expert knowledge for similar reasons of integrity of material. Again three of the top four responses being internal intranet Research to Practice, Agency Library and Specialist Agency staff. For both the managers and everyday research users, the use of the general internet and web based searches was reported second highest in frequency. This indicated that staff are utilising internal sources of research and knowledge as well as external sources. The Agency provides internet access to all staff and through its guidance tools, provides advice to staff on how to access and verify external sources. This suggests that there is no inhibitor for staff to access external materials as firstly, the internally generated resources would not meet the demand for all of the various research and information needs within the Agency, and secondly, different or a diverse source of knowledges are usually accessed to provide a broader viewpoint to the issue.

Figure 4.11 How staff access and source research and expert knowledge – everyday research users
These results demonstrate that the internal mechanisms and strategies used by the agency are being utilised by staff and staff are aware of how, and where to access practice or organisation relevant materials and expert knowledge. One participant spoke about accessing internally generated materials for no specific reason other than to see what was new and available – a very proactive approach rather than need driven. What was particularly useful to this participant was knowing that someone had already validated and appraised the information, and provided a practical short summary that related to her field of practice. This was beneficial to her rather than having to take the time to complete the appraisal processes herself, and knowing it was current and relevant.

“From time to time - and I wouldn't do it as often as I want - I would get into the research practice side of DoCS online and just check what’s coming through and the bulletins that come out through Research to Practice, they’re probably the most practical because they give you a nice little summary. It’s that hand-fed directed direction that gets me to the point of finding stuff to find, interesting, useful, to link to practice rather than reading a whole journal”. Everyday research user M5.

The participants are clearly suggesting that the Research to Practice Program is having considerable impact as the result of effective planning, implementation, evaluation and refinement of strategies. This also highlights that the information delivery systems that the Agency has put in place via the Research to Practice Program such as having simplified and summary information relevant to core business available, and champions or key staff to assist and promote research utilisation (which are also reinforced by a number of authors197) is contributing directly to research utilisation. Other sources of research which were reported in both data sets included the Agency Library, University libraries, specialist staff and units such as Professional Development and Quality Assurance.

One participant from the everyday research users cohort specifically discussed the richness of information found in undertaking external tertiary education and accessing university libraries. They found it provided (electronically) a vast array of information that they would not normally have access to through the workplace, but conversely that it could be overwhelming as there was no mechanism in place to alert to the content or validity of the

197 Price, Ravenscroft, et al., 2006; Alexanderson, Beijer, et al., 2009; Buckley and Whelan, 2009; Canavan, Gillen, et al., 2009; Dill and Shera, 2009; Eccles, 2009
research or knowledge (unlike the process of the Research to Practice Notes and summary materials).

“My sourcing of that now, it's much easier than it used to be because there's a whole online system and this agency's got easy access to systems of knowledge and particularly regular additions of well reputed and international literature. So using those. The other area that has been useful is if you're doing a university course you actually, and can get a library ticket, it opens up a whole range of things and I found doing that course really quite rich. In fact, overwhelmingly so, sometimes you couldn't tell too much unless you had access to it and it was all online, it was fantastic (sic)”. Everyday research user HO1.

The participant is clear that access to a variety of sources and resources is important particularly in locating a range of sources that present different views that assist in informing professional judgement. That is, access to only one source may not be reliable; therefore, access to multiple sources of research and information facilitates a more balanced view. Having access to tertiary institutions and their libraries provides a credible access point (as does the internal Agency Library system).

**Type of research and expert knowledge staff are accessing**

The types of research that staff are accessing to inform their practice and policy development was assessed across the three cohorts of the focus groups, the managers and everyday research users.

The focus group participants broadly were asked what materials they used in the context of the Research to Practice Program to ascertain whether that particular strategy (as shown in Figure 4.12) was having an impact. Therefore it is not comparable to the managers and everyday research users responses; however, there are responses provided by the focus group that were not only specifically related to the products generated by that Program and have been captured and presented. The core information accessed and used by the focus group cohort again were the internal based materials generated by the Research to Practice Program and more broadly the Research Centre which commissions organisational relevant research to inform core business and service delivery. The Agency Library again was
reported frequently across the various program streams due to the availability of electronic databases and systems that provide for electronic searches of relevant materials.

**Figure 4.12 Total Percentage Comparison Focus Groups - What are you accessing and/or using to inform your practice and policy-making?**

General material located after an internet search was also reported frequently (as per the previous discussion on how staff access and source information), however, again there is little information available to ascertain the quality, validity and relevancy of the material apart from the reported observations of the participants in this case study.

The managers and the everyday research users also reported the types of research mostly accessed and used were those generated by the internal Research to Practice Program and broader Research Centre (see Figure 4.13 and Figure 4.14). Also significant is the role that the Agency Library takes by providing a range of electronic sources such as journals that have been subscribed to (which are relevant to the business of the case study agency such as Australian Social Work, Adoption and Fostering, British Journal of Social Work, Child & Family Social Work, Child Welfare etc), databases, catalogues and others that work hand-in-hand with the Research to Practice Program and the overarching Research Centre.
The managers clearly indicated that they themselves as supervisors were critical to staff accessing and using research and were also a source of expert knowledge. These participants also identified this role in their own supervisors. This theme was reported as important to that of the availability of the internal based research programs and products. This notion of supervisors having an impact as an avenue of research access and expert knowledge to their staff is also highlighted in the responses from the everyday research users. The everyday research users viewed supervisors as relevant research users that could ‘handfeed’ research and information to them, as opposed to the everyday research users themselves having to go and explore available research and information sources.

What is evident from both the managers and everyday research users is that staff are accessing a broad range of sources both internally and externally. It appears that the
participants in the managers cohort are more inclined to access and use report based or paper based information. The everyday research users use a mixture of both paper based reports and seek out specialist staff, their supervisors, specialist units (such as the Drug Expertise Unit), other information networks and staff groups to have discussions with, and to source the required information and knowledge. The everyday research user HO2 firstly expresses that an evidence-informed approach to their work is very important and secondly summarises how they use a mixture of paper based research and other specialist staff/units to inform their practice and policy-making (which relates to the notion of a hierarchy of evidence).

“I'm in a head office position in a unit that is very big on touting being evidence-based in the things that you do and the decisions that you make. So we try very hard to mirror that in the way that we approach projects and things that we roll out and directions we give to the field. We're an operations unit so we want to try and make sure the things we do are also grounded in some sort of evidence that is informed by research. For me, the information I use to rely on to make sure that happens is a split between doing my own research and talking to a whole bunch of other people”. Everyday research user HO2.

What is clearly reported is that staff do not solely rely on one avenue or stream of research, expert knowledge and information. This suggests a level of intellectual sophistication towards undertaking research utilisation processes and a willingness to consider different and multiple perspectives that aid in the delivery of practice and policy development with in the case study organisation.

4.6 Professional experience, practitioner competence and expertise - research utilisation influence on professional judgement & critical thinking and inquiry

Research utilisation assists with the focus on providing an evidence-base to practice and to identify best practice or what works (or to have evidence-informed practice)198. It therefore also has the potential to aid in decision-making and clinical practice decisions. It is argued

198 Barratt and Hodson, 2006; Frost, Moseley, et al., 2006
that research alone does not directly result in a decision-making outcome but rather it requires a combination and the integration of the underpinning organisational framework, legislation and the ability to translate the research or expert knowledge with practice wisdom and user knowledge\textsuperscript{199} rather than being a substitute for professional judgement (thus a process).

Critical thinking and enquiry, or decision-making are components of professional judgement where the seeking out of research and expert knowledge and the analysis of such is not seen as removed or static from an action or ultimate outcome\textsuperscript{200}. McCracken and Marsh identified five steps of decision-making in evidence-based practice that clearly relate to the individual applied skills as identified through the managers responses.

The five steps are:

1. convert the need for information into answerable questions;
2. track down with maximum efficiency the best evidence with which to answer that question;
3. critically appraise that evidence for its validity and usefulness
4. integrate the critical appraisal with practitioner clinical expertise and with the client values, preference, and clinical circumstances and apply the results to practice; and
5. evaluate the outcome\textsuperscript{201}.

These five steps reiterate the importance of a skill set that is necessary to effectively access and utilise research and expert knowledge, out of which develops a basis for informing professional judgement.

The data collected from the research within the case study organisation evidently suggests that staff are actively aware of the research culture of the organisation. Staff clearly know how and where to access research and expert information to assist within their practice. Previous sections have also highlighted that staff reportedly use research in their practice and to develop policy. How this vast array of research and knowledge is synthesised and

\textsuperscript{199} Lomas, 2000; Humphreys, Berridge, et al., 2003; Austin and Claassen, 2008a; Austin and Claassen, 2008b
\textsuperscript{200} Crotty, 1998
\textsuperscript{201} McCracken and Marsh, 2008
impacts on individual’s practice is explored in this section to determine whether it has influenced a change in their practice to be more evidence-informed. It will also discuss the barriers and enablers that impact or not on research utilisation at the individual level.

The everyday research users were asked whether their practice changed with the availability of expert knowledge and research, and what the reasons or factors were that led to a change (or not) in practice. The responses are demonstrated in Figure 4.15 below.

4.15 Self reported change to individual practice - everyday research users

The majority or 87% of participants (13 out of 15) reported that their practice had changed in the past five years which coincided with the introduction of the Research to Practice Program in 2004. One participant reported that they were not sure due to the short nature of their time within the organisation. Another participant clearly stated that their practice had not changed (as indicated below) due to their position within the organisation and the lack of autonomy that their position held.

“My position within the department, and on the food chain, is very low. So no matter how much I skill myself up it doesn't necessarily mean that those skills are going to be put into use”. Everyday research user M3.

This response from everyday research user M3 regarding the lack of authority to change practice or implement findings was also found by Funk, Champagne et al.\textsuperscript{202} to be one of the key barriers to research utilisation in the nursing field.

Regarding the majority whose practice had changed towards a more evidence-informed approach, this was influenced not just through the availability of mechanism and strategies

\textsuperscript{202} Funk, Champagne, et al., 1991a
of the case study organisation such as having access to and making research and expert knowledge available, but by a personal motivation to be contemporary and to deliver the best possible outcomes to clients of the organisation. It is clear from the participant views below that there is an increasing confidence in using research and expert knowledge to inform both the practice and policy environment within the case study organisation which had directly impacted on a positive change to their practice and being more evidence-informed.

“I think that my practice framework has become much more sophisticated because there is easily accessible a range of information and also we've become much more sophisticated as an organisation, so there's the bringing together of people who have a high level of expertise and the opportunity to discuss and analyse..... So you can really I suppose refine and enhance your own thinking in your case practice and that gives you the confidence”. Everyday research user M2.

“My confidence in my work has changed dramatically from starting in this unit to now and I can say very confidently that would be mostly influenced by the greater use of research in the work that I do. It allows me to have a better understanding of the work that I'm engaging in and then allows me to sell it to people in a confident way. So in that respect it has drastically changed the way that I work”. Everyday research user HO2.

In determining other key factors that may assist with this practice change, the potential factors and context that hindered or helped the staff of the case study organisation to access and utilise research and expert knowledge on an individual level were explored. Both the focus group cohort and the everyday research users cohort were asked what some of the barriers were in the use of expert knowledge and research in their individual practice, as well as individual factors that promoted best practice use of expert knowledge and research within the case study agency. Figure 4.16 highlights the key factors that the focus groups expressed that hinder access and use of research within the case study organisation.
The most reported issue or factor across the focus group cohort was the issue of time constraints – this was two-fold. Firstly the lack of time related to the research user not being efficient in their skills and therefore taking extra time to search for and appraise various materials, but secondly also a perception that they (staff) were not allowed to take the time to undertake research related activity. Time constraints in terms of the pressure of the work environment also rated, however this will be discussed in the next chapter which specifically looks at the impact of the work environment on research utilisation within the case study agency.

Considering the other factors that hindered, the majority of the remaining themes directly related to the individual skill set of being able to effectively form a question, develop a search plan, access, find, appraise and translate the research. Again this relates to previous discussions on the requirement to have an information literate workforce and competent research users. The participant quoted below further reinforced the need for training and putting this training into action.

“we don't give a lot of training in critical thinking, a lot of formal training or we haven't up to now and I think that's - we've been very keen to get people operating but we haven't really given a lot of critical - time for critical reflection in training. So I think that's one thing and if you don't give that training then I think what you
do is you reinforce the negative messages for - that say we haven't got time for this, this isn't - okay, we're all saying this is important but in action we're not acting as if this is important (sic)". Everyday research user M1.

The participant also is clearly articulating the difference between having a commitment to a culture of research and evidence-informed practice and not putting the processes in place to actualise that culture. The point the participant is making relates to the progression of the organisation to a commitment to training in critical thinking and more broadly how to critically appraise. What is being perceived as not supported, and therefore the mixed message, is that the Agency is not providing staff with adequate time to critically reflect and translate research and evidence into practice and/or staff feel that they do not have the time nor the permission to take the time.

The final theme of what hinders, reported as ‘other’, was the participants reporting issues relating to the lack of relevancy of research to the practice of the agency. This also relates to the views of Billett\textsuperscript{203} which suggest that knowledge generation or construction is specific to particular practice communities and not easily transferrable, that is what works in one field will not necessarily work in another. Other factors that hinder included the over abundance of information, and a level of confusion on how to use research, and a lack of understanding of when it is appropriate to use and cite research. This response regarding a lack of understanding is interesting given the Agency tools\textsuperscript{204} that have been made available to specifically address the issue of when it is appropriate and not appropriate to use and cite materials. This too may be an indication of the need for continuous ‘rolling training’\textsuperscript{205} for new staff by the Agency to ensure parameters are understood. Apart from lack of a skill set or confidence of skill to critically appraise and time constraints which mimicked the responses of the larger focus group cohort, the majority of responses from the everyday research users related to barriers and enablers that were more practice environment related (these will be discussed fully in the next chapter).

\textsuperscript{203} Billett, 1998

\textsuperscript{204} NSW Department of Community Services, 2006c; NSW Department of Community Services, 2008a

\textsuperscript{205} By this I refer to planned regular training on information literacy/critical appraisal skills and the parameters for use within the Agency to capture new staff as they enter the organisation.
In considering the factors that assist, enable or help in research utilisation in the case study organisation, the responses provided by the focus group cohort were much more practically focused as described in Figure 4.17 below. The focus group participants clearly reported that having good access to a range of materials was the most important factor in enabling research utilisation within their practice. This was closely followed by having a good grounding in skills to access (and evaluate) research, and having key champions such as the Research to Practice and other specialist staff to access and to assist in the facilitation of research usage.

The translation of material into short, sharp summaries and products, was also deemed as a help to research usage, however, there was a mixed reporting as to whether the Research to Practice Program helped (even though they are the authors of the material the participants deemed as being helpful). The theme of what helps reported as ‘other’, generally related to the Agency effectively communicating the availability of, and access to research based materials and expert knowledge. This also related to the previous issue of time constraints and the request for dedicated time to access, appraise, consider and translate research into practice. In considering the overall barriers and enablers of research utilisation on the individual level, there is not a reported barrier or a limitation on access to research.
materials (as outlined in recent studies undertaken in the broader social care area\textsuperscript{206}) within the case study organisation, however, there is still a reported issue of lack of competence of staff (having the appropriate skill set) to effectively access and utilise research and expert knowledge.

Even though there is some commonality of factors that are enablers and barriers across the three ‘spheres of influence’ (individual, work environment and organisational context), the fundamental issue of having a solid grounding in the correct skill set and the time to access and utilise research are paramount for the individual within the case study organisation to successfully access and utilise research and expert knowledge in their practice and policy-making.

4.7 The NSW Statutory Child Welfare Agency and research utilisation: Examining the individual factors and key determinants

In examining the results of the various cohorts (focus groups, managers and everyday research users) within the case study organisation on the individual level, there is clearly a commitment to the use of research and expert knowledge by the Agency and also by practitioners. It has also been established that there is no impediment to electronic access to both internal and external materials that staff can utilise to inform their decision-making and professional judgement. However, there are key individual determinants and practice implications that impacts on research utilisation within the case study organisation.

**Individual determinants**

There are some core individual determinants that directly impact on the individual in the uptake of research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation. These include:

- having an appropriate skill-set/education
- being exposed to a research culture and mechanisms that enable this and which fosters a way of working and gives permission for such

\textsuperscript{206} Holzer, 2007; Holzer, Lewig, et al., 2007; Holzer, Lewig, et al., 2008; Buckley and Whelan, 2009
• having a positive attitude (which includes the individual’s values and beliefs) and motivation to access and use research and expert knowledge within practice
• demonstrating professional judgement.

In examining the core determinant of skill set and education it was established that this is fundamental to the capability of the individual to be a ‘competent research user’ and effectively undertake research utilisation within the workplace of the case study organisation. This capability provides the foundation for staff not only to be information literate, but provides confidence in their abilities to identify the research question or issue at hand that needs further evidence and knowledge. This capability also provides a framework for the critical appraisal and application of the research and expert knowledge to the practice environment. The Agency needs to ensure individual skill level development is promoted and enhanced to mitigate any potential use of non-quality materials that lack validation and relevance and continue towards building an information literate workforce. This is also related to effective knowledge management skills whereby knowledge can not only be used, but considered in the context of practice wisdom and in the facilitation of the creation of new knowledge. Again key to the case study organisation is reinforcing that research utilisation is not just about information dissemination but also about fostering and building capability of knowledge creation relevant to the organisational context.

The research participants across all three cohorts of the focus groups, managers and everyday research users highlighted that their exposure to ‘research to practice’ based mechanisms and other strategies that underpin the research culture within the case study organisation, firstly provided the platform as to the way the organisation conducts its business, and secondly validated the individual in undertaking research utilisation in their practice and policy development. This is expressed by the focus group participants below highlighting how the research culture and exposure to research has impacted on them and their practice personally.

"Maintaining up to date, credible information is critical in developing best practice standards and ensuring policies promoted are indeed supported by evidence – outcomes". Research Network Focus Group participant.
“Research offers factual information, current trends and analysis of issues. Based on the research findings, I am able to test my own assumptions. DoCS policy development, practice, and operational procedures increasingly rely on the research findings”. Research Network Focus Group participant.

The **attitude and motivation** of the research participants towards research and expert knowledge utilisation in the case study organisation can generally be described as positive. There has been no evidence to suggest from the data collected on an individual level that practitioners believe that an approach of evidence-based or evidence-informed practice is not actually going to make a difference to outcomes as identified by authors such as Lochman\(^{207}\). Practitioners involved in the research reported that utilisation of evidence-based materials plays an important role in the delivery of their practice and complements their practice knowledge. There was however, one participant in the everyday research users that reported a personally perceived negative attitude to their research use by the broader organisation due to their position and role within the Agency.

The research participants were clear that the primary purpose of research utilisation was for the work context and to ensure they remained contemporary as professionals in their disciplines and fields. Whilst some research utilisation related to external institutions such as universities, unquestionably the time invested in research utilisation processes was for the purposes of the workplace and client outcomes rather than advancing their standing within the organisation (or careerism). This will be more fully discussed in a Chapter 7 that examines the specific uses of research in the workplace. There were also no issues reported such as the effect of previous exposure which has been negative exposure, lessening the motivation of staff in their future research utilisation needs and uses which has been described in other studies\(^{208}\).

The participants were extremely positive in regard to the important use of research and expert knowledge to inform their practice and **professional judgement**. There was a genuine belief that research utilisation, both personally and professionally in the child welfare/protection context of service delivery in NSW was highly valued and supported at the individual level by the Agency. This is critical given the perception that the research

\(^{207}\) Lochman, 2006  
\(^{208}\) Estabrooks, Floyd, et al., 2003
culture within the Agency is not at all tokenistic and very much promotes and supports the individual in their research and expert knowledge utilisation. This in turn assists with their professional judgement and delivering more evidence-informed services to the clients of the Agency.

Implications for practice and policy development

The notions or concepts of evidenced-based and evidence-informed practice are not seen as a ‘current trend’ within the case study organisation, but rather as the normal way of working by the individual participants. It is the perception of the research participants that this way of working is embedded and enabled through the creation and delivery of a research culture and the economic investment by the Agency in such.

The previous discussions on evidence-based practice models being translated from the medical field to the social care of social sciences has raised debate as to whether in fact evidence-based practice is delivered by individuals or rather it is evidence-informed practice due to the variability of human service interventions. This may have implications for practice and policy-making when considering the general applicability and relevance of the practice or program to individual circumstance, however it also reiterates how research and expert knowledge forms part of professional judgement and is not a substitute for it.

Practice and policy-making in the case study organisation as reported by the research participants, is evidence-informed, taking into consideration research, skills and practice wisdom of the practitioner, and the local context and knowledge. Other implications for practice and policy-making is moving towards limiting the research and practice divide for the individual by recognising and validating practitioner knowledge and wisdom, and drawing on practice insight from the individual level when developing research which is specific and relevant to the organisation\(^{209}\). This also raised the practice implication of how staff appraise and apply research and expert knowledge and the on-going issue of skill development in this area. With the plethora of research available, these skills are vital to ensure staff are efficient in their use of time and assessment as to the quality of the information/source as to what is relevant and its applicability to the issue at hand.

\(^{209}\) Small, 2005
The positive attitude and motivation of staff to access and utilise research and expert knowledge is optimal, however, the need to continue to skill up and engage the individual/practitioner in the use of evidence-based materials and information is paramount for the Agency. Authors such as Almeida and Bàscolo\(^{210}\) also warn the policy-maker that literature on knowledge production and policy formulation are very different to policy implementation, and this directly impacts on translation of information into action and requires consideration by policy-makers in the case study organisation when deploying their professional judgement.

The Agency in engaging individual practitioners and policy-makers in evidence-based and evidence-informed practice needs to continue to address the key identified barriers of the research users such as skill development, and continue to provide the practice and policy resources that enable research utilisation implementation.

### 4.8 Conclusion

This chapter examined how the micro or individual contexts and factors such as information literacy, influence on professional judgement, attitude towards use of research in practice, professional experience, practitioner competence and expertise, and critical thinking and inquiry impact on the use of research and other evidence-based information and knowledge in a child protection setting (information processing theory).

In this chapter, I have explored how individual staff within the case study organisation understood the terminology around research utilisation in the context of their organisation. I have highlighted that evidence-based and evidence-informed practice and policy-making are not purely built on what is regarded as traditional research, but a whole range of knowledges such as practice wisdom and other communities of knowledge (such as organisational, policy, economic and service user knowledge). I have also established that the staff of the case study organisation are immersed in the research culture of the organisation and are enthusiastic and motivated in their access to and use of research to assist in their decision-making and professional judgment.

\(^{210}\) Almeida and Bascolo, 2006
The sources of research and expert knowledge that are predominantly identified and used by the research participants are those that are internally based or generated. They are service delivery specific (as they have been generated by the existing Research to Practice Program or broader Research Centre). Internal sources of research and expert knowledge were not exclusively accessed, and external mechanisms such as the internet and university libraries were also popular as sources to access research and other knowledge based material.

The most critical factor to the individual in the uptake of research and expert knowledge in their practice and policy-making was identified as having the appropriate skills to be able to effectively search for and critically appraise the materials sourced, and then to translate that into practice and policy-making. I discussed this more fully, arguing that broader issues of information literacy and knowledge management skills were required not for staff just to be end users of information, research and knowledge, but also to be able to participate in the creation of new knowledge through practice insight and wisdom that was specific to the organisation.

The participants of the everyday research users cohort rated their information literacy and knowledge management skills relatively highly, but regardless of rating, the participants reported that having the appropriate skills increased their confidence in accessing and utilising research and expert knowledge in their practice. Whilst it is established that the Agency has tools and training in place to assist in this skill development, the majority of the research participants indicated that they had not received formal training. It was reported by those staff more so in policy based Head Office positions that they were more confident in their skill level and abilities – this may also relate to an overall higher attainment of educational qualifications of this staff group.

It was not established that there was a differential of research access and utilisation between rural and metropolitan staff, however, this chapter has predominately explored and reported on electronic based access to research and expert knowledge.

The majority of research participants reported a positive change in their own individual practice to being more evidence-informed. They directly related this to the research culture of the organisation and the exposure to research materials and engagement mechanisms.
5 ASSESSING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT AND OTHER CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON RESEARCH UTILISATION IN A CHILD WELFARE CONTEXT IN NSW

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the second ‘sphere of influence’ which is the environment or meso level, and includes other contextual factors within the immediate workplace that impact on research and knowledge utilisation for the Agency in focus. In this chapter I explore notions of research utilisation practice and policy theory and examine concepts previously outlined in the literature. These include practice-based factors and research-based factors\(^{211}\) such as how time, support and access (relating to the presentation and type of materials) and available resources impact on the utilisation of research and expert knowledge for the individual in their practice. The chapter specifically addresses factors that both help and hinder research and knowledge utilisation at the workplace environment level by examining the responses from the everyday research users. It also considers the observed barriers and enablers to staff accessing and using research and/or expert knowledge as reported by the managers.

Consideration of external drivers that may impact on research utilisation in the immediate work environment of the case study organisation such as the legalistic and media environments that the Agency intersects with are examined. There is also consideration within this chapter of how different workplace environments within the internal operations of the case study organisation interact with each other, and whether this facilitates or hinders an evidence-informed way of working.

The chapter examines whether there is a differential impact on rural staff versus metropolitan staff and Head Office staff regarding equity of access to existing programs and strategies that promote the use of research and expert knowledge in the workplace. Additionally, it looks at the perceived observable change in the broader practice environment to the concept of, and Agency support of, an evidence-based approach to

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\(^{211}\) Hughes, McNeish, et al., 2000
policy making and service delivery. This chapter predominantly examines the data from the managers cohort and the everyday research users cohort. The focus group data provides an overall picture of the impact of existing mechanisms such as the Research to Practice Program, and whether such a program is having a positive effect across the agency in the context of the practice or workplace environment.

In this chapter I argue that there are key factors that impact on research utilisation, the most prominent being a supportive management relationship and time factors. It is also argued that there is an identifiable difference to the equity of access for staff. That is, staff based in rural locations having an inability to attend planned research events in the metropolitan area. This, when combined with time factors which inhibit access to and utilisation of research, demonstrates a further disadvantage for rural based staff.

5.2 Factors that can influence the utilisation of research

There are key factors that can impact or influence the utilisation of research and expert knowledge in the workplace context which have previously been articulated (Chapter 2) including the work by Walter, Nutley et al\textsuperscript{212} who outlined seven key practices that assist in effective impacts of research utilisation. That is, research must be translated, enthusiasm is required (on the part of the organisation or program and the users), there is contextual analysis, credibility, leadership, support, and integration. Hughes, McNeish et al\textsuperscript{213} in their studies in 2000 also highlighted both practice-based factors and research-based factors that impact on research utilisation. Practice-based factors which included a general lack of training (which incorporated a lack of training in critical appraisal skills), an organisational culture that does not adequately support and value professional development, and the requirement for positive leadership. Research-based factors included a lack of time and money, timing where research may not be contemporary or current to the priorities of practitioners or policymakers, research not being presented in engaging and useful ways, lack of availability and accessibility to research materials within organisations, and translation of research issues arising if findings are conflicting. Other

\textsuperscript{212} Walter, Nutley, et al., 2003b
\textsuperscript{213} Hughes, McNeish, et al., 2000
authors such as Meijers, Janssen et al, and Bogdan-Lovis and Sousa\textsuperscript{214} also hold a similar view to Water, Nutley et al and Hughes, McNeish et al.

With these factors taken into consideration, the following sections provide an overview of the data collected through my research and discuss the factors that help and hinder staff in using research and expert knowledge in their immediate work places within the case study organisation. These factors may have some commonalities to the previous chapter (which look at factors that relate to the individual or micro context such as skill set and information literacy); however, in this chapter these factors (if they are common) are discussed in the context of the immediate workplace environment, for example the individual applied skill base in Chapter 4 directly related to the confidence and competence of the individual, however, in this chapter it relates to how the skill base is supported within the work environment.

**Factors that help staff using research and expert knowledge in their practice in the immediate work environment**

The managers and everyday research users provided responses which identified factors that helped or assisted staff and themselves in undertaking research utilisation processes within the case study organisation on a work environment level. Firstly, the managers were asked to describe some of the factors that help staff in using research in their practice in their immediate work environment that they have observed within the day to day practice area and place of work of their staff members. 11 categories of responses were provided (Figure 5.1) to the question by the participants, with the responses thematically analysed into the three areas of:

1. applied skills
   - identification of appropriate quality material/information
   - skills/training - literature and search strategies
   - able to apply research/incorporate into work
   - able to analyse/critically evaluate material

\textsuperscript{214} Bogdan-Lovis and Sousa, 2006; Meijers, Janssen, et al., 2006
2. background
   - educational background

3. workplace support
   - prompts on templates to incorporate research
   - management - permission/encouragement/expectations
   - accessibility of material and in appropriate formats
   - time to research/engage/discuss/reflect - 'professional lens'
   - commitment of Learning and Development
   - endorsement/acceptance of research in the field.

Figure 5.1 Factors that help with research and expert knowledge utilisation in the immediate work environment – managers

Managers highlighted that management support and encouragement is a key factor to help with research and expert knowledge utilisation in the immediate work environment. Fundamental to the concept of management support and encouragement is the assumption that the managers and leaders themselves are ‘competent research users’ and are confident in their own skills and abilities to effectively encourage and mentor others to become ‘competent research users’. The notion also indicates that supervisors and managers are clearly communicating that research utilisation is part of practice and not separate to it.
This is also the view of Hoatson, that is, “research is not a luxury activity. It is essential to see it as having a crucial role in maximising good practice”\textsuperscript{215}.

Managers themselves (as can be seen from the responses below), spoke about this motivation, encouragement and permission that managers need to provide to staff and saw this as a critical factor to their role as supervisors (as discussed in Chapter 4).

\textit{“They are actively encouraged to seek out and utilise research”}. Manager R4.

\textit{“Permission and encouragement from supervisor”}. Manager R2.

Another factor that enabled or assisted that was identified by the managers was the accessibility to material either via desktop or in other appropriate formats. What was considered by the managers (and the everyday research users) as appropriate were short sharp summaries of research and reports, opportunities to attend forums/seminars, alternate media for seminars and forums such as DVDs and audio taping, and research that is visible or in hard copy. This aided staff in their engagement with research. Firstly research was available in a range of formats and secondly, the short sharp summaries in particular were an efficient way to examine research for relevancy and context prior to further examination of the research. This was also found in the Buckley and Whelan study\textsuperscript{216} which highlighted preferred dissemination methods included summaries, synopses and plain English materials as well as electronic, hard copy and oral methods for dissemination, and in the Holzer study where participants “accessed research through summaries and updates provided by their employer”\textsuperscript{217}. There is also a commonality of employer or workplace generated materials which again assists in the relevancy of research to the practice environment.

So whilst having electronic access to materials is important for staff in the case study organisation for the searching for materials, the availability of research in hard copy (published research reports and research notes) and other formats such as seminars, provides a physical or visual cue to the availability of materials. Also with the seminars

\textsuperscript{215} Hoatson, 1995
\textsuperscript{216} Buckley and Whelan, 2009
\textsuperscript{217} Holzer, 2007 also see Nutley, 2003
and forums, theses forums provide an opportunity for debate and discussion directly with experts and peers. One of the principles of the research seminar series is not only for peers to engage in reflective discussion of the research that is presented, but also to gain insight into how other units respond to and engage research in their practice. It is an unusual situation in this large case study organisation for staff from various offices and units to come together regularly - these forums assist in this peer reflection and debate (and engages with the broader process of research utilisation).

Also of importance was having an appropriate amount of time not only to actively undertake research utilisation activities, but to have time to engage in discussion and reflection of the research or evidence-based information, and to form a professional view point or apply a ‘professional lens’ to the issues at the focus of the research. This notion of the ‘professional lens’ is also viewed as applying professional judgement. There appears to be some conflict arising from what the managers have reported between supervisors supporting and encouraging research and expert knowledge use, and the availability of time which managers or supervisors sanction for such activity. This will be explored more as the data from the everyday research users is considered and in the context of prioritisation of workloads\textsuperscript{218} versus research utilisation activities.

The identification of appropriate quality material, the skill base that underpins this (literature search and research strategies), and the commitment of Learning and Development\textsuperscript{219} to promote, train and itself use industry recognised research, were not reported as frequently as management support, accessibility and time factors, however, they were considered important. The reporting of the commitment from Learning and Development could be considered by the participants as another form of the Agency’s commitment to facilitating the required individual skill set but also more broadly acknowledging that such training should be core competency training available to all staff within the case study organisation.

\textsuperscript{218} ‘Workloads’ relating to field staff are not of a numerical nature, that is all case workers do not have x number of cases, rather caseloads are determined by the individual events that the agency must respond to based on its statutory obligations such as the immediate removal of children due to risk of significant harm and the associated case planning and management functions to support, accommodated and undertake required legal and court processes. This and other activities such as professional development is managed via a \textit{work planner} which is managed within the supervision relationship between the case worker and their manager.

\textsuperscript{219} the corporate state-wide training function for the Agency
These responses build on the previous chapter (assessing the individual factors) and confirm the required skills of technology competency. However, the concept of the identification of appropriate quality material (not just the accessibility of material) should sit alongside the ability of the individual to analyse and critically evaluate research. This response may suggest that there is some hindrance to appropriate quality materials (or the format that research is available in), or may refer to the need to have accessibility to materials in a range of appropriate formats that relate to the context of the practice environment of the case study organisation. Osmond and O’Connor suggest there are clear linkages between practice issues and knowledge - there is a need for practitioners and policy-makers to know where to search for and access relevant materials as well as have the skills to utilise such to inform their practice. They go on to say that the educator or implementers of such programs or approaches need to ensure staff also have an awareness of access points not merely the skills to undertake a search for materials.

This means practitioners require clear understanding of the types of knowledge that can potentially inform their practice. Practice educationalists must ensure that students have an awareness of the diversity of knowledges that may tacitly or explicitly guide decisions and have a clear process/strategy for selecting knowledge that is most helpful to clients.\(^{220}\)

The everyday research users also provided multiple responses to the questions posed surrounding factors that help in research and expert knowledge utilisation in the immediate work place with 11 themes being expressed as outlined in Figure 5.2 below. These were categorised into three key areas:

1. practice applications
   - research that is visible e.g. resource/library section in offices
   - internally generated research/practice solution sessions
   - translating and articulating research to a level of relevancy (by the Agency)

\(^{220}\) Osmond and O’Connor, 2006
2. systems
   - other systems that promote research use such as Performance, Planning and Review (PPR) processes
   - better systems to manage information that is already available

3. workplace support
   - accessibility
   - positive team culture of research use
   - training/developing research skills
   - slowing it down – being less crisis driven and more informed
   - time to research think and discuss
   - professional supervision relationship and leadership.

Figure 5.2 Factors that help research and expert knowledge in the immediate work environment - everyday research users

These key areas differ from the ones established from the managers and are more focussed on the practicalities and systems that promote and support research as opposed to the managers who still had a focus on applied skills and the competence to put those skills into action. It could be hypothesised that the responses are different due to the diversity of participants in the everyday research users being from a broader range of positions across various levels\textsuperscript{221} and were not predominately managers within the case study organisation. Therefore the everyday users responses or views are more about what needs to be provided

\textsuperscript{221} Some managers were included in the everyday research users cohort.
to them practically to be effective research utilisers. The delineation is important as the role that the individual plays within the organisation makes a difference to the way they view the organisation, and the subsequent work environment.

The everyday research users clearly expressed that the most important factor that assists or helps in research and expert knowledge utilisation in the workforce is the support of their immediate management by way of an effective professional supervision relationship and leadership that actively promotes and encourages the use of research and knowledge in their practice. Sheldon and Chilvers\textsuperscript{222} also highlighted that support from management was crucial particularly around the process of incorporating evidence and research into practice and this was fundamental to creating and sustaining an evidence-based culture. This was also discussed by one participant who talked about the importance of both the manager/practitioner interface and also the next level of a more senior manager/casework manager interface to ensure that the workplace environment was skilled and conducive to research utilisation on a number of levels.

\textit{“It seems to me that there's a great deal of emphasis on supervision for case workers when there should be emphasis higher. And managers client services because if the manager case worker isn't getting the appropriate - isn't getting this kind of supervision they're not going to - you know, it's going to be very difficult for them to pass it on (sic)”. Everyday research user M1.}

Similar to the managers, the second most frequently reported response of the everyday research users related to time, whereby there is a need to recognise that the pressure of the work environment is not always conducive to taking time to access and use research and expert knowledge to underpin decision-making and professional judgement. However, participants stated that recognition and permission of putting time aside in the workplace to dedicate to research utilisation processes was deemed as fundamental. An example of this is articulated by a rural participant below.

\textit{“Well I know that in your workload planner there is your two hours I think of professional reading. So that's an identified time allocation.... That is good.}

\textsuperscript{222} Sheldon and Chilvers, 2000
Again, that sort of comes back to the personal thing of whether you’re actually going to utilise that time (sic)”. Everyday research user R2.

There is a tension of whether the individual chooses to use that allocated time even though the supervisor allocates the time. This highlights the issue raised (when discussing the responses to the managers) as to the availability of time versus the perception of wanting to prioritise client and field hours over research and thinking time. This is seen in contrast to the view that research and evidence utilisation is not a luxury but a way of working. This further raises the notion that staff are perhaps not seeing the relationship between how research and expert knowledge can in fact inform and produce positive outcomes. A perception gained from staff interviewed is that it is perhaps unacceptable to prioritise research over client related activities. This implies that these concepts are actually viewed as mutually exclusive to one another. This is contrary to the situation where time is available in workload planners suggesting that learning how to be ‘evidence-informed’ and actually practicing such (as outlined by Thomlison\footnote{Thomlison, 2003} when discussing how to implement evidence-informed programs into agency work practices) needs to be further supported within the case study organisation.

This notion of time also related to the notion of ‘slowing things down’, being less ‘crisis driven’ and more informed. These responses significantly related to staff remaining contemporary within their own knowledge of their practice and being active users of research so to be able to have information and knowledge on hand to use when required, not just as a reactive approach to a situation (casework or policy driven). Therefore dedicated time in workloads was considered important to maintaining professional capability relating to the core business of the organisation. This notion ‘slowing it down’ was articulated by one participant below.

“\textit{I think the time factor for us. It’s like, when we’re going - and I’m talking from a child protection, day-to-day of a child protection worker - it’s the time, the urgency around getting information. We need to slow it down, and as we as managers and leaders need to be armed with the information and be able to have that, you know,}”
accessible for workers when they need to make these really quick decisions (sic).”

Everyday research user R3.

Time is considered by an array of authors\(^{224}\) to be one of the key contextual factors in the workplace that inhibits research and knowledge utilisation and evidence-informed practice. Further responses were grouped around the issues of skill level within the workplace, having the appropriate training and translating research to a level of relevancy to the workplace. These factors have been previously discussed in Chapter 4, however, the factor of internally generated research and practice solutions sessions based on that research, suggests that context relevant research has more practice relevance and is more highly valued than research from other jurisdictions or nations as it is either difficult to ascertain the relevancy of, or more difficult to translate into the practice context of the case study organisation. Research that is based on the practice of the case study organisation is seen as a key factor that helps in research utilisation in the workplace environment as it is less abstract and more directly applicable. It also relates to potentially a reduction in the amount of time it may take to analyse the findings of the research and translate into practice.

Of interest were the responses that related to the visibility of research within the workplace, having a positive research culture in the individual teams and generally being positive towards the availability or accessibility of research and expert knowledge. These factors can be considered as sub factors to that of effective management support and leadership – not only does management support consist of the one to one professional supervision relationship, but also ensuring the workplace environment is generally conducive to an evidence-based approach to practice and policy development via team building and recognition processes.

Another system that promotes research use which was identified by one participant was the Performance Planning and Review (PPR)\(^{225}\) mechanism which is undertaken by all staff regardless of grade within the Agency. Such a mechanism could be used to support the

\(^{224}\) Tomison, 2002; Edmond, Megivern, et al., 2006; Holzer, Lewig, et al., 2008; Buckley and Whelan, 2009(not exhaustive).

\(^{225}\) This process captures and articulates the key result deliverables of individuals that relate to core position descriptions/tasks, and learning and career development over a 12 month period which is reviewed and redeveloped on an annual basis.
development of skills and the workplace to be more research friendly and inclusive. An example of how the PPR process is used to facilitate a research or evidence-informed work environment is illustrated by the participant below.

“We as a team are actually doing a research project of our own, that's in our PPR, that we'll have to present. So that way you get four different research projects brought to the group. So I think factors like that encourage us to keep learning and to keep using research..... I think the biggest things going to be the management, the encouragement to really utilise research, because we do have it there, like, we've got massive resources through the Intranet and stuff with data bases. It's just having that time to use it and to utilise it and to be encouraged to really put it in there (sic)”. Everyday research user R5.

The issue of translating and articulating the research to a level of relevancy, was not only identified as an internal practice issue for staff, but also an issue for the case study organisation to effectively communicate externally to educate the broader community and external drivers of the organisation. This external interface is firstly to promote the evidence-based approach the agency is engaged with, and secondly, the contemporary thinking and evidence that relates to matters at hand. The participant below specifically relates the issue of how the Agency needs to effectively articulate to such entities as the media to ensure there is a commonality of understanding of what evidence-informed and best practice is, however, in considering that, a point of caution would need to be considered to ensure that entities such as the media were not driving the Agency’s research agenda and the focus of delivering outcomes to clients was not lost. What is acknowledged as a potential issue is the broader external communities keeping pace with the knowledge, expertise and direction that the case study organisation is pursuing.

“I think that we somehow need to - and I think we've moved towards this - but I think that as an agency we somehow need to articulate and translate some of that very complex research work into messages that are able to be absorbed and understand and accepted by the community, by the media and by the court system (sic)”. Everyday research user M2.
There are similarities of the responses from both the managers and the everyday research users to the factors that contribute to research utilisation put forward by Walter, Nutley et al and Hughes, McNeish et al, however, electronic research accessibility is not portrayed as an issue for the case study organisation (see the previous discussion in Chapter 4).

Whilst these are the key or core factors that assist the staff of the case study organisation in the immediate workplace environment to access and utilise evidence-based materials and knowledge, the managers and the everyday research users also provided insight into the factors that hindered access to and utilisation of materials in the immediate workplace environment.

*Factors that may hinder staff in using research in their practice in the immediate work environment*

The managers were asked to describe what some of the factors were that hindered staff in using research in their practice in their immediate work environment. There were 10 themes that emerged from the responses provided as demonstrated in Figure 5.3. These were categorised into three key areas of:

1. **applied skills**
   - individual skill and ability in using research/lack of training
   - unsure of validity of research to practice environment
   - fear of incorrect usage of research
   - professional differences

2. **practice applications**
   - access to research and resources
   - legal issues

3. **workplace supports**
   - lack of management/leadership support in using research
   - culture of work environment
   - pressure of work environment
   - lack of time for research and reflection.
A direct connection (or reversal of responses) to the previous question regarding what helps or assists was a lack of availability of time. This was considered to be the most significant hindrance to research utilisation in the immediate work environment reported by the managers. The pressure of the work environment of the case study agency also was a considerable factor which hinders use of research in practice. This specifically related to the nature of the Agency being a statutory child protection agency which as reported by the participants tends to be ‘crisis driven’ with substantial workloads. It was reported that the very nature of being crisis driven and servicing clients first does not give the level of value to searching out, accessing and utilising research in practice. This, with the additional theme of a culture of how the agency undertakes work (which was reported by the participants as not undertaking rigorous research), compounds factors that hinder individual staff utilising research in their daily practice to inform the previously identified ‘professional lens’.

In examining this further, for managers (three from Professional Development and Quality Assurance, and one from a Head Office Unit and not from field based areas) to be reporting there was not a positive culture of research use, it is difficult to ascertain whether this is indicative of all program areas or all locations within the agency, or whether there is a false reporting that the research culture embedded in the Agency is having the positive impact it was devised to have in work environments. In relation to issues of professional differences (disciplines) and therefore the stated difference of interpretation of research,
this could be either a hindrance or a help. A hindrance if staff perceive research for prescriptive purposes only (that mandates the procedural way forward), and a help if to gain diverse opinions that can be taken into consideration as part of the individuals overall professional judgement.

One participant reported that the nature of work and a practitioner’s response to daily fieldwork is intuitive (or instinctive and spontaneous) and not an analytical (or of a reasoned and inquiring) process. This was due to the immediate work place pressures such as workloads and the requirement of immediacy of a response to the statutory child protection work undertaken, however, this could be a hindrance if decisions were purely based on the intuitive.

“Reliance on intuitive rather than analytical process in the direct work of child protection (sic)”. Manager R5.

A practical example of this may be instinctively responding to a situation of chronic neglect and/or poor parenting and not undertaking any further action due to low level risk factors rather than analysing the totality of the patterns and number of risk reports. Evaluating the reports cumulatively may determine more significant risk factors and the sourcing of research and expert knowledge to identify evidence-based interventions may inform more appropriate decisions surrounding case work actions.

A further hindrance was the lack of individual skill and ability to use research or to get appropriate training to do so. This is in direct reversal to those qualities that supervisors and managers deem as a requirement in order to be an effective and competent user of research. This presents as an issue of contention whereby a research culture is supported and encouraged by management, however, there is a perceived lack of appropriate training in how to develop the skills and the opportunity to put these skills into practice so as to be able to analyse and critically evaluate research and expert knowledge, as well as effectively interpret and apply the material to practice in an appropriate and meaningful manner. The participant below also validates the concern of the role of managers and supervisors not assisting in the processes of translation and application of knowledge to the workplace.
“Lack of time/ability to structure and relate to current work ......lack of leadership and confidence at local level in how to relate to current work (sic)”. Manager R7.

A final factor to consider is the legal framework in which practitioners and policy/project officers operate. Participants raised the issues or fears that research may be used incorrectly and/or using research in a legal context and not knowing if it was appropriate to do so or to use research to inform their own professional opinion. This lack of clear parameters within the Agency of when and when not to use research, expert knowledge and evidence-based information to inform practice (and therefore practice outcomes) creates confusion and a level of apprehension. There may also be what Tomison describes as ‘defensive practice’\(^{226}\) where there may be a reluctance of practitioners to work outside stipulated practice procedures for fear of incorrect interpretation of evidence leaving them exposed to criticism or prosecution. Tomison expresses the fears that some practitioners may have and as a result of these fears they are not prepared to accept such risks. For the case study organisation, the issue of internally generated material that is validated and endorsed may be seen by practitioners and supervisors as one mechanism for overcoming these risks and fears as it lessens the need to fully appraise and translate the research or evidence findings as this may have already been done.

The everyday research users identified 11 core themes or factors that hindered their access to and utilisation of research and expert knowledge in their practice and policy-making (as presented in Figure 5.4 below). Again three key areas were established:

1. applied skills
   - research integration
   - lack of confidence in self/skills

2. practice applications
   - travel to forums
   - relevancy/limited research to topic
   - access (electronic) and storage of information

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\(^{226}\) Tomison, 2002
3. workplace supports
   - lack of supervision/monitoring of research use for practice
   - external drivers
   - workload/crisis driven
   - non-conducive environment
   - lack of time
   - too policy driven.

These three key areas are common across both the managers and everyday research users, however, tend to again be more practically focussed, that is, the everyday research users are identifying more concrete or practical areas or topics that have a direct bearing on enabling or hindering research utilisation within the immediate work environment as opposed to more strategic or bigger picture issues.

Figure 5.4 Factors that hinder research and expert knowledge utilisation in the immediate work environment - everyday research users

Again without question, the issue of the lack of availability of time or the perception of a lack of availability of time rated as the most critical factor hindering access and use of evidence-based materials. Holzer claims that time for reading and research should be “seen as legitimate forms of professional development and the need for management support and endorsement in order to create an environment that is conducive to accessing and applying
research”. This also confirms the previous discussion on how management supports the use of and ensures time is made available for such activities.

Adding to the notion of ‘defensive practice’ previously raised; it was reported that the lack of time may be a myth by one participant where in some instances staff are being involved in the ‘busyness’ of the work environment due to either a lack of motivation (not previously reported as an issue in data of my research) or confidence within their skills and abilities. This is highlighted by a specialist unit staff member below as an observation she has seen in practice.

“Yeah, time, people say we just haven't got time which I think is something that's a myth in some cases. I know some people are overloaded and things but in my day-to-day practice I encourage them to even make time on their workload planners to actually be able to have an hour a week or something to look at a piece of research so they can actually develop those skills in accessing it”. Everyday research user R4.

It is difficult to determine whether this view is more widespread or not. It was raised by other participants that time is allocated in workloads for research activities as discussed earlier in this chapter (see quote by R2), however not articulated as a myth regarding the accessing and/or the prioritisation of that time.

Access to electronic materials was the next most frequently reported hindrance. This again is in complete opposition to the previously reported results based on the data from the case study organisation where access to material was not deemed as an issue. In this case, the issue of access related to the vast volume of information available, how to access previous searches (literature and other) on specific issues, and the storage and retrieval of that information to make best use of time that is available, not the issue of basic access. This issue of having systems or processes in place to access previous literature searches undertaken by the Agency Library and managing the vast array of information is described by the participant below.

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227 Holzer, 2007
228 also see Buckley and Whelan, 2009
“Simple things like the storage of already found information. That can be a barrier because a lot of times we end up reinventing the wheel and doing searches 100 times for information we've already searched for. So how do we categorise this and manage this information properly so that it's easily accessible in the future, hinders the use of it. It certainly hinders the most time-efficient use”. Everyday research user HO2.

Adding to this observation is that the Agency may at times have an overwhelming amount of research and knowledge materials available which may be daunting to staff in trying to establish where to start searching for information.

The issue of the lack of self confidence in research use (previously discussed as an individual factor in the gaining of the appropriate skills in Chapter 4) also was reported as relating to the contextual factors of the immediate work environment as skill confidence is not solely based on whether the individual has the required skills but also on the environment in which they practice those skills. The everyday research users highlighted the ongoing requirements for appropriate modelling and encouragement of leaders and managers in the promotion of a conducive environment to apply research and expert knowledge within the work place. The lack of supervision and monitoring of research use within practice also had a direct impact on the understanding of when it was or was not appropriate to use research and expert knowledge, and a lack of ability to integrate or translate the evidence-based materials with practice or to inform professional judgement. This was also highlighted when examining the data from the managers.

From the responses provided, the nexus between accessing and then translating research and expert knowledge is clearly a paramount concern in the immediate practice environment. This is also compounded by the crisis driven work environment and lack of availability of time which dictates the workers prioritisation of tasks and therefore evidence-based research and knowledge may be seen as not as important to addressing the needs of the matter or situation at hand (rather than being complementary). An example of this is seen through the response below.

“Yeah, I think the practice environment dictates what we do”. Everyday research user M3.
Like the practitioner above, another everyday research user raised the issue that the work of the Agency is too policy driven as opposed to evidence-based driven. Again this suggests the practice and/or policy environment rather than evidence is driving the organisation not acknowledging how each of those components can actually complement each other.

“It's much more of a policy procedure driven agency rather than say an evidence based critique of stuff, critique of materials (sic)”. Everyday research user HO1.

This further raises the question of the input that the practitioners from the field do or do not contribute to the development of research and policy which ultimately affects their everyday work. Clarence\(^{229}\) raises the issue that evidence-based policy-making is assumed to be linear in nature rather than an interactive relationship between evidence and policy, and also suggests that evidence-based materials can be incorporated into a rational policy making process, however, policy making is neither linear nor rational in nature. This is also compounded by the participant’s views of the lack of practice input into the policy-making process and the incorporation of a range of knowledges that should effectively impact on such policy-making. This creates a policy versus practice tension or as one participant from a Head Office unit articulates, a Head Office (policy) and field (operations) divide.

“Whilst it’s obviously not a front line business we do support the front line here..... It is that quite often, well we don’t quite have time to do that.....I think as well - and this might be a bit controversial - I think that the separation in the organisation that we have between policy and operations is a barrier in itself. Because quite often policy is seen as the ones who have the luxury and the ability to do that, and we need to get out there and practically apply (sic)”. Everyday research user HO4.

The point the participant makes in openly acknowledging the field/Head Office divide shows insight of how the policy development process within the case study organisation needs to consider practitioner experience and wisdom to ensure applicability. This is also described by Schofield where:

\(^{229}\) Clarence, 2002
...it is unlikely that policy designers can anticipate the operational consequences of their initiatives because they are too far removed from operational management\textsuperscript{230}.

The participant above is also acknowledging that Head Office does not have the same constraints placed on them as in the operations sections and therefore time to research may be more feasible if based in a Head Office position/unit.

So whilst there is an intent in the case study organisation to have an integrated policy development process (similar to those described by key authors such as Bridgman and Davis, Bardach, and Colebatch\textsuperscript{231} in the policy field), it is not clear that all policy development processes in the case study organisation are evidence-based or alternatively do not take into consideration or account the practice based knowledge and issues of the field. This was acknowledged as an issue and has an impact on the practitioners and policy-makers practice. This also raises the issue of evidence-based (or scientific) knowledge production for use for policy formulation and implementation. Authors such as Almeida and Báscolo\textsuperscript{232} suggest it is not feasible where the goals and purpose of the knowledge production or research are distinct or different to the goals and purpose of the policy development and implementation leading to the inability to have that interaction or exchange between the two purposes. This leads to a potential further divide between policy and operations.

This is also acknowledged by Holzer, Lewig et al, and Shonkoff\textsuperscript{233} relating to the different cultures of research use and the need to have an interface between the various knowledge and practice communities to address the immediacy of some issue raised by practitioners, and the institutional issues raised by the policy-makers as to why policy is formulated in a particular way.

External drivers were also seen as a barrier as previously discussed in the section on factors that help or assist in the access to and use of research and expert knowledge. Whilst there is a need to be able to communicate effectively with external communities and

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\textsuperscript{230} Schofield, 2004, also see Wyatt, 2002; Nutley, 2003; Proctor and Rosen, 2008
\textsuperscript{231} Bardach, 2000; Bridgman and Davis, 2004; Colebatch, 2006
\textsuperscript{232} Almeida and Báscolo, 2006
\textsuperscript{233} Shonkoff, 2000; Holzer, Lewig, et al., 2008
drivers such as the court and other forensic systems and the media, it has a direct impact or is a barrier when staff are fearful of their abilities and skills to appropriately utilise the various materials in such a legal environment as outlined below by one participant. This however, does not necessarily reduce the overall motivation to utilise and include research, but has a bearing on how and when it is used.

“I think people are scared of research and of using research within the legal context. Like using it in your secondary risk of harm assessments because the question is always asked in our day-to-day practice, what if it goes to court”. Everyday research user R4.

This response is consistent with those provided from the managers where there is a hesitation or fear to use research in a legal context. Firstly as it is viewed by the courts as superfluous to the requirements of court and legal processes, and secondly, concerns the lack of confidence of staff using research where staff report a fear of being cross examined and not effectively articulating the stance they are taking based on the research rather than solely the forensic evidence.

A further barrier reported by the everyday research users was the limited or lack of readily available research that was relevant to the core business of the Agency or the issue at hand. This again related to the issue of efficient use of time and workload pressures in dictating the availability of time to access and utilise evidence-based materials both in an operations practice and policy development sense. It also related to the general availability of material that was context specific to the NSW child welfare system. Again it was acknowledged that the existing internal programs and structures that generated materials were an excellent source due to the relevancy of the material; however, the sheer expanse of the issues that practitioners and policy-makers dealt with meant that those internal programs could not generate enough material to meet the demand. This is in the context of internally generated and internally commissioned research activities.

A final theme raised the issue of travel to seminars. The issue was more than just one of transportation, but rather of equality of access to the various research events and seminars that the Agency facilitates for those staff working in the more rural and remote areas across the state. Traditionally it has been an organisational choice to centralise these function,
however, there have been occasions when research seminars have been repeat delivered\textsuperscript{234} in key regional centres. This was discussed by a manager located in a remote location (see response below) and was perceived as a disadvantage to those staff situated in rural and remote locations who either did not have the resources nor the availability of time (compounded or multiplied given the time it takes to travel to a metropolitan location) to attend such forums. This disadvantage was not only the physical presence at such forums, but also not having the opportunity to interact and discuss concepts and issues with the presenter and other staff outside the immediate unit which provided fresh new ideas and debates.

\begin{quote}
\textit{``The only barrier would be the travel for the seminars and sort of things like that.....sometimes you miss out because they're not usually held in our area...so there's a level of I suppose of additional access to research in the metropolitan areas as opposed to the more rural and remote localities''. Everyday research user R1.}
\end{quote}

The participant did go on to discuss alternate dissemination or media options such as the recorded DVDs of some of the seminars\textsuperscript{235} and how these are distributed to all unit, however, felt that these were received in the unit many weeks later and were not as dynamic given no opportunity for interaction with the presenter and other staff. However, just receiving the material was considered very positive even though there was a disparity of availability between metropolitan/Head Office and rural locations. Similar to the Hagell and Spencer study\textsuperscript{236} (which considered audiotape as a method for social care staff keeping up to date with research) the DVDs produced from the internal seminar services were welcomed, but the research was rarely followed up as an interactive approach of discussion, but was more readily accepted to that of a lecture style. This was also articulated by focus group participants (see one example below) regarding the DVD production of the internally run seminars. The watching of the seminars on DVD, and the lack of the opportunity for interaction and discussion with the presenter that was usually found at the ‘live seminars’, did not facilitate a translation of information to practice.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{234} Seminars would be run in a metropolitan centre and then the same seminar would be run in a regional centre the following day.
\textsuperscript{235} The Research to Practice Program only records limited seminars each year due to financial constraints, therefore not all staff have access to the materials from that seminar series or other research forums that are held.
\textsuperscript{236} Hagell and Spencer, 2004
\end{flushright}
“...the presentations on video are often dry, long-winded and difficult to attach to practice (sic)”. Child and Family Focus Group participant (Coffs Harbour).

What this indicates is that several participants are demonstrating that learning occurs in a number of ways, particularly through interaction and not just a delivery or dissemination of information. Learning styles need to be taken into account when attempting to develop a workplace environment conducive to research practices and utilisation. The use of alternate dissemination or media options for research and expert knowledge particularly for rural and remote staff needs further exploration to ensure the timely and possibly more interactive mechanism for staff. Both Murphy and McDonald, and Pain et al\(^{237}\) concluded there is very little difference between research utilisation in rural and remote particularly relating to electronic access as is with this case study, however, in this case study organisation, the vast geographic nature of the service delivery system does impact on utilisation processes if technological options are not available, and participation in face to face processes is not an option.

Whilst both cohorts indicated the same categories or key areas that hinder staff in research utilisation activities (applied skills, practice applications, and workplace supports), there was a divergence. Managers were more concerned with the pressures of the immediate work environment (time and priority setting) whereas the everyday research users were more concerned with practicalities of research utilisation such as a lack of supervision and monitoring of research, inequity of access to non-electronic based research activities, and the identification of relevancy of research to the case study organisation. Both cohorts however, report fear and apprehension of using research in a legal context.

### 5.3 How are existing strategies within the case study organisation impacting on an evidenced-informed approach?

When considering the broader dissemination strategies that are in place in the current workplace environment, the focus group participants were asked to consider whether the

\(^{237}\) Murphy and McDonald, 2004; Pain, Magill-Evans, et al., 2004
existing strategies put into place by the Agency, predominantly the Research to Practice Program, were effective and/or were having an impact (either positive or negative). The responses (n=58) were mostly positive with 65% indicating a positive impact, 33% indicating a somewhat positive impact and a one person indicating no impact (see Figure 5.5 below). The number of participants (n=58) was less than the total number of participants (n=67) due to no response being provided by some participants or participants stating they had no knowledge of existing strategies and programs and therefore not providing a formal response.

**Figure 5.5 Total percentages focus group participants - is the Research to Practice Program making an impact on practice/policy? (n=58)**

The two examples below are staff that did respond but had no knowledge of existing internal strategies.

“Never heard of Research to Practice Program until now”. Child & Family Practitioner Focus Group participant (Blacktown).

“No idea – have not had the opportunity to access it (sic)”. Partnerships and Planning Focus Group participant (Illawarra).

These responses are very divergent to the majority of responses gathered through the focus groups, managers and everyday research users in that the majority are aware of and use the internal Research to Practice Program. These responses raise questions of whether there are isolated instances of staff not knowing about the existing mechanisms that can assist in
their research utilisation uses and whether these staff have had induction into the broader agency (including the research culture), and management or supervision support. One of the participants who had no knowledge is from the Partnership and Planning stream (and these teams are located within the Regional Office structures). It was noted from the focus group responses that this program group felt that there is a lack of relevancy of research to their business. The level of promotion and interaction of materials may be minimal for this group, however, it was reported by a Partnership and Planning staff member of a very positive interface (see response below as one example) that indicates that Regional Office based staff regardless of program stream do have knowledge of and access the internal Research to Practice Program.

“Encourages debate around issues – makes work contemporary (sic)”. Partnerships and Planning Focus Group participant (Nepean).

The majority of the Partnership and Planning program stream who participated in the focus groups stated the Research to Practice Program was having a positive impact (see Figure 5.6 below which provides a representation of the responses by program area).

![Figure 5.6 Is the Research to Practice Program making an impact on practice/policy?](image)

Significantly, the Learning and Development participants agreed 100% that the Research to Practice Program and the dissemination methods utilised is making a positive impact on practice/policy as articulated below. This group is responsible for the development of curriculum that meets practice requirements.
“Influences curriculum content of Learning and Development project officers thus practice of case workers (sic)”. Learning and Development Focus Group participant (Bidura Office of Learning and Development based at Glebe).

The participant is relating how the Learning and Development Branch utilises materials and by doing so creates an evidence-informed curriculum; this has a flow on effect to the direct practice of the field workers or practitioners. This effect has been aided by the availability of the Research to Practice Program and the broader Research Centre and the products that they produce.

Figure 5.7 provides an overview of the responses which the focus group participants provided as to whether the existing Research to Practice Program was having an impact on practice and policy.

Figure 5.7 Existing research utilisation strategies and impacts on practice and policy in the Agency
These responses fall into the keys areas of:

1. positive use and impact/promotion/accessibility

2. areas for improvement
   - use of real life examples relevant to the Agency’s practice when translating research and expert knowledge to practice
   - not actively promoted in Regional Offices

3. rural and metro divide
   - impacts (positive) more on metro e.g. seminars
   - depends on access to products/material due to resourcing.

The issue of the Research to Practice Program not being actively promoted in Regional Office locations, confirms the discussion previously that some program streams and locations in the case study agency do not, or may not have the same level of access to, or equity in gaining materials, resources and assistance in undertaking research utilisation processes, or simply may not have the knowledge that strategies are in place to facilitate such. It is difficult to gauge whether this is due to a general lack of promotion, or the targeting of particular work groups such as field practitioners, or managers/supervisors not understanding or being inducted appropriately in order to support their staff. What it does create is a level of disadvantage to pockets of staff within the case study agency regarding avenues and knowledge sources to firstly, assist in ensuring their practice is contemporary and secondly, providing an avenue to tap into internally generated knowledge and research sources that can facilitate their practice.

The other key issue that needs further examination is again the reporting (16% of Child and Family Practitioner focus group participants) that metropolitan staff have significantly more opportunities to access and attend research based activities particularly around attendances at seminars and other planned forums. The Child and Family Practitioner focus group was the only program stream to report this (and also reported by the everyday research user R1 as previously outlined).
This issue of access or attendance of rural staff at the seminars was also highlighted by a Professional Development and Quality Assurance staff member (rurally located). They indicated that even though such activities as the seminars provided considerable information, it is not practical to attend the session due to distance and the cost to get there (in terms of both time factors and financial resourcing).

“I think it provides more concise information which is great when considering trends in practice, theory or research findings...attending sessions is great but not always practical (sic)”. Professional Development and Quality Assurance Focus Group participant.

This issue would indicate that there is an observed or perceived inequity for rural and remote staff to be able to engage and interact across the range of planned research activities by the case study organisation. So whilst there may be no reported disadvantage with electronic access for staff, the workplace context (including geographic locality) does impact on access to more formal research activities (and the full spectrum of research utilisation processes). This relates to the access to products and materials based on availability of resources within the immediate work environment which could be human, financial, and technological in nature.

There was a diverse range of responses that fell into the ‘other’ category in Figure 5.7 of both a positive and negative nature including:

- external factors such as the narrow view of the judicial system in accepting the use of research and expert knowledge submitted to complement evidence
- the Agency Library provides previous literature searches that can be used by other staff and assists in accessing other research and sources of knowledge
- the Research to Practice Program provides ‘permission’ to access and utilise research and expert knowledge within the Agency and assists in providing quality research. This is seen as the broader organisation providing permission not just the supervisor in the immediate work place
- there is often a ‘bombarding of information’ (whether it is relevant information or not). At times there may be too much information when decisions need to be
made swiftly. This then impacts on how, if and when research is used in practice and policy-making processes.

- alternate media for seminars and other formal research activities to assist with access such as webinars and DVDs need to be identified and made available in a timely way.

Ultimately, however, the general response was that the Research to Practice Program was making a significant contribution to the practice and policy of the case study agency, giving confidence in how, when and where to access research and expert knowledge to assist in the practitioners’ decision-making and professional judgement. This can be summed up by the responses by the focus group participants below. The response from a Research Network Focus Group participant is articulating that the Research to Practice Program and other existing strategies have assisted in knowing where to find quality materials, but also the various research materials have assisted in increasing knowledge of particular issues and therefore it further assists in informed decision-making. This overall provides increased confidence in how the participant makes and applies decision-making.

“I’m more confident in my decision-making and understanding of issues”. Research Network Focus Group participant.

The participant from the Partnerships and Planning Focus Group below demonstrates the impact of having a research culture in place – this promotes learning in the immediate work environment – not just of individual practitioners but for the organisation in building an evidence–base to it operations. This provides motivation to practitioners to also be evidence-informed.

“It inspires me to study, I very much appreciate the learning culture that is promoted within DoCS – the priority given to “education” and feel confident about the evidence base to our work that we are promoting (sic)”. Partnerships and Planning Focus Group participant (Nepean).

The final quote from the Child and Family Focus Group participant below provides a practical example of how research specific to the Out of Home Care (OOHC) program
stream within the case study organisation has had an impact on policy and practice. This intersection between research and policy/practice is clearly observed for this participant.

“The Research to Practice program has made an impact on my practice. I have found research and discussion that has been presented on OOHC in particular to be very useful on reflecting on current practice and policy within the Department (sic)”. Child and Family Practitioner Focus Group participant.

Furthermore, the internal mechanisms to promote and generate research usage provided credibility, or a strong evidence base to the work the case study organisation undertakes. The notions of acceptance and collaboration relates to those external drivers and other communities such as central agencies (Treasury, and Premier and Cabinet) where the evidence-base can influence external outcomes such as the submissions for new programs or policy interventions based on research and expert knowledge sources.

“Because the Department is using the Research to Practice Program to influence its work, I believe there is more credibility to what we are doing. Having an evidence base that underpins our work means that there are more opportunities for acceptance and collaboration (sic)”. Partnerships and Planning Focus Group Participant (Southern Highlands).

It is clearly established that the focus groups determined that the internal Research to Practice Program has had a positive impact on practice and policy; however, dissemination methods could be improved to ensure equity of access to all staff of the case study organisation.

**Observed changes in the practice environment**

Building on the observations of the focus groups, the everyday research users were asked whether they had observed any changes in the practice environment in which they had worked (see Figure 5.8).
Overwhelmingly 93% (or 14 out of 15) participants stated there has been an observable shift in the practice and policy environment towards an evidence-base and the use of research and expert knowledge. Mostly the participants indicated that this shift had occurred over a period of approximately five years. The observed changes started to occur around the same time the Research to Practice Program commenced, and other key research activities such as the creation of a Research Network and research agenda were being developed within the Agency.

The response below captures the view of a specialist staff member talking about how it is not just the Research to Practice Program that has made a contribution to such a shift, but other program areas that have built on an evidence-informed way of working and a program area that specifically is also mandated to be ‘champions’ of research and expert knowledge usage through coaching, case review and practice improvement programs (the Professional Development and Quality Assurance Program). However, the participant is of the view that it has been more successful in some localities versus others, therefore, it cannot be generalised that the observed changes of practice to be more evidence-informed, are consistent state-wide. This inconsistency may relate to several factors such as the lack of specialist staff from the Professional Development and Quality Assurance Program (PDQA) and other research champions being available in all workplace locations, a less than supportive workplace environment where management do not support research utilisation as an everyday work practice, or a lack of resources whereby all priority is shifted to immediate response work.

“I think there has been a shift in some ways in that the whole PDQA thing. The development of PDQA as a stand alone. This is important. I think that's been very significant. How well that's carried through in different places is moot I think to
some degree. In some places very well, in others not so well but as a message to the department I think it's been critical (sic)”. Everyday research user M1.

A participant from a Head Office unit articulates that the changes observed are positive and significantly rely on how management within the work environment support and promote the use of an evidence-based way of working and facilitate research and expert knowledge utilisation processes. The participant also raised how this gives credibility to the work that the Agency undertakes (both internally and externally as policy-makers). This could again be reflective of the New Public Management approach, and also communicates how the case study organisation put into place effective organisational learning practices supported by a broader organisational culture which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

"Yes, absolutely I have and I think it comes down to ....it's about the leadership input. Having been in the unit over a couple of directors I've seen the shift so where once use of research would be sporadic and if the situation allowed for a bit of extra time to go there we could go there. It's shifted to a situation where it's accepted that we need that background before we can proceed generally and so I think there's now an understanding, particularly - so from my perspective in my unit - that for us to be credible in the field we need to put our money where our mouth is and back up the things we say”. Everyday research user HO2.

The participant who reported that they were ‘unsure’ (see below) was an employee who had not been with the Agency for a particularly long time. This participant described that change to an evidence-informed way of practice was not really observable due to the fact that they felt it was a clear expectation or embedded in the way of working, within the organisation culture of a norm for practice and policy making. That is, if there was a knowledge gap, there was an expectation from the Agency or in the workplace that you would gather the relevant knowledge and research, or access someone who can facilitate access to such.

"It’s hard for me to say really, because I haven’t been here for an overly long time and uppermost in everyone’s mind that I have worked with thus far has always been the best interest for the child and the client. So whatever is going to work for them and it’s always been promoted that if we don’t have that knowledge, to find out
what’s going on for them and how we can help, then we ask somebody who does”. Everyday research user R2.

The participant also raised a further tension in their response, that is, the best interest of the client is always at the front of the practitioners mind. However, it needs to be recognised that best interests and policy may not always align.

It could be concluded that the everyday research users did observe a change to a more evidence-informed way of working within the case study organisation over the past five years. This change coincided with the Agency’s shift towards introducing a research culture via the Research to Practice Program and other research activities as well as Professional Development and Quality Assurance activities, however, it is not possible to gauge whether this impact is consistent state-wide. What is reported from the participants is that there is a clearly observable change in the way the case study organisation is undertaking its policy development and service delivery. This is succinctly expressed by one participant below.

“Yes, I get the sense that during the last few years, DoCS policy development/practice/operational procedures increasingly rely on the research findings”. Professional Development and Quality Assurance Focus Group participant.

5.4 The NSW Statutory Child Welfare Agency and research utilisation: Examining the work environment and other contextual factors

In examining the results of the various cohorts (focus groups, managers and everyday research users) within the case study organisation in the immediate work environment level, there are clearly some key contextual factors that enable the use of research and expert knowledge by the Agency and also by practitioners. If these key factors are not well supported, they then become factors that hinder the research utilisation practices.

The data examined shows that to establish a workplace environment or climate of research and expert knowledge usage requires:
• effective support at the management or leadership level
• autonomy - the work role you hold within the organisation
• time to be able to undertake research utilisation processes and reflect on findings
• access to quality materials that are relevant and user friendly
• an infrastructure and resources to support an evidence-informed work practice environment.
• communication/promotion, and
• education to establish and maintain skill level.

**Management support or practice climate** in the form of immediate management assistance in skilling up the practitioner, actively encouraging the use of research and expert knowledge, and assisting in the translation of research into the practice within the case study organisation are deemed to be vital in the immediate work environment. This is to ensure an evidence-informed way of working is embedded. Participants were clear in articulating that if these factors were not in play, then it became a hindrance in applying research utilisation practices and principles to their work. This also builds on the previous chapter regarding supervisors being a source for accessing expert knowledge and research.

The everyday research users are more focussed on the practicalities and systems that promote and support research as opposed to the managers who had a focus on applied skills and the competence to put those skills into action. Everyday users are more concerned about what needs to be provided to them practically to be effective research utilisers.

Holzer, Lewig et al suggest that **work role or the position** you have in the organisation does influence access to and application of research and in turn provides some capacity to change or alter practice due to a level of autonomy. This was reported in my research as also a factor and therefore the increasing needs for supervisors to provide leadership to encourage and support research usage.

It is reported in this chapter that there is a Head Office and operations divide. This also relates both to the work role or position held within the organisation and subsequently the

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238 Holzer, Lewig, et al., 2008
availability of time. The perception that Head office staff do not have a crisis-driven nature to their work and therefore have more time to undertake research utilisation activities was a reported issue as was the issue that Head Office do not take into account the practice wisdom of the field staff when developing policy.

The role that managers and supervisors play is pivotal within the case study organisation and this needs to be considered or addressed due to reports that in some places there is a view that there is a culture of not undertaking rigorous research as part of normal workplace activities and/or practice.

The factor of *time* is also crucial, time within daily workload to undertake research utilisation activities including reflecting on the evidence and translating that into practice. Participants also reported that there was a nexus between a policy of having an allocation of time available and that of being able to access that time. The issue of either time use or lack of time due to work prioritisation and capacity issues, or due to other reasons such as defensive practice, a lack of engagement or working under a supervisor that doesn’t actively encourage taking the allocated time, has a direct bearing on whether research utilisation activities take place. Fundamentally it was reported that time was a key factor that needed to be made available – if not, the lack of time became a hindrance to implementing research utilisation processes.

The issues of *access* within the immediate work environment related not to electronic access but having materials and *resources* and the *infrastructure* available to ensure relevant material to the Agency was available quickly. It also related to having materials already translated identifying practice implications/translation for the case study organisation. Having infrastructure such as the Research to Practice Program and alternate dissemination methods\(^{239}\) does facilitate research and expert knowledge utilisation in the case study organisation, however, it is reported in this chapter that dissemination is not equitable beyond electronic access to materials to those staff in rural and remote locations.

Whilst the data captured did not speak to the specific issues of child welfare, it was clear that the various cohorts believed that if there was not an adequate understanding of those

\(^{239}\) Ibid. for further discussion on barriers and enablers relating to infrastructure.
issues such as engagement with families, types and impacts of abuse, out of home care, early intervention and prevention strategies etc, it would lead to difficulty in identifying appropriate evidence-based material and knowledge that could effectively inform practice. This is further supported by the notion from the various cohorts of the necessity to identify materials that are child welfare practice relevant to support professional judgement and practice decisions.

**Communication and promotion** of the existing internal strategies is paramount to ensure all staff, no matter what stage of their career with the Agency, are aware of and have access to the strategies in place. This is articulated by one Head Office participant and gives clear examples of how the use of communication and promotion could be put into place. This assists in the immediate work environment, keeping the strategies and access point at the front of the minds of practitioners and policy makers.

“I think we could use our own research, the practice unit, a lot better than we do. I don’t know why there’s a reluctance to do that. I mean, I’m surprised when people don’t even know that we’ve got a library, let alone that it’s downstairs and they walk past it every day. It’s just things like that. I know that that unit has on a number of occasions done a bit of a PR push, and I think maybe it’s something that needs to be - when people start work, when they have a project, it needs to be something that’s considered”. Everyday research user HO4.

Communication and promotion also was reported to relate to sharing knowledge and keeping connected with external agencies and communities. This was seen as an integral strategy in the immediate work environment to educate others on how the Agency uses an evidence-informed approach to policy development and service delivery.

**Education,** or the teaching of the required skill base as core competency training, also assists the utilisation of research in the immediate work environment. It was reported by the various cohorts that the applied skill base is required. Again without enabling the development of the skills training, it became a hindrance. Ensuring that staff have formal training to establish the core skill base (as discussed in Chapter 4) needs to be considered as part of the training regime of the organisation, again, not as a one off but as an ongoing commitment in the workplace.
Implications for practice and policy development

Managers need to establish a lead role in facilitating research utilisation processes and developing a team-based culture which is conducive to research and expert knowledge utilisation. Managers themselves need to be competent research users in order to model and promote an evidence-informed way of practice.

The applied skill-based should be considered as a core competence for all staff as one way of the Agency ensuring there is on-going training and education. In order to have effective uptake of research, particularly internally generated research, more equitable dissemination and translation methods need to be considered for rural and remote staff members across all program streams. Research being disseminated and translated is more effective if in short sharp summaries that directly relate to the operations case study agency to facilitate translation into the practice context. Another implication for practice is the reported confusion regarding time availability which is critical for decision-making processes and outcomes.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how the immediate work environment (or the meso level) within the case study organisation impacts on the individual and their ability to access and utilise research and expert knowledge. Concepts and practices that have stemmed from the introduction of NPM have played a role in the way the case study organisation supports an evidence-informed practice climate. It is also been established through the analysis of the responses that the case study organisation faces similar challenges to those barriers and enablers of research utilisation practices as outlined by Walter, Nutley et al, and Hughes, McNeish et al. I have highlighted that there are critical factors that need to be in place in the immediate work environment to effect research utilisation processes and two of the key factors are management support and time. However, other factors such as access, infrastructure, the work role of the individual, communication and education all play a role.

There was little differentiation of responses from the various research cohorts except the everyday research users were more practice application oriented in their responses than the managers. It was reported that there was a majority view that the existing strategies and
dissemination methods employed in the workplace were effective. However, it has been established that there is a Head Office/metropolitan verses rural and remote divide creating inequity of access for those staff based in more rural and remote locations regarding being able to access all research based activities other than those provided electronically by the Agency. The majority of participants also reported an observed change of practice in the immediate work environment in both the practice and policy settings, to that of a more evidence-informed way of practice. For the newer staff it was reported that there is an expectation of working in an evidence-informed way from the outset of employment.

In essence, there are immediate workplace environment factors that do impact on the individual in accessing and utilising research and expert knowledge to inform their practice. These factors as outlined above need to be in play to affect an evidence-informed way of working. If they are not in place, then these factors themselves become hindrances to staff.
6 ASSESSING THE ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON RESEARCH UTILISATION IN A CHILD WELFARE CONTEXT IN NSW

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the factors within the third ‘sphere of influence’ - the organisational context (macro level) and factors that impact on the agency regarding research-utilisation and evidence-based practice. I specifically examine the organisational factors that influence the use of research such as organisational culture and how it supports certain approaches such as evidence-based practice and policy-making. I also discuss whether organisational culture can also be used as a tool to bring about change, that is, a renewed focus on how policy and practice is delivered in an evidence-informed way.

It is important to differentiate between workplace environment (meso) and the organisational environment (macro) particularly in the case of a very large decentralised service delivery agency where workplaces are geographically far from the centralised functions of the agency. The emphasis in this chapter is how the broader level of operations of the case study organisation facilitates or hinders research utilisation and whether executive leadership and a research culture play a significant role. The meso level was particularly concerned with the actual communities of practice or service delivery components and their interface with research and expert knowledge, not the high order strategic identity and culture of the case study organisation that will be considered in this chapter.

It is important to consider whether there are factors that are unique to the organisational sphere of influence; or if there are similarities with factors identified in the individual and environmental (work place) spheres of influence and how the organisational context impacts on those factors. Other considerations will include how the organisational parameters for practice and policy-making (rules, roles and responsibilities, and autonomy) impact, as well as the impact of leadership.
A key focus in this chapter is the consideration of organisational theory and the synergy of fit of evidence-based practice and policy-making with organisational theory. In particular, I examine how key aspects of organisation impacts on research utilisation in a mandated statutory child welfare agency and how this facilitates or hinders the individuals research utilisation processes. The chapter also examines whether there is a differential impact on rural staff versus metropolitan staff and Head Office staff regarding equity of access to existing programs and strategies that promote the use of research and expert knowledge in the workplace. It also looks at the perceived observable change in the broader practice environment to the concept of, and Agency support of, an evidence-based approach to policy making and service delivery. Both the everyday research users and managers provide insight into the factors that help or hinder research and expert knowledge utilisation at the organisational level for individuals, whilst the everyday research user responses are the focus in considering the use of an evidence-informed approach to bring about and enact change within the case study organisation.

It is argued in this chapter that without a fundamental culture that promotes and gives permission to enact a research based culture and way of operating, it would be extremely difficult to change the direction of practice to that of an evidence-informed way within the case study organisation. It is also argued that this research culture must go hand-in-hand with leadership which both promotes and models research utilisation processes and activities.

6.2 The role of culture and organisational learning in supporting evidence-informed approaches

Public sector organisations and their cultures have changed and transformed at significant speed over the last 30 years since New Public Management, and as Bourgon expresses, what a public service looks like is becoming less predictable in a world of innovation, flexibility and globalisation. Public sector organisations tend to be more constrained by

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240 See Hatch, 1993; Cahill, 1997; Hatch, 1997; Easterby-Smith, Antonacopoulou, et al., 2004; Elkjaer, 2004; Smith, 2004a; Smith, 2004b; Phillips, 2006, Jones, 2004; Austin and Claassen, 2008a; Austin and Claassen, 2008b

241 Bourgon, 2008
legislation and imposed controls than their private sector counterparts, however, regardless of those constraints a public sector organisation culture does promote the need for continuous improvement and responsiveness of policy and services to citizens. Therefore the right balance between controls and constraints needs to occur with innovation and a progressive culture. An evidence-informed approach to policy making and practice is such an approach. That is transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and improving performance all within the context of delivering public service, and public value based on evidence of what works (the learning and implementing of new innovations).

Traditionally the literature on organisational learning and the learning organisation has not only focussed on the individual’s ability to learn but also the ability to see the organisation as a large system\textsuperscript{242}. The organisation in this case study is itself a community of knowledge and practice. Brown and Duguid\textsuperscript{243} suggest that a unified approach to actual policy, practice and learning is a necessity for effective innovation and change in an organisation including the need to address any gaps between the prescribed procedure and actual practice to have an accurate understanding of the organisation. Organisational learning in recent times has considered the synergy between continuous professional development (CPD) and evidence-based practice\textsuperscript{244}, that is organisational learning is also concerned with the acquisition of organisational knowledge via organisational inquiry that informs practice which can result in new ways of working and performance improvement\textsuperscript{245}.

It is important to highlight that organisational learning can be a mechanism, not just for performance delivery and measurement, but also ‘enlightenment’ and the creation of new knowledge and practice. Schofield\textsuperscript{246} frames the concept, as policy and practice learning. Whilst this may be a current view, authors such as Phillips also warn organisations that even though continuous professional development may provide an avenue for evidence-informed practice, it is not a guarantee “that new knowledge and skills will be adopted and translated into practice”\textsuperscript{247}. That is, a continuous professional development system may identify learning needs and divert resources to those needs, however, if there is a lack of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{242} See Argyris and Schon, 1974; Argyris, 1977; Argyris, 1991; Hatch, 1993; Argyris, 1995; Argyris and Schon, 1996; Argyris, 1997; Hatch, 1997; Argyris, 2002; Argyris, 2004; Elkjaer, 2004; Phillips, 2006
  \item \textsuperscript{243} Brown and Duguid, 1991
  \item \textsuperscript{244} Phillips, 2006
  \item \textsuperscript{245} Argyris and Schon, 1974
  \item \textsuperscript{246} Schofield, 2004
  \item \textsuperscript{247} Phillips, 2006
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
translation or a lack of communication in the understanding for the development of those skills (or more broadly change) then there may be no outcome or response to that learning; there is an educative-practice gap. Evans and Hardy also make the distinction between the role of the organisation in building organisational evidence to support practice, not just building individuals’ practice. So in effect the whole organisation needs to be a knowledge organisation that is developing and evolving. This is particularly important as “learning and learning how to learn are not just individual tasks”\(^{248}\) but that of the broader organisation. This raises the notion for the case study organisation of whether the adoption of a research culture and the delivery of mechanisms to promote research and expert knowledge utilisation, has a level of integration that actively promotes and makes feasible evidence-informed practice, or indeed it has the mechanisms in place to capture or evaluate that interface.

**Evidence-based practice requires complex actions on part of organisations to facilitate its implementation including high level management commitment and putting in place systems for managing information and innovation and for individual skills development**\(^{249}\).

It has been established through both the examination of the individual and immediate work environment contexts, that there is a research culture that has been developed, grown and enacted within the case study organisation. This is also affirmed through the document analysis process (as outlined in Chapter 3) with considerable strategic documents and frameworks in place to implement such an evidence-informed approach to the business of the case study organisation.

### 6.3 Factors that may help the use of research in practice in the broader Agency organisational environment

The managers provided 11 themes to the question surrounding ‘what are factors that may help the use of research in practice in the broader organisational environment for the staff’

\(^{248}\) Evans and Hardy, 2010

\(^{249}\) Gerrish and Clayton, 2004
they supervise/have responsibility for’. These 11 themes presented in Figure 6.1 below were categorised into key areas of:

1. support to sustain applied skills
   - access to training to assist research utilisation
   - accessibility
   - able to analyse and critically evaluate material
   - able to apply research and incorporate into work
   - workload management

2. leadership
   - clear support of research culture
   - promotion of lifetime learning
   - effective communication strategies

3. contextually relevant materials and activities
   - Australian based research
   - provision of regular forums
   - availability of the Agency’s Library Services.

Figure 6.1 Factors that help research utilisation in an organisational environment – managers

Overwhelmingly the clear support of a research culture at the management and senior executive level is the predominant factor at the broader organisational level that would
facilitate practitioners and policy/project officers to utilise research in their practice. Leadership and an effective research culture are not synonymous but are interdependent on each other. An effective research culture is one that builds on the best practice strategies of a knowledge organisation (organisational learning), provides the infrastructure, provides the opportunity for the interface between staff and the broader organisation to be reflective and two way (double loop learning) in growing and developing knowledge and an organisational evidence base, and has embedded this into the way of working. A research culture should also articulate clear and shared values and language. Key to this is effective leadership where there are appropriate management supports such as training, supervision, availability of time, and access to technology is in place to effect and support a research culture within the organisation.

Some participants suggested that the executive of the case study organisation also has a role of promotion, that is the senior executive promoting the concept of evidence-informed practice as well as then demonstrating application at a practice level. Some examples of these responses are included below. The consideration of the executive modelling across the organisation was suggesting that all program streams and all locations should be targeted by the entire executive - not just the executive based in Head Office but also by those very senior operations managers based in the regions. This would present as a consolidated and cohesive message surrounding research utilisation within the organisation.

“Clear support from senior/exec management eg giving this a high profile (sic)”. Manager R2.

“Modelling – ability to observe across organisation (sic)”. Manager R6.

The participants above are articulating the importance of individual staff members observing that the senior executive themselves are modelling evidence-informed practice and that there are not just pockets of the executive and leaders within the case study organisation, but no matter where you look, evidence-informed practice is being modelled and supported organisation wide. This gives credibility to the research culture and

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Berger, 2010
participants generally were more likely to be evidence-informed in their own practices if they could see the senior and executive level supporting, valuing and modelling evidence-informed approaches.

Factors such as the provision of regular research seminars, conferences and fora for staff to attend was also frequently reported by the participants. This theme did not merely relate to the availability of seminars etc, but it also relates to effective workload or time management strategies where research is considered of value with the Agency and should be built into the functions of its workers. The notion of having such availability of research activities and time implies the benefit of such strategies in bringing research directly to staff within the Agency and minimising any access barriers by being proactive in the delivery of internal research activities which is one of the key functions of the Research to Practice Program.

The issue of access may be more significant for rural and remote based staff. As previously identified, rural based staff are more inclined to undertake formal tertiary education as a strategy for professional development due to a reduced opportunity to attend alternate professional development and research based activities. This issue of face to face run activities occurring mostly in metropolitan areas is seen as a specific issue for rural based staff. The participant below suggests that location should not be seen or recognised as a hindrance. The response was given in the context of senior executives raising the profile of an evidence-informed way of working and using a variety of mechanisms such as existing internal research based communications and other internal newsletters to ensure the message is clearly visible and coming from the most senior executives within the Agency. In considering this mix of communication the participant has highlighted the need to ensure that regional opportunities for research seminars and other practice solution sessions (PSS) are available and utilised to ensure equity.

“Using communication strategies to promote the use of same eg DoCS Vox, Research Network, R2P seminars ......Regional opportunities eg R2P and PSS sessions (sic)”. Manager R2.

Some factors reported less frequently by participants, such as communication strategies and promotion of lifelong learning, are strategies for enabling a culture of research usage
and predominately relate to the effect of leadership of the Agency’s executive within the case study agency. The promotion of lifelong learning as described by the participant below is seen in the context of a continuous professional development process whereby the Agency not only provides tools and strategies for staff to develop professionally, but also provides a platform for staff to take ownership or responsibility to enact continuous professional development. It is building an organisational environment or culture that values continuous professional development. The organisation has such strategies of identifying continuous professional development through core training programs for different staff groups but also via the Performance Planning and Review mechanism which documents training and career development requirements.

“By promoting the idea that learning is lifelong and staff need to continue to refresh their knowledge and skill base obtained at university (sic)”. Manager M1.

A common factor (across individual, work environment and organisational environment) that helps research utilisation are the applied skills that are required, such as the ability to analyse and critically evaluate research and apply such. If this isn’t feasible, then access to the relevant training to build those skills should be core training within the Agency. In considering this key area of applied skills, the responses of ‘able to apply research and incorporate into work’ would suggest that there is an organisational culture of acceptance of research usage as part of core business. The opportunities are there to ensure practice, projects and policy development are evidence-based, however, it is not possible to ascertain whether there is a rigorous delivery of core competency training in research utilisation and evidence-informed practice within the case study organisation. There has been no reported delivery of training\(^\text{251}\) in critical appraisal and applying research to practice since the introduction of the Agency guidance tool \textit{Practice Guide: Accessing and using research and evidence-based information}\(^\text{252}\) and subsequent state-wide practice solutions training sessions in 2009 either due to lack of priority or resources.

Use of Australian based research was nominated by one participant as a necessity to assist in the application of research to practice in an Australian context. They stated that Australian research should be valued just as highly as research from other localities such as

\(^{251}\) Brown, 2010

\(^{252}\) NSW Department of Community Services, 2008a
the United Kingdom and the United States of America. This issue of relevancy was a request to the Agency from the participants to generate and identify more locally based research as it had more relevancy to the context of operations of the Agency. The provision of internally generated research material was highly valued by the participants. Examples include:

- Effective casework practice with adolescents: Perceptions and practices of DoCS staff (2007)
- The importance of attachment in the lives of foster children (2006)

Key issues of time and accessibility to research was again raised as an issue of leadership in this sphere of influence. This related to the senior executive of the Agency providing permission for and acceptance of research as a valid activity, and promoting a culture within the Agency of research use (see the participants view below). The executive or leadership team were just as accountable for research utilisation as staff of lower levels within the case study organisation.

"Time to read – this is to be seen as a valid activity and included in workload planning...supervisors [should] value research in practice and hold staff accountable for same (sic)”. Manager R5.

Generally from the responses provided from the managers, leadership and effective modelling are key to facilitating research and expert utilisation in the case study organisation as is the notion of life-long learning.

The everyday research users were also asked to provide factors that assist in research utilisation in the case study organisation. They provided 12 themes as demonstrated in Figure 6.2 below.

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253 Available from the home page of Community Services and by selecting ‘Research’ - Community Services, 2010
These were categorised into three key areas of:

1. executive buy-in and investment
   - maintaining the monetary and human resource investment
   - no resistance from executive – demonstrated leadership
   - mechanisms for promotion such as Research to Practice and Library Services

2. demonstrating outcomes
   - seeing tangible results and following it through
   - embedding the evidence-base into policy
   - viewing change as positive and implementing new initiatives

3. organisational support
   - having champions
   - creating time and space for research activities and engaging with the willingness of staff
   - less crisis driven – being proactive
   - relevancy of materials and a research focus on core business
   - training
   - technology for rural and remote locations.
The responses or key areas provided by the everyday research users are significantly different to those provided by the managers – again having a focus on the key practicalities required to enable research utilisation. An example of this concerns the concept of leadership where the managers most frequently reported that clear support and a research culture were the most prominent factors that assisted in research utilisation, whereas the everyday research users mention leadership as important but in the terms of not resisting the use of research rather than actively promoting it. This is a subtle difference but important. The everyday research users are indicating a keenness of staff or a willingness of staff, to actively engage in the research culture of the organisation. They are not wanting resistance at a senior level to inhibit research usage in practice and policy-making.

The willingness of staff or the hunger for information as described by the participant below is also indicative of the progressive culture of the organisation and the need to strive for the best possible outcomes for clients.

“I think there is a pretty strong willingness on behalf of staff. I think they were hungry for the information. I think they were always looking for anything extra that could help them do their job. I think we were really lucky in that aspect”.  
Everyday research user HO5.

The implementation of the research culture within the Agency was not met with resistance from staff but rather practice application issues such as time emerged. The availability of time and space for staff was viewed by the everyday research users as the responsibility of the broader organisation to implement such measures to ensure time (and space) is available. It also needs to be considered as valid use of time, therefore attempting to mitigate the issues of being crisis driven or reactive rather than being proactive in research and expert knowledge use. This was also raised by the managers.

The most frequently reported factor that assists with research and expert knowledge utilisation in the case study organisation by the everyday research users was mechanisms or infrastructure to promote research use such as the Research to Practice Program and Agency Library. The participant below discusses the systems or mechanisms that have been put into place by the Agency and how these systems complement the broader research culture development within the Agency. Without the Agency delivering key strategies to
assist in implementing the culture of evidence-informed practice and policy-making, and
having underpinning framework and strategic documents that communicate the indicators
of such a research and evidence-informed culture, it is difficult to realise the vision or
direction in which the Agency is heading. This also relates to the response of having
‘champions’ to assist and facilitate the use of research within the organisation.

“Talking about it; talking about evidence-based practice is I think in my mind,
above all of the system things that are in place like access to a library, like having
people at a library who are more than happy to help people out and access
information for them and that sort of thing, above all of that stuff which is fabulous
is just the fact that people are talking about it. Because without the idea that things
need to be evidence-based and that things are better if they are evidence-based and
informed by research and expertise - without that people won't access the library”.
Everyday research user HO2.

In essence the Agency has built some infrastructure to assist in the delivery of knowledge,
but it is also the linkage between having a mechanism to implement and having enablers or
champions to both sell the vision and physically assist in facilitating research utilisation
processes.

The responses relating to seeing change as positive and being involved in new initiatives
and was a very positive aspect which assisted the organisation to continue to evolve and
strive for an evidence-informed approach. The notions of change being positive within the
organisation suggests that organisational adaption and development is important and that
the organisational culture of the Agency (even though it faces constraints and controls as a
public sector entity) supports a willingness to change. However, sometimes there is so
much change within the case study organisation in trying to reflect evidence-informed
ways of working (and outcomes of various inquiries and reports) that at times staff are
playing ‘catch-up’. At times the organisation is unable to deliver change as it is superseded
such as articulated by the participant below who is discussing the changes to be
implemented from the latest special commission of inquiry. This environment of
organisational change creates the turmoil of embracing required change whether it be

254 Argyris and Schon, 1996
internally or externally generated, and then over committing to change processes. This may be detrimental to the culture of the organisation due to staff perceiving that change processes are failing to implement change. This may also impact on the motivation of staff to implement change at a practice level.

“So there are some barriers, organisation, they should be ones that we know, but this organisation has never quite caught up with itself. It's had so many changes over so many years, it hasn't ever recovered from it and this one possibly won't be any different (sic)”. Everyday research user HO1.

Independent commissions of inquiry and reviews have historically been utilised by government to examine and review practice and policy direction due to ongoing complaints or inability to provide appropriate service levels. The most recent special commission of inquiry relating to the case study organisation related to the deaths of children who had been in contact with the child protection system and was to examine systemic and practice issues to make recommendations to improve service systems and delivery for effective child protection services in New South Wales. These inquiries are an important part of the unique context of the case study organisation. These inquires impact on the culture of the organisation as the catalyst for change. Some view this positively as a vital component to ensure the organisational culture evolves, others perceive this negatively as having little input internally to the how the Agency and its culture positions itself.

Conversely to the response above is a positive interpretation of change by everyday research user M4 below. This response suggests that it would be remiss of the case study organisation not to enact change as it has direct bearing on improving practice and this is important for the culture of the organisation (and as a learning organisation). The key aspect that is important is the philosophy behind why the changes are relevant and instigated, and not the view that ‘change is occurring for change sake’. The participant highlights the motivation for working in such a knowledge based organisation. So whereas some may see the act of change as a constraint, others see it as enabling.

“Yeah, but what's also interesting is that you know like you hear so often that in local level, people don’t like change, we're not so good at change, but I think that
comes from people's philosophy around how we change. Why wouldn't we want to work for an organisation that is continually trying to improve its practice, increase access to research, do those positive things and see change? (sic). Everyday research user M4.

This motivation is also recognised by Cahill and suggests that having innovation and the drive towards a learning organisation is a tool to improve practice and ultimately service delivery and client outcomes. It also emphasises the reduced risk to the individual worker in the organisation by providing the technical requirements and education/learning to assist in undertaking the functions of their roles.

Being part of a learning community, a learning organisation, can be an uplifting, empowering experience. Innovation is a risky business: if creating a learning community can reduce the amount of risk the individuals in that community bear, the effort necessary to create the learning community will not be in vain.  

Delivering outcomes and relevancy of materials was reported through several themes of seeing or observing tangible results (such as staff seeing the broader organisation using and implementing research and expert knowledge through programs such as the Early Intervention and Prevention Program). Participants reported that it was very important seeing research embedded into policy and procedure at a centralised level of the organisation. They felt it is important that the Agency is being proactive from the commencement of the development of policy/procedure, ensuring it is evidence-informed as it is fundamental to being able to demonstrate the application of research and expert knowledge at a client practice level. The participant below discusses this application and how by utilising such research activities as the Research to Practice Seminars, she was able to take on gained information and knowledge which both impacted positively on her practice and the outcome for the client; that is, the intervention was tailored for the circumstances of the individual who required the service. This is a clear example of how the strategies employed by the Agency to facilitate an evidence-informed way of working are actually being realised in practice.

Cahill, 1997
“The research to best practice seminars. They are a practical way that you can actually go and find out what you can be doing on a day to day basis to actually utilise and implement and benefit from research that other people have done. So benefit, not just for your practice but for the outcomes of the clients that you’re working for as well (sic)”. Everyday research user R2.

Investment of both a financial and human resource nature were also considered important by the everyday research users as it demonstrated executive level buy-in and investment to a way of working within the case study organisation. This investment is reflected in the systems and mechanisms that have been implemented to facilitate research utilisation within the Agency (such as creation of the Research to Practice Program, creation of the Library Services and other mechanisms such as the Research Advisory Council). It is also reflective of ensuring that the Agency has appropriate people in positions to enable the mechanisms and research culture. This was reported via maintaining the monetary and human resource investment, and by ensuring appropriate positions such as the casework specialists and other key manager positions are filled with appropriately qualified staff to act as champions for research use. It was expressed that the macro level of the Agency was key to facilitating this and ensuring that positions were recruited to in a timely way.

The identification of an experienced operations manager coming into the research unit actually facilitated the interface between the research arm of the Agency and the field/Head Office to become more ‘real’ due to the understanding of the nature of practice and insight into how to target research products and methods of dissemination that were more meaningful for those who use it on the ground. It also facilitated the process for knowledge transfer and practice wisdom from the field being fed back to the research arm of the Agency. This was viewed as a positive strategic decision by the Agency as it had positive impacts.

“What are some of the other enablers? I think sort of that two way thing I was talking about before. It’s not just about saying: Here you go, here’s the research information. It was about taking on that it was really a two way process. One of the other things we did is a manager came in that was actually from the field and that made a huge difference - it did make a big difference, because it meant we had
Training in evidence-informed practice was raised as being a core factor in the facilitation of research use. It is reported that the Agency at the organisational level should invest in maintaining an education component relating to evidence-base approach. It was also highlighted that the training should not be a static process but dynamic and corporate systems such as the Performance Planning and Review process could be used to gauge the level of need. As the individual’s and the Agency’s competency in evidence-informed practice (and research utilisation) grows, training should also be dynamic to address the change in competency levels. However, maintaining and developing skills as previously articulated is not the sole responsibility of the Agency, individuals also must have ownership and responsibility for their continuous professional development.

“Just that it would be really nice if we could get some education on it.... because I don't think I have all the answers and I just think it would be a great environment to get more education on this (sic)”. Everyday research user HO3.

Further investment in infrastructure and alternate technology to reach those staff that are unable to access planned research activities was considered important for rural and remote staff who are geographically isolated. This was proposed by one participant (see quote below) as a solution and therefore enabling factor in research utilisation.

“Technology. I think that would be great. I mean especially for rural and remote, even having access onto a webcam or something so you can actually see the person when we're doing phone consults and things”. Everyday research user R4.

As also highlighted by the manager participants, there is an identified issue with an inequity of access for rural and remote staff for interactive and discussion based research activities (not electronic access to research as that has been found to be equitable state-wide within the organisation). What is highlighted is the proactive stance that has been taken by staff in more rural and remote localities in providing feedback via mechanisms such as the Research Network and Research to Practice Program as a way to redress the
inequity. However, investment in infrastructure needs to be considered by the executive to redress such inequity.

Organisations need to instigate a critical reflection or interview process (similar to that identified by Evans and Hardy\textsuperscript{256}) to identify and gain evaluative feedback which can be transformed into on-going learning for, and within, the organisation. This is also reiterated by Eccles\textsuperscript{257} whereby if an organisation takes on an evidence-informed approach, it also provides the platform for review and evaluation to effectively measure changes or shifts in practice outcomes. This can be demonstrated by the Agency for example, in undertaking the current evaluation of the Early Intervention and Prevention Program.

What was not raised at this level was the broader views of staff of the incentives to utilise research to inform practice. It could be considered that the view of improving practice and therefore client outcomes as previously outlined by everyday research user R2 is incentive enough, as is the point of delivering tangible results and implementing new programs such as the Early Intervention Program based on research and evidence. What was not explicitly expressed was any need for an incentive by staff to be evidence-informed in their approach to work. What is evident is the demonstrated keenness and willingness of staff to take such an approach, and the general acceptance of this by professionals as an optimal way of working.

It is demonstrated that there is an investment by the organisation to embed an evidence-informed approach in financial, human and intellectual capital\textsuperscript{258} terms. However, there are no explicit incentives or procedures to suggest how this should be done apart from the broader undertaking in strategic documents and corporate plans that work of the Agency should be evidenced-informed. It could be concluded that the approach to research culture within the case study organisation is built into the general philosophy and culture of the organisation. Examples of this include the broad statements in the corporate plan such as “continuously improve our skills and knowledge with the support of high quality research and training”\textsuperscript{259}; however, this does not translate into practical applications such as into

\textsuperscript{256} Evans and Hardy, 2010  
\textsuperscript{257} Eccles, 2009. Also see Dill and Shera, 2009  
\textsuperscript{258} See Kannan and Aulbur, 2004 for discussion on the importance of measuring intellectual capital in a knowledge management organisation.  
\textsuperscript{259} NSW Department of Community Services, 2005
position descriptions. It does transpose however, to the framework documents for research orientated units within the Agency and the associated infrastructure such as the Research to Practice Program\textsuperscript{260}.

### 6.4 Factors that may hinder the use of research in practice in the broader Agency organisational environment

The everyday research users and managers were asked to describe or nominate factors that hinder the research utilisation process at an organisational level to determine if there was a key set of factors that impinged on the individual within the case study organisation, and therefore impact on the uptake of research and expert knowledge in their practice. Managers identified 10 themes that were factors that hinder the use of research in the organisational context (see Figure 6.3 below), and were broadly categorised into three key areas:

1. difficulty of application
   - fear of using research incorrectly
   - research that does not fit the local context and practice environment
   - difficulty of research usage in a legal context

2. lack of organisational support
   - no mechanism for promotion of research use
   - lack of fora for staff
   - lack of skills – access to training
   - scarcity of time
   - lack of value placed on research within the organisation

3. non-demonstration of outcomes by the Agency at a strategic level
   - research not mimicked in policy and procedure
   - resistance to change.

\textsuperscript{260} NSW Department of Community Services, 2004
The factor that was most frequently reported was the lack of value placed on research. This has a direct relationship to the previous question on what helps or enables research use. The response is in direct opposition to previously reported findings of what facilitates research utilisation. The participants are highlighting that this value placed on research is both a facilitator and a hindrance. A facilitator when the value of the research culture is communicated and modelled, however, it is also a hindrance if this is absent. The managers expressed the value placed on research at the most senior levels is a key enabler, however, it is considered as a hindrance if this portrayal or demonstration of the value of research is limited. What is key is the ongoing demonstration by the senior executive of the Agency in the promotion of research utilisation, as well as the clear statements of how it is valued and in turn value adds to the Agency. This could be for example, through the use of and referencing both the research materials and services that are available internally when giving key messages to staff.

The importance of such ongoing displays is outlined by the participant below who discussed the clear linkage that the senior executive must make between research usage and the operational demands of the Agency. Without this there is not a clear reason or pathway as to why staff should be utilising research and expert knowledge in their work situations. The participant indicated that without this clear direction or context by senior executives and the broader organisation, there would be a hindrance for research utilisation processes and a conflict with the general research philosophy of the organisation.

“Messages from senior management reinforcing operational demands etc and productivity without this context (sic)”. Manager R2.
Other factors such as scarcity of time and/or competing priorities is another commonality across the various work environments. Interesting to note with the responses to this particular question, was that not one participant in the managers cohort raised the issue of lack of access to research as an organisational barrier to research utilisation practices and processes. This could be interpreted as an Agency (at the broader organisational level) that provides a range of accessibility options to research and expert knowledge that are being effectively utilised or that are appropriate to the needs of the staff population. From this analysis, it was clear that other factors held more importance for the managers.

The issue of training to provide the required skill set was again raised in the context of the unavailability of such training directly impacting on the staff member’s ability and skill to become a competent research user. This was stated by one participant below who believed a lack of appropriate training was a key hindrance to research utilisation processes. This factor has been raised across all three spheres of influence, this time availability of training in the context of the corporate training program area.

“Lack of access to training on appropriately using evidence based research (sic)”. Manager M1.

It is clear that staff of the case study organisation see a corporate responsibility to provide training for a core set of skills that will facilitate research utilisation. Barratt and Hodson\(^{261}\) outline key areas for organisations to focus efforts on when establishing organisational support for evidence-informed practice - one of which is focussed and targeted training. This is also recognised by Rodgers\(^{262}\) in her study considering the impact of training and education on research utilisation. Rodgers found that formal education and training does have a positive impact on research utilisation activities as staff take an active role in learning the required skills, however, the Agency has undertaken little training in critical appraisal of research and expert knowledge and research utilisation as previously described.

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\(^{261}\) Barratt and Hodson, 2006
\(^{262}\) Rodgers, 2000, also see McPherson and Barnett, 2006 who discussed a blended learning approach to skills acquisition for child protection workers.
Other key factors or themes raised by the managers related to not utilising research appropriately in policy and procedural development, or not having a mechanism to be able to apply it to practice. The difficulty of using research in a legal context or using it incorrectly was also raised (issue of parameters or possibly permission). These issues could be considered within broader institutional factors or features\textsuperscript{263} that hinder research utilisation, that is where administrative or legal factors isolate or limit the application of research to practice where there may be little choice but to operate in a prescriptive manner due to the mandate of the case study organisation. An example of this may be the use of research and expert material being inappropriately included directly in affidavit materials or statements of evidence (legal) rather than being considered in risk of harm (casework) reports that may influence the recommendations in the affidavit/statement of evidence which is presented to the court.

A further reported hindrance was that of ‘change resistance’ where the introduction of a research culture impacted on staff’s acceptance in the use of research in assisting core business (whether this be policy or project development or fieldwork). It is also where the constant change in the organisation’s operational environment creates a level of resistance and potentially an inability to follow through on the application of research and expert knowledge. This is reported by the participant below in the context of the organisation as an entity itself whereby it should not be change resistant, but should model an appropriate message of the importance of applying an evidence-informed approach.

\begin{quote}
\textit{``Importance given by the organisation in following through the application of research evidence base to practice (sic).'' Manager R6.}
\end{quote}

The factor that was reported regarding research that could not be contextualised to the Australian context or core business of the Agency was raised by the managers as a hindrance (see response below).

\begin{quote}
\textit{``A lack of research that fits the local cultural context.''} Manager M2.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{263} See Jewell and Bero, 2008
This was considered by the managers as important for the organisation to address, firstly to generate practice specific research projects internally that directly relate to the mandate of the organisation, and secondly demonstrating outcomes through the integration and translation of research into policy and procedure. An example of how this has been achieved within the case study organisation is the development of the material around the early intervention and prevention strategies to work with families in order to stop them coming into contact with the statutory child protection systems. This resulted in the new program area of Brighter Futures within the case study organisation.

Whilst authors such as Satherley, Allen et al\textsuperscript{264} have investigated the various tools to critically evaluate research and expert information, they too identify that existing tools to appraise research do not assist in identifying the contextual relevancy of materials. This indicates a significant hindrance for organisations particularly around interpretation and application of research and expert knowledge, as well as training programs that organisations develop and put into place that can assist.

The everyday research users were also asked to provide their views on what hinders research and expert knowledge utilisation within the case study organisation. Overall there were 11 themes identified (as displayed in Figure 6.4 below) of which three key areas emerged.

1. difficulty of application
   - relevancy of materials
   - ignoring advice and requests from field staff generating silo building
   - policy parameters such as court work and legal frameworks

2. lack of organisational support
   - communication
   - impacts on rural staff regarding time, access and opportunities to catch-up
   - access hinderance and lack of training
   - supervision and motivating staff
   - lack of time/crisis driven

\textsuperscript{264} Satherley, Allen, et al., 2007
3. organisational constraints
   - economic and human resource constraints
   - not caught up to previous change and changes to leadership of the Agency
   - external drivers such as central agencies of Treasury and Premiers and Cabinet and other drivers such as the media.

The most frequently reported factor for the everyday research users that was an organisational hindrance to research utilisation was the crisis driven nature of the organisation, or the immediacy of the work that needed to be carried out due to the statutory basis to the organisation which shapes the organisational culture of the Agency. This barrier (as described by the participant below), relates not only to the issue of accessibility, but to the lack of time available to effectively access and utilise research and expert knowledge.

“I don't think there's any organisational barriers apart from crisis, apart from people - I believe the higher we go up the management line the time line for the crisis just increases, you know, it's got to be done yesterday or there's political pressure. I can understand that in terms of urgency to get work done and to do a good quality piece of work as well. Sometimes that can be a barrier where you haven't got the benefit of the time”. Everyday research user R4.

In considering the reported issue of ‘access hindrance’, again it concerned not the broad notion of accessibility but that of time to access and a limited number of research options
available internally, such as limited on-line journals. The participant below talks about how research is freely available and that the issue of time is the key factor.

“*I mean generally because there’s been such a big push in the organisation to make research so freely available and provide it in such an easily digestible form, generally it’s not an issue. It’s more if there’s a time constraint and you just don’t have the time necessarily to be able to find the information that you’re looking for within the time frame*”. Everyday research user HO5.

This does differ to the reported issue for rural staff where there is a general issue of equity of access (see participants view below). It was reported that there are further difficulties, as the Agency hasn’t taken into consideration other factors such as ‘catch-up’ opportunities for those staff who are not able to access all research activities that are available in the metropolitan area.

“*Metro I think have a lot more access to - I suppose because of distance too...to a lot of different seminars. I'd like to see them come out to Orana and Bourke because part of it is what we do in practice is for workers to feel valued. It's hard to apply research if they're not feeling valued (sic)*”. Everyday research user R4.

The concept of workers being valued by the leadership and executive of the Agency is important. The participant was referring to distance and geographic isolation as a barrier. By staff not having the use of technology and other avenues to access research activities, such as the forums and seminars, it may lead to a perception that rural and remote workers are less valued or not as entitled to the same level of access. This issue could also be possibly seen as a negative consequence (or lack of benefit) in working in the more geographically isolated locations across the state and would (or could) also impact on continuous professional development activities of staff. (See earlier discussions on rural and remote staff undertaking more formal tertiary study as a mechanism to update professional capacity). These issues may also relate to economic and human resource constraints regarding what the case study organisation has in terms of resources to make available the technology and other mechanisms to deliver research products and fora state-wide.
The everyday research users also reported a lack of communication and promotion by the senior executive (and the subsequent promotion of research via supervision and motivating staff) as an organisational barrier. For example, the setting of organisational behavioural standards such as the executive attending research seminars was described by one participant as key if the organisation wished for the staff to follow the executive in applying an evidence-informed approach.

“I've never seen any exec people at a research to practice, you know what I mean, like - there has to be some marketing, some PR in that, if you want people to follow..., and that it's okay to go and talk to your colleagues that you may never, ever get a chance to meet and talk about some of that research (sic)”. Everyday research user M4.

Effective management and supervision is considered vital and was previously reported as a facilitator of research utilisation. However, it is not clear whether managers themselves or those who are responsible for supervision are actually being evidence-based within their own management practices in bridging the research to practice gap, that is – are managers themselves evidence-informed and skilled in translating theory and research into practice to assist in the day to day operation of the case study organisation. The impact of this is that if managers themselves are not competent research users and are not evidenced-informed, there is less technical capacity for managers to facilitate research use and less likelihood of them motivating their staff to be evidence-informed. Barzelay and Thompson\textsuperscript{265} discuss the importance of evidence-based management in decision-making and advice giving, and Bourgon\textsuperscript{266} discusses the merits of utilising networks to tap into collective knowledge and to encourage broader system-wide thinking and discussion. However, it is not clear that this emphasis at a middle management or supervisor level is being promoted at the broader organisational level within the case study organisation. This then could be perceived as a potential lack of training provided by the organisation across all of the structures and hierarchy of the organisation on the broad concept of implementing evidence-informed practice.

\textsuperscript{265} Barzelay and Thompson, 2009
\textsuperscript{266} Bourgon, 2008
Participants were also very clear in identifying factors such as external drivers that impact on an evidence-informed approach. These drivers could be central agencies that provide policy or procedure that is generated with little opportunity for debate and tailoring to the organisation operations, or from other areas such as those delivered by the judicial and forensic systems. This is being described below by one participant; however, the participant indicates that not all external drivers or reforms generate the same level of barrier. In fact some can be positive such as the reform generated from the recent special commission of inquiry that has lead to an evidence-informed outcome. This particular reform or driver is considered less of a barrier than others as it is viewed as potentially delivering effective outcomes for the organisation that are evidence-informed. This is also relevant to those public sectors reforms that occurred under New Public Management which facilitated evidence-informed processes and ways of working.

“Oh I think there's some external drivers that are outside our control. One of the interesting ones and I think it's probably more, it's less a barrier than people do think, but this is a reform being led by central agency”. Everyday research user HO1.

There is also the acknowledgement by one participant below to the legal (or institutional) factors (similar to those raised by the managers) that are a barrier to research utilisation and evidence-informed practice due to the fact that the judicial and forensic systems are based on legal argument as opposed to evidence-informed decision-making. This is considered an organisational barrier as it is one factor that needs to be resolved at the most senior levels between agencies in the delivery of services. Approaches undertaken in a human service delivery system may not be considered appropriate or compatible with crime and justice philosophies.

“Look I think that we operate within a legal framework and it's not only a legal framework but a very litigious framework and that doesn't lend itself well to clinical evidence-based because they want to deal with the facts that can be proven or not proven as opposed to a caseworker's assessment of the situation and the assessment of where that clinical expertise would come in. Then the political environment is it is much more difficult to argue based on the kinds of research that we have to hand,
rather than the very kind of legalistic, forensic arguments”. Everyday research user M2.

The other key organisation constraint was change. Not so much the inability or resistance to change, but the constant rate of change within the case study organisation which provided a sense of constantly catching-up rather than being proactive to change. It was viewed that the organisation was never really catching-up with itself and never really recovers from change. It is what I would describe as change fatigue – the constant of reform and change is ever present, however, may not be achieved as further change supersedes the present change mechanisms. There was also reported concerns regarding the numerous changes to the most senior leadership of the organisation and how this may impact on the Agency moving forward with evidence-informed practices. However, it is not evident that the commitment to an evidence informed approach has waned, however, different leaders have different priorities and therefore a research culture may not be prioritised as highly by some leaders.

The reporting of ignoring advice and requests from field staff and the silo building within the organisation was raised by five participants as an organisational barrier to research and expert knowledge utilisation. This issue is an extension of the Head Office versus Operations divide that I reported in Chapter 5 and impacts on policy and procedure development, and the subsequent implementation of service. There is a general observation that there is a significant separation of function within the organisation which is neither productive or conducive to the performance of the broader organisation, and this has occurred due to a lack of effective leadership as described by the participant below. It is important to note that these silos are not just Head Office and field (or operations), but also within (or between) the major units and divisions within Head Office.

“I always think it starts at the top. So there is that barrier at the moment, that instead of being one big organisation we're silos and that's been allowed to happen”. Everyday research user HO3.

This separation or internal organisational politics is perceived to have stemmed from a top-down approach to service delivery (being informed of how things will be or single-loop learning) and a linear policy/procedure development function that is in place in the case
study organisation. This is a top down organisational culture. The linear policy process again is considered within the broader policy functions and an example may be where one program policy stream develops policy independent to another policy stream even though there may be consistent practice issues resulting in confusion. Organisational politics are barriers to organisational learning and evidence-based practices as there is an emphasis on micro issues rather than knowledge development, processing and sharing267.

This separation is viewed from field staff as a lack of acknowledgment of the vast practice wisdom of field practitioners in complementing policy development, and therefore a lack of input into the evidence-informed practices of the Agency. Whilst the participant below identifies the separation, her view is that the divide or separation is nonsensical; however, it is creating substantial issues and barriers for the organisation as a whole in facilitating an evidence-informed approach to practice and policy-making.

“I think I’ll mention again that separation we have between the policy and the operations. I don’t know, maybe it’s just my latest rant or something, but I’ve always seen it as just silly and organisationally it doesn’t make sense to me. Having said that, I always say I’d never work in policy. I’m an operations person even though I see the dichotomy is false, I know where I sit. But I see that organisationally it does create issues. When I first came to work in head office, it’s one of the first things I noticed. Now I work really well with policy, we work almost as one, but you don’t see that all the time. I think organisationally it’s a real barrier to using expert knowledge for a start, because I’ve seen many instances of there not being a respect for each others’ expert knowledge”. Everyday research user HO4.

Authors such as Gambrill268 argue that such a top-down approach within an organisation is counter-productive to evidence-based or informed practice approaches, as it disregards vital knowledge and practice wisdom that could be incorporated. This is also described by van Buuren269 when discussing the importance of understanding, and incorporating, the different ‘ways of knowing’ to the various facets of the organisation to build a complete and quality policy or procedure. The accountability for an evidence-informed approach

267 Schilling and Kluge, 2009
268 Gambrill, 2006
269 van Buuren, 2009
should be held by the executive of the organisation; however, the responsibility for
enacting it should be devolved down through the Agency. Despite the observed or
perceived division or the development of silos within the single organisation, it is pivotal
as described by Kindler, that staff and service users must be considered in the
development of policy and practice to ensure a legitimacy of the work being undertaken.

*There is no single best organisational structure for innovation. Indeed, almost any
company, regardless of size, shape and culture, or hierarchical structure, can be
innovative. The critical, elusive ingredient is alignment – having the entire
organisation on the same page concerning objectives, tactics, and ultimately
commitment to innovation.*

There is fundamental alignment that is required within an organisation to effect change and
innovation. This too relates to reducing the barriers and dismantling any perceived or
actual silos or divides that are in place between, and within, the Head Office and the
operational areas of the case study Agency. This is a significant dilemma for the case study
organisation given the rhetoric of being an evidence-informed agency, however, by not
recognising and valuing the input of the practice wisdom of field staff, policy processes
will be linear and knowledge creation within the organisation will not be reflective of the
entire organisation.

Argyris and Schon stipulates the requirement that organisations, in order to be effective at
learning, are also required to evaluate between what is reasonable prescription and
effective implementation. This is also discussed by Evans and Hardy in describing that
learning organisations need to be reflective and undertake double loop learning to ensure
procedures are appropriate, rather than single loop learning which is prescribing procedure.

In the overall consideration of barriers, there are significant similarities reported between
the data cohorts that relate to difficulty of application and lack of organisational support. It
was the manager’s group that identified a range of situations where the organisation may

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270 See Barratt, 2003
271 Kindler, 2008
272 No-author, 2006
273 Argyris and Schon, 1996
274 Evans and Hardy, 2010
not be effectively demonstrating tangible outcomes and successes in implementing evidence-informed practices, however, it was the everyday research users cohort that clearly labelled organisation constraints such as the observed silo building within the case study organisation. This further impacts on knowledge creation and transfer.

6.5 Use of evidence-informed practice to commit to and enact change

The everyday research users were asked to report whether they had observed any changes towards an evidence-informed approach in the organisational practice environment. 100% of participants reported a positive change over a period of the previous five years.

It is evident the two participants below have clearly observed changes within the organisation environment towards an evidence-based approach to practice. The response from everyday research user R1 indicates how research and evidence is informing practice, and that practice reflection is also informing research and practice change, whereas everyday research user HO1 discusses the general maturation of the child protection workforce within the case study organisation and recognises that certain program areas may be maturing more quickly. This could be due to the focus on child protection and the various inquiries stemming from child deaths in New South Wales. It is apparent that the Agency has a focus on the immediate front end system of service delivery (statutory child protection) and thus the maturing of this program area, however, it is not negating other areas such as out of home care (substitute care), rather it is determining what is the priority focus at that point in time.

“I'm just thinking the changes to me are definitely evident, but whether that's because it was the research indicated that we need to change or they've recognised that it just didn’t work before. I'm hoping it is a combination of both”. Everyday research user R1.

“A general maturing if that's the word, of child protection as a discipline and some of the components that then move into, out of home care service, but I think it's still catching up. I don't think it's moved as quickly as child protection discipline. A
response to outside scrutiny. I think that's been a real driver as well (sic)”. Everyday research user HO1.

One participant below highlighted the reverse to everyday research user R1. The participant below indicated that even though he had observed a positive change towards an evidence-informed approach, he thought research and evidence only came into play at specific key change points to facilitate change. He felt that there was no relationship between research itself being available and the proactive use of such to create change within the case study organisation. This is important when considering the overall research culture of the organisation and the processes of using and creating research and knowledge for the purpose of change. If there is no clear relationship between processes of using research proactively to instigate change, there is a lack of innovation and proactive organisational learning, and a potential lack of timeliness when evaluating the culture and direction of the organisation.

“So I think research comes into play when the department is trying to support a change. However, yeah, I don't think research is what moves the department”. Everyday research user M3.

Even though the participants reported they had observed a positive change in the organisational environment, they also highlighted areas of significance that have impacted on that change. Several participants reported a concern of the role the corporate Learning and Development arm was playing or not playing in the education and implementation of evidence-informed practice within the case study organisation. These concerns (two of which are articulated below) relate that the Learning and Development section of the Agency were either not modelling evidence-informed practice themselves in the delivery of their program (core training and induction), nor were they keeping pace and/or their role as champions and educators within the case study organisation had been reduced. Everyday research user M1 was discussing the observed withdrawal of the Learning and Development function from broader skill development and training (such as learning about and being inducted into evidence-informed practice) and that the impact of that Branch has been minimised, whereas it should be a leader in the area of evidence-informed practice.
“I'm a bit surprised that learning and development aren't reflecting their use of research in a better way, which for me is a component of overall evidence-based practice”. Everyday research user HO2.

“Well, I think that it's a shame that we've basically shut down learning and development the way that we have”. Everyday research user M1.

These are significant concerns given the previous discussion on the importance of an education function in both research utilisation, and the broader concepts of evidence-informed practice. It too is concerning if the curriculum being delivered is not underpinned by the latest evidence and expert knowledge.

There was also discussion by participants on the various parameters that have impacted on the observed changes within the broader organisational context, such as rules and procedures, and the roles and responsibilities (or autonomy) one has within the organisation. Again relating to the previous discussion on barriers, the participant below raised the issue around how policy may limit evidence-informed practice due to the prescribed or mandated responses of staff due to the statutory nature of the organisation.

“I just think that evidence-based practice is limited by the policies that we get”. Everyday research user R5.

The issues of roles, responsibilities and autonomy275 were also raised in the context that staff at lower levels in the organisation had little authority and were fundamentally not the decision-makers within the organisation. These staff therefore had little opportunity to influence how the organisation developed and implemented policies, and had no autonomy to change practice to that which was evidence-informed. This lack of autonomy resulted in a lack of motivation or even a resistance to be evidence-informed. This particular view of authority and the lack of autonomy is articulated below.

“I think you'll never have a perfect system and I think you'll never have a system that's based on research. I think, at the end of the day, the people that are in

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275 Exworthy and Powell, 2004; Thompson, Chau, et al., 2006; Hupe and Hill, 2007 all discuss the role of autonomy and discretion.
positions - or the people in authority on a lower level are the ones that will make the decisions and we trust that they use evidence based research, but at the end of the day that's too much effort”. Everyday research user M3.

This participant throughout the interview process articulated that he was ‘for’ an evidence-informed approach. He suggested that if the evidence is incorporated and was in place at the policy and procedure development phase and at the decision-making level within the organisation, this would provide a positive impact, however, the participant was quite negative regarding the actualisation of such. This is making an assumption that during the issue identification, policy analysis, identification of policy instruments and the consultation phases\textsuperscript{276} of the policy process, there is an automatic incorporation of research and expert knowledge, and this equates to the policy or procedure being evidenced informed, which may not be the actual case.

Regardless of the perceived or observed changes and how the organisational context impinges on that, one participant clearly articulated her fear that what the Agency already has in place that facilitates an evidence-informed environment, may be impacted upon by constant political and economic pressures (such as elections and the implementation of efficiency savings of a budgetary nature). This participant reported the concern that potential external change could impact on the organisational environment and culture and it would be remiss to lose the current standing of research utilisation processes and mechanisms within the Agency. It is also important to acknowledge the vulnerability of public sector organisations to political processes and therefore the participants concerns.

“\textit{My pearl of wisdom would be - well, it’s more a wish than a pearl of wisdom - that given whatever, political or economic change we’re going to face in the next 12 months, that we don't lose the ground we’ve got, too. So, all of the great stuff that has happened in recent years; that we don't lose it and we grow on it}”. Everyday research user M5.

\textsuperscript{276} Bridgman and Davis, 2004
6.6 Leadership

The role of leadership has been highlighted in this chapter as significant, not just as providing a platform for an evidence-informed approach, but also in terms of modelling and ensuring that systems such as corporate training and other strategies are in place to facilitate the evidence-informed approach to practice and policy-making within the case study organisation. Bradley, Webster et al.\textsuperscript{277} examined the importance of the leadership role in the translation and diffusion of innovation, suggesting the roles of senior management and clinical leadership (plus quality data) are all necessary for success. Whilst the organisation leadership has provided a strategic platform, incentives are not present to facilitate behavioural change or motivation, rather the way of working (which is to be evidence-informed) is implied. It is not overtly obvious that the expectation is clear regarding use of research and innovation and the practical application of such\textsuperscript{278}.

It could be argued that overall the leadership within the case study organisation has been effective in providing key strategic frameworks, human and economic resources and a infrastructure (even though it is observed and reported as metropolitan biased) to disseminate and have knowledge exchange. As described by the participant below the leadership of the case study organisation provides a platform for an effective knowledge organisation, however, the dismantling of the silo and linear policy making effect is required as is the further development of infrastructure to provide equity of access state-wide. The modelling of the executive in evidence-informed practice to promote and ‘bring-along’ staff provides a further platform.

The identified areas of debate for the leadership of the case study organisation are firstly ensuring key corporate functions such as Learning and Development are evidence-based in their own practices, and secondly, also acknowledging that time pressures and workload practices (including resource allocation which is a reflection of organisational culture and history) do impact on the motivation and use of research and expert knowledge in the broad organisational environment. The participant below suggests that the case study organisation is on the ‘right track’ to being successful in research utilisation practices and

\textsuperscript{277} Bradley, Webster, et al., 2004
\textsuperscript{278} See NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 1999; Barratt and Hodson, 2006 regarding the importance of incentives and learning theory to promote and create behavioural change and motivation.
being an effective knowledge organisation, however, the Agency needs to acknowledge the investment of time and resources to continue such processes.

“I think we’re pretty good, I do. I think we’ve got the makings of a fantastic knowledge organisation. So I think there are a lot of things that we’re doing right, and we all wish we could buy time to do more of that and it’s unfortunate that we can’t”. Everyday research user HO4.

In relation to the organisation connecting with other communities of knowledge such as the university sector and the connecting of researchers with practitioners; leadership from the case study organisation has been significant. The creation of forums such as the Research Advisory Council, and Joint Appointments between Charles Sturt University and the Agency (Western Region) all facilitate in bringing theory and practice together. This in addition to the Research Network, and the Agency commissioning of research externally to develop knowledge and evidence relevant to the Agency, has demonstrated how the leadership of the case study organisation is promoting external partnerships and connecting to the research to users. This facilitates context relevant research. This practice is promoted by authors 279 such as Coleman and Walter, Davies et al where there is recognition of the importance of bridging the communities of researchers and research users. An example of this within the case study organisation is the relationship with the Social Policy and Research Centre at the University of NSW who is undertaking major research and evaluation into the components of the Early Intervention and Prevention Program on behalf of the Agency. This informs not only the Agency, but the university researchers regarding what is relevant and contextual for the environment of the case study organisation.

6.7 The NSW Statutory Child Welfare Agency and research utilisation: Examining the organisational factors

In examining the results of the various responses from the managers and the everyday research users, it can be identified that there are factors at the organisational level of the case study organisation that act as enablers, and others that act as barriers to research and

279 Walter, Davies, et al., 2003; Coleman, 2007
expert knowledge utilisation by staff. The case study organisation appears to be working in a whole of system model\textsuperscript{280} of research utilisation where research is embedded into the core of the agency in terms of policy and procedure development. It is also found in the management and leadership of the organisation which supports research via organisational processes, and also by promoting life-long learning, or a practitioner generated approach, where individuals are also responsible for their continuing professional development.

The analysis of the data indicates that key factors are required to be occurring within the organisational environment to engage and sustain an environment that is conducive for staff to actively seek out and apply an evidence-informed approach to their work. These factors include:

- leadership – effective modelling and practice
- alignment of organisation
- investment in infrastructure – human and financial (including resource allocation to permit effective time allocations within workloads)
- evaluating and refining strategies
- education
- delivering tangible results to enable change.

When examining concepts of \textit{leadership}, a consolidated and consistent message from the executive of the case study organisation was vital to communicate the importance of an evidence-informed approach. This then, according to the research participants, is required to be backed-up by the actual display of the executive and key leaders actively engaging in and promoting research and expert knowledge usage within the organisation. The messages and the display need to be consistent for staff to follow and implement such an approach to their practice. If the message and the display is disparate, then this creates confusion and a perception of potential resistance at the leadership level. This may also lead to a miscommunication of expectations of the case study organisation that it is operating under an evidence-informed approach embedded through a research culture.

Significant is the reporting of silo building within the organisation which impacts on the \textit{alignment of the organisation}. If there is an observation of organisational politics which

\textsuperscript{280} Walter, Nutley, et al., 2004
leads to the non-sharing of information, and not considering the organisation as a whole in the development of policy and procedure (negating practice and other policy wisdom), this may lead to distrust of the approach undertaken. It also does not provide the executive of the case study organisation with a true and accurate account of the interface between policy and procedure development and practice implementation. If it is observed that the ‘left hand’ is unsure of what the ‘right hand’ is doing, and this in turn creates additional work for staff or provides a conflict in information, it creates an organisational environment where credibility may be questioned regarding the products produced and the integrity of the evidence-informed process. This may also lead to resistance not only in delivering the outcomes of those products, but in the philosophy of being evidence and knowledge-informed.

**Investment in infrastructure** has consistently been reported very positively by participants in the enabling of mechanisms such as the Agency’s Library Services and the Research to Practice Program (and products). This commitment by the broad organisation to an evidence-informed approach is realised through the provision of infrastructure both in human and financial terms. However, one implication or theme that has been present through all the different ‘spheres of influence’ is that of time allocation. At the organisational level, this relates to the investment (or not) in resourcing levels that enables staff to have dedicated time to undertake research utilisation activities. This needs to be considered in light of other institutional factors such as administrative and legislative mandates that the case study organisation must operate within.

What is relevant to infrastructure and resource allocation is the reported metropolitan bias in gaining access to non-electronic based research activities facilitated by the Agency. This was observed by participants as being critical, as it was perceived that there was not the same level of value placed on staff in rural and remote locations by the Agency (they therefore felt less supported and it reduced incentive to work in those locations). The observed bias also raises the need to have continuing *evaluation and refinement of infrastructure and strategies* to best address any inequities. The participant below discusses how certain strategies utilised by the Agency may be transient or momentary in

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281 See Ogiehor-Enoma, Taqueban, et al., 2010 for further discussion regarding leadership commitment to infrastructure in promoting an evidence-based approach to work cultures.
nature as better technological advancements come into play, or the culture of the organisation in relation to evidence-informed practice evolves.

“I think the main challenge is to kind of maintain the focus on research to practice and sort of saying that the uptake of research is important. I know within our agency we have - that’s all happened but it’s about, I guess, continuing it and I guess changing those strategies depending on the context. Technology changes or workforce changes, those things, seminars might not work or you might need to just change the way you do things... and not seeing it as a static thing. I think it’s changing and progressive. It’s a relatively - for a lot of agencies it’s a relatively new concept and I think inevitably it will change. So it’s really about keeping your finger on the pulse (sic)”. Everyday research user HO5.

There is also a requirement for **evaluation and reflection of practice implementation** to ensure the cycle of evidence-informed policy development, and the implementation of that into practice, is relevant and accurate and addresses the original identified issues and problems that needed action or resolution. A further factor that is integral to successful implementation is the corporate responsibility in developing competency through the deployment of **education and training activities**. The participants clearly articulated that certain sections of the case study organisation were perhaps not as advanced in the practice and delivery of an evidence-informed approach, however, one of these was the Learning and Development Branch which is a corporate function. This could be detrimental for enacting change within the case study organisation if curriculum is not evidence-based, and/or the non-availability of training in evidence-based practices is not resolved to facilitate individual practitioner competence. Education in evidence-based practice approaches and how to appraise and evaluate research and expert-knowledge is necessary to be delivered by the Agency as it provides a pathway for staff to learn about learning processes and actively engage in that.

**Delivering tangible results to enable change** was viewed by participants firstly as the executive or the organisation enacting an evidence-informed approach and leading by example, and secondly providing the basis as to why change was necessary. If staff could see that the executive use such evidence-informed approaches to inform decision-making and the delivery of policy, it encouraged staff to be more evidence-based in their own
practices. It also provided a valid avenue for accepting and implementing change in the Agency as the decisions to enact change were deemed to be based in evidence and research.

**Implications for practice and policy development**

Leadership is integral in the promotion and enacting of an organisational culture that promotes evidence-informed practices. The leadership of the Agency must be consistent in the articulation of messages (or the vision for a research culture) and their display in engaging with such a culture. However, if there is a lack of alignment of the organisation that creates silos and potential miscommunication or conflict of information, this could be vastly detrimental to the whole research culture of the case study organisation. The case study organisation has a corporate responsibility in maintaining competence in an evidence-based approach to practice and policy development of itself and its staff through educational and training strategies. These strategies need to be robust and in place to enact an organisational culture that is reflective of research and expert knowledge usage.

### 6.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how the broader organisational context impacts on research and expert knowledge utilisation within the case study organisation. There are critical factors that need to be in place in the organisational environment to ensure a successful approach to evidence-informed practice and policy making; the most vital being leadership. Leadership is critical in terms of both the promotion and demonstration of an evidence-informed approach. This promotion and demonstration by the executive must also produce tangible outcomes as this gives staff confidence in the approach and the motivation to engage and follow the vision of a research culture articulated by the executive.

The managers and everyday research users cohorts reported similar factors and issues that enable or hinder research utilisation stemming from the organisational environment. However, it was the everyday research users who again were mostly discussing more practical or systems related issues such as a lack of training or infrastructure to provide equity of access to all research activities facilitated by the Agency. There was significant
reporting around ‘silo building’ within the case study organisation which could be to the
detriment of enacting a fully inclusive evidence–informed approach by the Agency,
however, 100% of the participants articulated that they had observed changes in the
broader organisational operating environment towards an evidence-informed culture.
7 EXPLAINING THE IMPACT OF THE ‘SPHERES OF INFLUENCE’ AND USES OF RESEARCH IN A CHILD WELFARE CONTEXT IN NSW.

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how the three levels or ‘spheres of influence’ (organisational, environmental, and individual or the micro, meso and macro) impact and interact on the use of research and evidence-based practice within the case study organisation. The chapter examines whether the factors of influence can co-exist, whether they are mutually exclusive or have fusion, whether they are static or dynamic (or whether this is dependent on context and condition), and how this is positioned with organisational learning and culture.

The chapter explores the uses of research (instrumental, conceptual and symbolic), and whether uses of research provide a legitimisation of the practitioner’s/policy-maker’s view (is it balanced or biased) in their delivery of decision-making and professional judgement. As with the spheres of influence, the uses of research will be examined to see whether they can co-exist, whether they are mutually exclusive or have fusion – are they static or dynamic, and can they be used at different times for different reasons. It is argued that neither the spheres of influence nor the uses of research are static; they are dynamic in nature and they are not mutually exclusive. It is put forward that one of the spheres of influence has more significance than the other two. It is initially considered that the individual sphere of influence (skill set) might be the most influential; however, it is difficult for the application of an individual skill set if the other spheres of influence (work environment, and organisation structure and culture) are neither conducive nor supportive.

This chapter also considers the outcomes of this chapter and the previous three case study chapters by proposing a new typology of research users. The everyday research users are then classified according to the proposed typology which shows how the individual uses and applies research and expert knowledge to influence practice and policy – that is the purpose of and engagement with research.
7.2 Impact of the three spheres of influence on the practitioner and policy maker

In considering the analysis of the previous three results chapters (individual, work or practice environment and organisational contexts), the research participants have indentified the factors or determinants that impact on the effective research utilisation processes within the case study organisation. Even though there were commonalities of factors and key areas across all three spheres of influence such as skill set, training and time, it is clear that these impacted on the individual practitioner and policy-maker practice in different ways given the context of those different settings. Table 7.1 provides an overview of the key determinants that impact on the individual across the three spheres of influence in the uptake of research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation.

Table 7.1 Key determinants that impact on the individual across the three spheres of influence within the case study organisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPHERES OF INFLUENCE</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Environmental</th>
<th>Organisational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>having an appropriate skill-set/education</td>
<td>effective support at the management or leadership level</td>
<td>leadership – effective modelling and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>being exposed to a research culture and mechanisms that enable this and which fosters a way of working and gives permission for such</td>
<td>the work role you hold within the organisation (autonomy and discretion)</td>
<td>internal alignment of organisation in behaviour and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>having a positive attitude (which includes the individual’s values and beliefs) and motivation to access and use research and expert knowledge within practice</td>
<td>time to be able to undertake research utilisation processes and reflect on findings</td>
<td>investment in infrastructure – human and financial (including resource allocation to permit effective time allocations within workloads)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>demonstrating professional judgement.</td>
<td>access to quality materials that are relevant and user friendly</td>
<td>evaluating and refining strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>an infrastructure and resources to support an evidence-informed work practice environment.</td>
<td>education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>effective communication/promotion</td>
<td>delivering tangible results to enable change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>education to establish and maintain skill level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table presents core processes and factors across all three levels or spheres that impact on organisational culture and organisational learning. There are two significant factors across all three spheres of influence. These are the individual applied skill base and the
exposure to an organisation culture at the micro, meso and macro level. The applied skill base is key to being a competent research user at the micro level, and requires the support for training and facilitating research use and translating into practice at the meso level. There is also the corporate responsibility (macro level) to provide education and infrastructure to enable training and competence.

The organisational culture of the Agency was also highlighted across the three spheres. It was not just the mere exposure to a research and organisational culture at the individual or micro level, but a necessity to ensure practitioners and policy makers are supported through effective supervision and management practices at the meso level, and providing the leadership and infrastructure at the macro level to realise and actualise an organisational research culture and to be a learning organisation.

The strategies outlined in the following table (Table 7.2) are known and currently implemented strategies for research utilisation in social care organisations in the United Kingdom. These strategies and principles have been identified as being effective in the facilitation of research utilisation processes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION - CASE STUDY ORGANISATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Ensuring a relevant research base | • Commissioning of research  
• Research Advisory Council  
• Research Network |
| 2. Ensuring access to research | • Agency Library Services  
• Research to Practice Program |
| 3. Making research comprehensible | • Products from Research to Practice such as Research Notes, Seminar Notes, Research Updates, Seminar series |
| 4. Drawing out the practice implications of research | • Research utilisation practice guides  
• Library search guides |
| 5. Developing best practice models | • Establishment of evidence to create new programs and policy directions such as the Brighter Futures Program |
| 6. Requiring research-informed practice | • Research usage in development of practice standards |
| 7. Developing a culture that supports research use | • Provision of infrastructure and collaboration with other tertiary institutions in the development and implementation of a research culture  
• Leadership and executive support |

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282 adapted from Walter, Nutley, et al., 2004 cited in Nutley, Walter, et al., 2009
In considering those strategies within the context of the case study organisation in New South Wales, all of the strategies are being implemented in some form, however, even though there is evidence of the case study requiring research-informed practices such as the best practice standards from the Professional Development and Quality Assurance Program, there is little evidence of the case study organisation having a direct requirement for an evidence-informed approach. An example includes the omission of clear expectations and practice requirements as part of position descriptions and selection criterion, which set the initial scene of the organisational culture of the Agency when individuals first engage or think about engaging with the Agency.

What is distinctly lacking in the case study Agency is that the requirement for research-informed or evidence-informed practice has not been made explicit as discussed in Chapter 6. The Agency potentially needs to address this culture-practice gap and consider how the research utilisation process is actually implemented into the work of the individual in the Agency, and what incentive based systems (micro view) could be put into action. The organisation also could consider what Barrett describes as the micro political processes that occur in public sector organisations as this has not as yet been developed in the case study organisation. These processes need to be well thought out and include systems for the monitoring and evaluation of research and expert knowledge utilisation to complete the cycle of implementation (to gauge whether the desirable impact is actually occurring), as well as provide the opportunity to gain practice wisdom and create new knowledge that is relevant and will impact on further strategies and policies developed by the Agency. It also requires non-practice based functions within the case study organisation such as corporate human resources to consider and evaluate position descriptions, and the requirements or selection criterion for positions to ensure evidence-informed practice requirements are clearly articulated and understood. This does not suggest there is any resistance to instil such processes within the case study agency; rather it has a lesser priority.

Participants such as everyday research user R5 previously spoke about the proactive approach they were taking in utilising the PPR (Performance, Planning and Review) systems for themselves as a mechanism to embed the active process of research utilisation into the daily work practices. As previously articulated there is a general philosophy and

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283 Barrett, 2004
statements within corporate planning documents that facilitate the implementation of the research culture, for example “Ensure the out-of-home care service system is evidence-based and developed in partnership with the out-of-home care sector”\textsuperscript{284}. However, from the examination of the corporate documents there is no general or generic mechanism in place to firstly clearly outline organisational expectations, and secondly to capture and monitor research and evidence usage within the case study organisation. In examining generic position descriptions for the positions of Generalist Caseworker, Casework Manager, Manager Client Services and Generic Project Officer Learning and Development\textsuperscript{285}, there were no requirements to be evidenced-informed stipulated within the core duties or skills areas. This presents as a vulnerability within the ongoing maintenance of the research culture within the case study organisation.

It has been established that there are distinctive factors in play in each sphere of influence. It is important to establish whether these factors operate within isolation of each other, are mutually exclusive or whether one of the spheres of influence has more of an impact (or is more integral) to the uptake of research and expert knowledge utilisation than the others. This is important and goes to the understanding of how the broader organisational culture and behaviour supports and facilitates a research culture and evidence informed practice.

\textit{Co-existence of the spheres of influence - mutual exclusiveness or fusion, static or dynamic}

What is argued is that the various spheres of influence must be operating dynamically in order to effect the optimal research utilisation processes within the Agency and one cannot function without the others. If there is a lack of alignment or direction across the micro, meso and macro levels of the organisation or the various levels not working collaboratively with each other, organisational culture and learning is disrupted. To gauge how the spheres work collaborative and dynamically, the everyday research users were asked whether they had observed the interaction of the spheres of influence within their work and the broader organisation.

\textsuperscript{284} NSW Department of Community Services, 2005
\textsuperscript{285} Department of Human Services, 2009; Department of Human Services, 2010; Department of Human Services, 2010a; Department of Human Services, 2010b
93% (14 individuals) of participants (n=15) reported that the spheres of influence were not mutually exclusive - the spheres of influence interacted together and participants presented views as to which sphere was more important in facilitating that interaction. However, one participant stated that the spheres were mutually exclusive. Everyday research user M3 considered that the spheres of influence that impacted on research utilisation processes were mutually exclusive and did work in isolation. This participant stated (see quote below) that all practice is fundamentally ‘dictated’ by the policies and policy arm of the Agency and throughout the interview indicated that practitioners needed to be conformist and had little autonomy. According to everyday research user M3, structure and broader macro issues are dominating the interactions within the case study organisation. He suggests that this is representative of a broader issue where the mandated operations of the legislatively based service delivery agency is the only guide to practice and policy - that is, it is only the organisational sphere of influence which has an impact and the other two spheres of influence are irrelevant. Everyday research user M3 even suggests that policymakers may not be context savvy or understand the practice environment (policy-practice divide); however there is little the participant feels they can do to mitigate this situation.

“Policy is what dictates what I do....you know even though I hate it, and I hate to admit it especially with my opinion that the people that are making those policies don't know what they're on about, that's what dictates me. It dictates me because of liability”. Everyday research user M3.

The participant also presents an issue of corporate culpability and individual liability. The participant whether driven by fear or lack of confidence suggested that to be ‘liability neutral’ or ‘liability adverse’, then the practitioner only takes notice of the broader organisational context and policy and procedures as opposed to self instigated research and evidence and knowledge sharing. This also relates to the concept of what Tomison describes as ‘defensive practice’ which was discussed in Chapter 5.

However, the majority of the participants clearly articulated that the spheres of influence interact with each other, however not equally (this will be discussed in the next section). The participant below provides a working example of how the three spheres of influence

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286 Tomison, 2002
are always interacting with each other to deliver outcomes, whether this is the securing of additional funding from outside the Agency, or the continuing development of a learning organisation. This participant noticeably sees the interaction of the three spheres giving back to the ongoing development of the Agency; a cyclical approach where the spheres of influence interact to provide the framework and the evidence to move forward which gains ground and position within the Agency. This in turn is necessary to underpin further change and practice improvement. This creates a continuous cycle of professional development, and a contemporary view (organisational learning) to service delivery and policy making grounded in evidence, practice wisdom and expert knowledge. This participant is clearly identifying that the organisational sphere of influence dominates in enacting the interactions of the three spheres.

“Definitely I think they do work together and I think, yeah definitely. If you were thinking of how they interact, they’re always interacting. Again, I guess the example that I gave before about seeing a change in - with the securing of additional funding, seeing actually changing culture around the use of expert knowledge. And the recognition that we needed to build an organisation and we needed to change our practice based on expert knowledge and evidence”. Everyday research user HO4.

R1 suggests that the spheres of influence are not mutually exclusive and they need to work together considering the broader macro organisation. At times however, the spheres of influence actually work against each other producing a disjointed approach. An example provided by the participant is the Agency’s research culture that promotes and encourages the use of research and expert knowledge to aid decision-making and professional judgement, but then does not monitor management or supervision practices that may hinder such use of materials. Another example is the Agency not addressing micro organisational issues such as internal politics and silo building that impact on the practitioners research utilisation processes (including knowledge development and creation).

“I think they work together in relation to there are so many parts to the organisation. I think they can work against each other. But I think what everybody is promoting is trying to be part of the bigger picture and how you actually, as an
The participant also clearly articulates how the relationship between the individual (micro) and the environment (workplace/meso) is just as important as the relationship between the individual and the organisational sphere (Agency/macro) in undertaking evidence-informed practice. That is, an individual needs to recognise the connection to both the work environment (application) and greater organisational environment (strategic direction) to understand and enact evidence-informed practice and policy making. Conversely, this also can be considered as how the individual is constrained or enabled by the structures of the organisation, or how organisational culture and behaviour either promote or limit the engagement and interaction with research utilisation processes. So whilst it has been established from the participants there is a general consensus that the three spheres do in fact need to interact to ensure an optimal research and expert knowledge usage environment, the participants also reported that the interaction of the spheres needs to be both positive and well communicated to ensure the interaction is dynamic and effective for practitioners and policy-makers.

It was established from the previous analysis that the majority of everyday research users reported that the three spheres of influence interacted and were not mutually exclusive, however, each sphere does not necessarily have equal importance in those interactions. In determining whether one sphere of influence has a greater impact or is more integral than the others in relation to enabling research utilisation processes within the case study organisation, the everyday research users reported most frequently (Figure 7.1) that the organisational environment was the most important.

Figure 7.1 Spheres of influence - most important sphere - everyday research users
The participant below, in giving their response provided an overview of their logical thought process to get to their final response. The initial notion or concept was that it would be presumed that the individual skill base was the most important as it could be applied regardless of support or assistance. However, this notion was set aside along with the work environment, as the participant thought that without the organisational leadership, the culture, structure, vision and direction for an evidence-informed way of working would not be in place.

“It's kind of funny because some people I guess - in my head I was thinking, well some people would say well individual skills, because if you don't have that skill you're never going to have it. But then I think - I don't think - then you're just writing everyone off. So if you like have the practice environment that facilitates good learning, good role-modelling, and are willing to spend the time to teach someone, you can teach someone that stuff. But then if you don't have organisational leadership to promote that, then you're not going to have any of it (sic)”. Everyday research user M4.

Everyday research user HO5 also had a similar view, however differed by suggesting the organisational sphere of influence was necessary, not in just providing the high order leadership and vision, but by enabling the three spheres to work together in an ordered way so they did not work against each (which was previously highlighted by everyday research user R1). Thus the organisational sphere plays a role of facilitating and enabling the practice environment and the environment for individuals to develop and maintain a skill-base.

“I think it’s like the broader organisational context needs to be there first because if you have the skills, that’s great, but if you don’t have the broad organisational context, it’s like putting the cart before the horse. You need to have that first, otherwise, yes, you might have those skills that are all around the agency in bits and pieces, but you can’t actually utilise them or get them to really work in an organised way without that broader organisational context”. Everyday research user HO5.

The participants who considered the practice or work environmental sphere of influence to be the most significant were suggesting that it provided the support and environment where
the interface between practice, and research and expert knowledge utilisation took place. This was where skills could be grounded or consolidated. One example of these similar responses is below which also suggests the requirement for the linking or alignment of the spheres to work together to facilitate a positive interaction between the spheres of influence.

“I would say it's hard for the worker by themselves but if they've got a supportive management team and supportive CSC well then they can become involved with that research stuff. Obviously the policy that comes down from head office is going to greatly affect that and if all there were in the same alignment it would be much more better. But I think if you had a positive management team that really encouraged research and workers that were encouraged to do it; I think that would change a lot (sic)”. Everyday research user R5.

This participant is also clearly stipulating the significant role of supportive management at the practice level. Previous discussions have raised the importance of the supervisor in the facilitation of an evidence–informed approach. Collins-Camargo and Royse287 undertook a study to examine the self-efficacy of workers in undertaking an evidence-informed approach to their practice. They concluded that staff receiving effective supervision were more likely to be engaged with and see the organisation having a culture that promotes evidence-informed practice. This resonates with the findings here.

Regarding the individual sphere of influence, predominately the responses related to the establishment of a skill base which if at a level of competency, allowed the individual practitioners and policy makers to undertake research utilisation processes regardless of the work environment or organisational environment they were operating in.

It has been established through the analysis that the organisational sphere of influence (factors and context) is the most important in implementing or facilitating an evidence-based or informed way of working. This is also reiterated by Maynard when considering bridging the research – practice divide (science to service divide) in evidence-based practice and policy making (EBPs). “The implementation of EBPs has proven to be

287 Collins-Camargo and Royse, 2010
complex and challenging processes, with organisational factors coming to the forefront as important in bridging the gap between service and science”288.

In essence an effective research culture (and organisational culture) is one that builds on the best practice strategies of a knowledge organisation (organisational learning). It provides the infrastructure, provides the opportunity for the interface between staff and the broader organisation to be reflective and two way (double loop learning) in growing and developing knowledge and an organisational evidence base, and has embedded this into the way of working. It is a culture that articulates clear and shared values and language. In the context of the organisational learning paradigm, it is also necessary to be ready for new knowledge – to be flexible and adaptive as evidence, research and knowledge changes289. Leadership at the organisational level has one of the most significant impacts on the implementation and practice of evidence-informed approaches within the organisation. “The organisation’s leadership must hold the vision and values that create and sustain a culture of learning”290.

The importance of leadership has been described throughout by participants in regard to the organisational presence in valuing, promoting and modelling an evidence-informed approach within the case study organisation. In considering that the Agency in focus is a mandated legislative service delivery organisation, it could be perceived that such an evidence-informed approach in that environment could be somewhat constrained. This could be due to the very nature of the specific business of protecting children and young people from risk of significant harm which is legislated and needs to adhere to very prescriptive regulations and policies, as well as being a high profile subject within the political context291. However, the Agency has utilised such an approach to its best advantage in the development of new program areas such as the Brighter Futures Early Intervention strategy, and core documents reflect an evidence-informed approached. For example, the Brighter Futures Program was established in the Agency after considerable scrutiny of the Agency for not addressing reports of poor parenting and chronic neglect that may not lead to legal action by the Agency. These reports considered collectively,

288 Maynard, 2010
289 See Davies, Nutley, et al., 2007; McWilliam, Kothari, et al., 2008; Collins-Camargo and Royse, 2010; Evans and Hardy, 2010; Maynard, 2010
290 Busch and Hostetter, 2009
291 See Grol and Wensing, 2004
however may require a legislative response and it was necessary for the Agency to consider ways to prevent such escalation. After conceptualising the need to have a more preventative program that was to divert children and families away from the statutory child protection system, the Agency undertook a process to ensure the development of models for the program was evidence-informed. The models proposed went through economic modelling (including cost benefit analysis), were put to Treasury to source funding, and implemented. The program is currently going through an evaluation phase.

Nutley, Walter et al., suggest that there are three models of research use that an organisation can operate under as described in Table 7.3 below.

Table 7.3 Nutley, Walter and Davies’ three models of research use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODEL TYPE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research-base practitioner model</td>
<td>Research use is the responsibility of individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded research model</td>
<td>Research use is achieved by embedding research into the systems and processes of service delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational Excellence model</td>
<td>Key to successful research use lies in the development of appropriate structures, processes and cultures within local service delivery organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the available corporate documentation (considered in the document analysis phase of the research), and the establishment of infrastructure by the Agency for research utilisation, it is argued that the case study organisation appears to be operating within the ‘organisational excellence model’ of research use that is, the Agency has invested in the structures, processes and the cultures of the Agency to embed and deliver an evidence-informed way of working. However, an embedded model of research according to the document analysis, is the vision of the case study organisation. Therefore this is a point of contention where a research culture and infrastructure is in place, but strategies to facilitate a shift to embedding research into the systems and processes of service delivery are not yet fully integrated. Stipulating the model of research use within the case study organisation is important in recognising how evidence-informed practice is viewed and implemented, but it is also vitally important to understand how and why staff are using research - the main reasons for that research use and application.

292 Adapted from Nutley, Walter, et al., 2007
293 NSW Department of Community Services, 2004; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006a; NSW Department of Community Services, 2006b; NSW Department of Community Services, 2008; NSW Department of Community Services, 2009
7.3 Uses of research and expert knowledge in the case study organisation

There are many reasons why people and organisations use research, evidence and information in policy-making and practice. This could be for action or change, for defending an action or change, or even for defending non-action and maintaining the status quo, for advancing policy agenda, for assisting with resource allocation, and generally for promoting and enacting change. Research, information and knowledge can also be used for agenda setting where there is such a plethora of information or issues that need attention that the agenda setting process gives focus to the potential “bottleneck of attention” (see Jones and Baumgartner 2005) to establish how the span of attention at the organisational or individual level is actually allocated.

Within the case study organisation, the above is a true reflection of why information, research and knowledge is used. It is used to assist in establishing priorities and agendas and for other decision-making and policy making processes. What requires further examination is how individuals use research, information and expert knowledge in their practice and policy making. In order to understand individual research use within the case study organisation, the everyday research users were asked how they used research and expert knowledge against Stetler’s model and to provide examples of how this was enacted.

Instrumental use

The everyday research users were asked about ways that they use research to help determine a clinical or practice decision (instrumental use). 80% reported (see Figure 7.2) that they had used research or expert knowledge instrumentally to inform a clinical or practice/policy decision. All of the rural responses reported that they had used research in an instrumental way. Of those who reported that they had not used research instrumentally, two were from a Head Office and one from a metropolitan location.

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294 See Davies, Nutley, et al., 2000; Parsons, 2002; Jacobson, Butterill, et al., 2005; Lewig, Arney, et al., 2006; McWilliam, Kothari, et al., 2008
295 Jones and Baumgartner, 2005
296 Stetler, 1994
The two Head Office participants stated that their areas of work were not explicitly surrounding clinical or policy decision making type functions, but rather suggest that research that they have accessed may be used instrumentally by others, or that they may use that information in a different manner. The metropolitan participant (see response below) who reported not using research instrumentally believed that policies should be underpinned in evidence and therefore the use of research should come through the policies and procedures which reflect work practices. This illustrates that there is an assumption that all policy and procedure within the Agency is evidence-informed and perhaps also goes to a shared expectation that this is the case being an Agency with a research culture.

“We would come through the underlying policies from - the evidence-based policies that we have in the department, that’s how I do that (sic).” Everyday research user M5.

An example of how research and expert knowledge has been used instrumentally is outlined by the participant below. Everyday research user R5 indicates that research is used instrumentally in the secondary assessment process which is the comprehensive assessment process that leads to decision-making for action such as the engagement of services for intervention, or the removal of children based on the circumstances of the individual situation. He articulates a process of reflection and critical reasoning where research and expert knowledge assists with the analysis processes and ultimately casework decision-making. He also acknowledges how each situation is individual which implies that research cannot be used as a blanket application in the case study organisation – it may provide evidence for what works, however, professional judgement needs to consider the individuality of the situation.
“That would be through our secondary assessment. I find a lot of my research I use reflectively when I'm analysing what this means for a child, how their protective and safety issues are affected; all that sort of stuff. Given that we work in a crisis environment it's hard to - we're in different situations all the time (sic)”. Everyday research user R5.

The majority of those interviewed reported using evidence instrumentally in their work places if it was relevant to the nature of the work they undertook or position they held.

**Conceptual use**

The everyday research users were asked if they had used research and expert knowledge as a source of new ideas or to change thinking (conceptual use). All but one of the everyday research users provided examples of how they had used research and expert knowledge conceptually within their practices (see Figure 7.3 below). The participant who reported they did not use research, expert knowledge and information conceptually was a metropolitan based participant. This participant has previously reported a lack of autonomy in their work role.

![Figure 7.3 Conceptual use of research and expert knowledge - everyday research users](image)

The participant in the quote below clearly states their perception that they are in no position to be using research and expert knowledge conceptually as staff need to be conformists and should not ‘rock the boat’ or be radical in their thoughts or actions in order to conform to existing policies, procedures and service delivery models.

“Interviewee: No.
Facilitator: No?
Interviewee: No way. No.
Facilitator: What about --?”
Interviewee: We're conformists here.
Facilitator: You're conformists.
Interviewee: No radicals (sic)”. Everyday research user M3.

This participant continued on to again reiterate that the policy and legislative environment of the case study organisation supersedes the complete practice environment and therefore there is little reason to pursue using research and expert knowledge in a conceptual way. This is in direct contrast to the following participants who suggest research and expert knowledge can produce new ideas or innovations, or alternatively provide information to assist in building new individualist models of service delivery. Everyday research user HO3 suggests that perhaps there are a range of options and avenues for accessing research, expert knowledge and information that may be a catalyst for new ways of working, and that the traditional process of policy and practice development needs to be at times challenged.

“We get a bit stuck with that in that we're almost pressured into using that traditional process. We do come up with new ideas and we do get it from research. It will be that we might have been to a conference or we might have read an article that it's stirred something”. Everyday research user HO3.

What is also interesting to note is that this participant talks about this in a proactive sense, that is not reacting to a particular situation or policy framework that requires refinement or renewal, but rather the constant scanning of the research environment which may produce a mechanism for change. This notion of wider influence of research use is raised by Nutley, Walter et al as a potential fourth stream of research use that could be added to the Stetler model.

Research can have an influence beyond the institutions and events being studied. Evidence may be synthesised. It might come into currency through networks of practitioners and research, and alter policy paradigms or belief communities. This kind of influence is both rare and hard to achieve, but research adds to the
accumulation of knowledge, which ultimately contributes to large scale shifts in thinking, and sometimes action\textsuperscript{297}.

Everyday research user R2 discusses working with a very complex client group in the out of home care program stream that requires comprehensive placement and support services. The participant suggests models of service delivery are not ‘one size that fits all’ and by utilising research and expert knowledge, new ideas can be formulated into effective service delivery options that are tailored to the individual needs.

“Yes, especially in regards to looking at placements for kids with high needs. I find it helpful to find what sort of research has been done and then think about ways that some of those ideas can be incorporated into either existing placements or if you’re looking at setting up something new, how that can be transitioned into the new placement”. Everyday research user R2.

It can be observed that the individuals interviewed in the case study organisation used research and expert knowledge conceptually for a multitude of purposes from the development of policy and procedure to service delivery in the field. Research can be used conceptually both on a needs basis to assist in solution building or for the development of new ideas. It can also be used proactively via the constant scanning of materials and participation in research activities which may lead to further investigations into new innovations and programs.

Symbolic use

The everyday research users were also asked to describe the ways they use research to try and support their position and/or to influence someone else’s practice (symbolic use). 80% of the participants reported that they do use research and expert knowledge in a symbolic way (see Figure 7.4 below). The three participants who were classified that they had not used research symbolically had a representative from each of the three cohorts (rural, metropolitan and Head Office). The metropolitan participant was the same participant that was discussed in the section on conceptual use.

\textsuperscript{297} Nutley, Walter, et al., 2003
The participant below demonstrates that some functions of the case study organisation would not utilise research and expert knowledge in a symbolic fashion. In the quote below, everyday research user HO3 outlines a more directive approach to compliance from a Head Office unit rather than a symbolic approach as there is neither an opportunity nor intention to enter into negotiation processes.

“We kind of - no we kind of don't. Because we kind of strong arm them and go well this is best practice. We don't really get into negotiation (sic)”. Everyday research user HO3.

The reference to “strong arm them” relates to providing the field or practitioners with a directive where no debate is entered into. The example provided is very specific where there is some consultation or opinion sourced in developing practice, policy and procedure in most cases, however, little debate and discussion from the field in the final preparation and endorsement of the final product. This may occur in a situation such as a legislative change where a new procedure must be automatically enacted.

Everyday research user R2 reported they did not use research symbolically but highlighted that in order to do so, the practitioner, policy maker or staff person, should have in-depth knowledge and be an expert in that subject matter themselves before gaining a level of credibility to use research and expert knowledge in such a manner. This also raises the issue of whether staff are utilising research to legitimise their own views and actions (which could be biased and narrowly focussed) in order to influence a decision or action without having a full and well considered viewed of the implications of the research.

“I think to be able to use research to try and specifically change somebody else’s point of view, you have to have a really in depth knowledge of that research. I
don’t think just reading one article gives you the knowledge to go out and change lots of people’s opinions. I think you might be able to use it as a starting point to do some more research yourself or look into things or just some wider reading”.

Everyday research user R2.

The participant from a Head Office position below discusses the importance of once establishing a new program and or policy area; there is the fundamental requirement to “sell” the message to get people on board. The participant in this example is discussing the development and creation of the Brighter Futures Program and how they utilised internal research including data and statistics on numbers and level of reports to make a point of selling (or to influence the acceptance of) going in a certain direction with policy and service delivery. The research and evidence was being utilised to enact change and could be used in situations for both incremental change or new innovation.

“I could probably think of a few of those if I had enough time, if you had all day. But again, I guess because it’s fresh in my mind, it would be around - once we got past the conceptual side of seeing where we would fit in this brave new world, we then had to sell our approach to everyone really. We’re still trying to sell it to some people but certainly we used - and we always came from that, you know, what this has told us. We commissioned economics and statistics to give us the stats on it. To go out there and tell us, predict what is likely to happen when this happens (sic)”. Everyday research user HO4.

Participants in the Professional Development and Quality Assurance Program areas such as the participant below were more inclined to use research in a coaching role to influence and improve the practice of the individual staff person, to overcome decisions being made on personal beliefs and attitudes, and to focus individuals on being more evidence-informed in their practice.

“All the time...Well I find out at doing consults and that. Especially where you've got a group of workers where they haven't actually done any formal education where a lot of the comments made - or sometimes - the comments may be sort of just based on their own values and case plans might be just based on their own beliefs and their own attitudes. (sic)”. Everyday research user R4.
This participant was specifically addressing the issue of a practitioner that does not necessarily have a theoretical underpinning as to why certain actions are recommended and procedures are in place due to a lack of formal training in the child protection field. There was no identifiable pattern of a value clash between the practitioner’s own sets of beliefs and assumptions, and the suggested practice outcomes or directions for the everyday research users, therefore this did not specifically relate to gender, religion, ethnicity or class structure, but rather the level of formal training and theoretical understanding.

By using research symbolically (and their own tacit knowledge of what works or not), the specialist staff are in essence providing an opportunity for other staff to promote their instrumental learning (understanding of technical aspects of the position) and their conceptual learning and thinking capabilities. This is also found in Phillips where the role of continuous professional development has a positive impact on evidence-based practice learning strategies.

It can be surmised that there are numerous ways and methods being used within the case study organisation in the symbolic use of research and expert knowledge. It is also observed that the use of research and expert knowledge (instrumentally, conceptually or symbolically) provides a legitimisation for the practitioner and policy-maker in their decision-making. Research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation have generally been utilised to assist in informing professional judgement and therefore it is important to ensure that the practitioners and policy maker are not biased towards research or expert knowledge only, but consider this in the context of the practice environment to construct a well-informed decision-making or policy making process.

**Co-existence of uses of research - mutual exclusiveness or fusion, static or dynamic**

It has been established that staff in the case study organisation use research and expert knowledge according to Stetler’s model and that there is a diversity of use within the categories. It is also important to understanding whether the three uses of research (instrumental, conceptual and symbolic) can only be used in isolation, that is, are they

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298 All staff, except Indigenous staff, are required to have minimum three year tertiary degree in a related human services field. Formal training in the specific discipline of child protection occurs during the caseworker development program and on the job training.

299 Phillips, 2006
mutually exclusive or can they be used in conjunction with each other. This was explored with the everyday research users.

100% of the everyday research users reported firstly the uses of research did not work in isolation and secondly that the uses of research were not mutually exclusive. From the Table 7.4, it is demonstrated that the everyday research users actively use research in different ways. Nine of the participants were classified as using all three types of research use. This included three metropolitan staff, two Head office staff and four staff from rural and remote locations. Eight out of the nine research users were either in management (policy or field based) or specialist caseworker positions. This suggests that the different uses of research are applied in differing situations and this is important to those positions. The remaining participant that identified examples of all of types of research use was a caseworker new to the organisation. There was only one everyday research user that used only one type of research use (instrumental) which was everyday research user M3. This participant previously established that he believes he is quite constrained due to a lack of autonomy and position within the organisation. The remainder of the everyday research users had a combination of either instrumental and conceptual, or conceptual and symbolic uses. There were no classification of participants who had a combination of instrumentation and symbolic use suggesting that conceptual use is key to informing professional judgement.

Table 7.4 Summary of the application of research use - everyday research users

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
<th>Conceptual</th>
<th>Symbolic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>M2</td>
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<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>HO1</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>HO2</td>
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<td>HO3</td>
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<td>HO5</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>R1</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>R5</td>
<td>Y</td>
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There were responses that indicated that the individual situation is more likely to determine what research and expert knowledge is sourced and then how it is used, as opposed to the actual piece of research itself. It was also suggested that individuals may have a predisposition to a particular way of working and as such this may also influence how they use research. An example of this is below where the participant suggests if the individual practitioner is more pragmatic (or practical/matter of fact) – there would a higher likelihood of that individual using the research instrumentally as opposed to symbolically (or even conceptually).

“\textit{I think it's just how, perhaps, an individual can work with the type of information research provides; maybe some people lend themselves more to the symbolic use as opposed to conceptual use or instrumental use. Maybe if you're more pragmatic you're going to be able to use it bit more concretely instrumentally, as opposed to symbolically. I don't know why, but I think they're absolutely not mutually exclusive”}. Everyday research user HO2.

The predisposition or the personal style of the practitioners and policy-maker, how they work and learn is something that needs to be taken into account by the case study organisation when translating and disseminating research at the organisational level. For instance if there is dissemination of research and an exchange of knowledge to pursue a behavioural change in practice, it may need to take several forms to ensure all people interpret and embrace the direction that needs to be undertaken. The participants also suggested that the same piece or groups of research could be used in a multitude of ways such as described by the participant below.

“\textit{I think it's probably a bit fluid. Like, it might start off maybe as conceptual to start off with and then the more you learn about it and the more you understand it, you can then use it instrumentally in your practice and then the more well versed you are, the more you can use that to influence other people's ideas as well”}. Everyday research user R2.

This is also reiterated by everyday research user M2 who also provides caution about staff just focussing on one piece of research or expert knowledge as this may provide a view that is not well considered. The participant suggests there should be a variety of sources to
better inform decision-making within the Agency, and viewing research and expert knowledge as having more of a basis in the conceptual and symbolic arenas so as to inform professional opinion and judgement, as opposed to the blanket or direct implementation of the research without considering the contexts involved. Whilst the participant did not provide any explicit examples of this occurring in practice, it was apparent that it was a concern to the participant.

“Oh no, they'd have to be used in conjunction with each other and I think that it's essential that we have - that we don't point to a particular study and say that gives us evidence. I think that we have to use the particular research to inform our conceptual thinking and then for that to be symbolic in terms of we do do that level of analytical thinking in approaching our work (sic)”. Everyday research user M2.

However, everyday research user HO4 argues that the instrumental uses of research and expert knowledge may be used in isolation due to the environment of standards and compliance which the case study organisation operates in.

“Instrumental, I think there would be a lot of people that would argue that you could use that in isolation. Certainly when you look at parts of a project, some of them it is quite a purely instrumental approach. Doesn’t sit all that well with me, I’m more of a big picture looking person, but I have seen it. Thinking of a few projects within the team that are really quite instrumental based, more of a compliance monitoring type approach but certainly they still all interconnect I think (sic)”. Everyday research user HO4.

Research undertaken by Amara, Ouimet and Landry which examined how university research in government agencies was utilised also concluded that the three uses of research (instrumental, conceptual and symbolic) are not mutually exclusive, however, different policy areas and workplace may emphasis different uses of research.
Considering that professionals and managers in government agencies are exposed to a large variety of sources of information, these results suggest that the three types of use of research play simultaneously a significant role in government agencies.

As is with the case study organisation, different forms of research use are being used simultaneously and for different purposes. It could be argued that research may be used more conceptually in the first instance for policy making and then evolve into the symbolic and instrumental uses. For practitioners on the ground, there may be more of an inclination towards instrumental use. The next section specifically explores the reasons or purposes why staff are using research, expert knowledge and evidence in their practice and policy making.

### 7.4 Main purposes for accessing, using research and applying research

The previous sections highlighted the interactions of both the spheres of influence and the uses of research within the case study organisation - that is, the spheres of influence work at their optimum when they are all working together facilitating research utilisation; and the uses of research are varied and dynamic in nature. In establishing the above, it was also important to understand how the individual practitioners and policy makers actually apply or use research in their work - that is, was it for a specific reason or to generally assist in decision-making and practice application or for other reasons.

Both the focus group participants (Figure 7.5) and the managers (Figure 7.6) were asked to provide the key reasons for research and expert knowledge uses and some examples to illustrate that usage and application.

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300 Amara, Ouimet, et al., 2004
Both the managers and the focus group participants had similarities in their responses which could be grouped (as display in Table 7.5 below) into the three general areas of:

1. informing direct practice outcomes
2. development work
3. professional development practices.
The three areas of research application in practice also have an alignment to the uses of research, however, it has been described by the various participants as practice base application rather than a research use. For example, it could be argued that informing direct practice outcomes is instrumental use, development work equates to conceptual use and professional development practices more broadly would fall into the symbolic use area. This also suggests that there is a level of embedding of research into these facets and functions within the Agency – a move towards the embedded research model previously outlined (Nutley, Walter and Davies’ three models of research use). These areas are also similar to those that have been found through the studies undertaken by Holzer, Lewig et al\textsuperscript{301}, and Buckley and Whelan\textsuperscript{302} when examining how individuals use and apply research and expert knowledge to their fields of work.

The participants in both cohorts reported most frequently that the use or application of research and expert knowledge was practice or work issue specific with many participants conveying that research application greatly assisted critical thinking and informed decision-making and professional judgement. An example which demonstrates this is the quote from the Research Network Focus Group participant below who also suggests that consulting research and expert knowledge is also a way to clarify thinking to ultimately come to a point where the decision being made is well informed and considered.

\textsuperscript{301} Holzer, Lewig, et al., 2008
\textsuperscript{302} Buckley and Whelan, 2009
“When presented with practice issues, decisions and [I] feel [I] need to 
clarify/consult research so that decisions are as well informed and considered as 
possible (sic)”. Research Network Focus Group participant.

Whilst the participants indicated that on many occasions the nature of research application 
was very topic or issue specific, there was a common theme of the availability of research 
which was utilised generally for the purposes of ongoing professional development, either 
at the organisational level or at the individual self initiated level such as described by the 
focus group participants below. A Child and Family Focus Group participant from 
Maitland indicates the dual application of research and expert knowledge - that is, for a 
topic specific purpose which may be a more reactive use, and then for the more proactive 
use of ongoing professional development.

I keep an eye on new research available. Sometimes this is for a specific enquiry to 
inform practice, generally though it is for holistic knowledge”. Child and Family 
Focus Group Participant (Maitland Annex).

This is also reiterated by a Child and Family Focus Group participant from the Helpline, 
whereby the primary application of their research and expert knowledge usage was for the 
purposes of ensuring they are up to date with both the technical and professional aspects to 
undertake their job responsibilities.

“To ensure that I have the relevant knowledge needed to fulfil my job 
responsibilities”. Child and Family Focus Group participant (Helpline).

The final quote below captures a more specific reason for using or applying research and 
expert knowledge. The Professional Development and Quality Assurance Focus Group 
participant was discussing how research and expert knowledge is used in a specific manner 
to firstly develop a position or practice decision, and then it is utilised symbolically to 
argue why (or to back-up) the position or the decision they have taken in order to have 
their project endorsed and implemented state-wide.
“When I’m required to provide sound justification/rationale for my project, I like to substantiate my position with evidence base. Research helps me to this extent”. Professional Development and Quality Assurance Focus Group participant (Head Office).

What is evident within the case study organisation, are concrete examples of how staff are accessing, using and applying research and expert knowledge to inform their practice and policy-making. It is clear different staff are using the materials for different purposes, some proactively for professional development and for the coaching of other staff to assist in improving their practices; or proactively (or reactively) to ensure decisions are well informed and considered, focussing on the outcomes delivered to the client base of the organisation. It is also considered that research and expert knowledge use within the case study organisation is being used in the framework of professional judgement to legitimise and strengthen decision-making. It does not appear that research and expert knowledge is being used in a way that is biasing an action, rather it seems it is being used as a seminal piece(s) of information that assists in professional judgement, professional development and coaching. Research and expert knowledge utilisation within the Agency is identified as an educative and professional development strategy to identify best practice and evidence-informed models of service delivery.

7.5 Consideration of what has been established within the case study organisation

This section revisits what has been established in the case study chapters in order to consider whether there are identified roles staff play in their engagement with research and expert knowledge that may lead to the formulation of a new typology of research users.

Chapter 4 discussed the skills and attributes of a competent research user, and factors that hinder or enable the individual with research utilisation within the case study organisation. It specifically explored the views of research participants on key definitions and concepts of expert knowledge, research, evidence-based practice, information literacy and knowledge management as well as how the key concepts or skills of information literacy and knowledge management impacted on an individual’s confidence in identifying,
accessing, appraising and using research and expert knowledge in their practice and thus then the impact on research utilisation.

It was argued in this chapter that capability of the individual is paramount to the ability to access and utilise expert knowledge and research, and therefore necessary for effective knowledge management, knowledge creation and translation of information into practice and policy-making. The data and results showed there are some core individual determinants that directly impact on the individual in the uptake of research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation. These include:

- having an appropriate skill-set/education
- being exposed to a research culture and mechanisms that enable this and which fosters a way of working and gives permission for such
- having a positive attitude (which includes the individual’s values and beliefs) and motivation to access and use research and expert knowledge within practice
- demonstrating professional judgement.

It was highlighted that evidence-based and policy-making are not purely built on what is regarded as traditional research, but a whole range of knowledges such as practice wisdom and other communities of knowledge (such as organisational, policy, economic and service user knowledge). A process that involves a hierarchy of evidence and therefore an evidence-informed approach is more suitable for this field of practice. It was also established that the staff of the case study organisation are immersed in the research culture of the organisation, and are enthusiastic and motivated in their access to and use of research to assist in their decision-making and professional judgment. Those sources of research utilised were predominantly identified as being internally based or generated by the Agency, however, some other external mechanisms such as the internet and university libraries were also popular as sources to access research and other knowledge based material.

The most critical factor to the individual in the uptake of research and expert knowledge in their practice and policy-making was identified as having the appropriate skills to be able to effectively search for and critically appraise the materials sourced, translate that into practice and policy-making and, for the creation and development of new knowledge.
Whilst it is established that the Agency has tools and training in place to assist in this skill development, the majority of the research participants indicated that they had not received formal training. However, the majority of research participants reported a positive change in their own individual practice to being more evidence-informed. They directly related this to the research culture of the organisation and the exposure to research materials and engagement mechanisms.

In Chapter 5 I discussed the context of the environment or workplace of the individuals participating in the research such as how time, support and access (relating to the presentation and type of materials) and available resources impact on the utilisation of research and expert knowledge for the individual in their practice. The chapter specifically addressed factors that both help and hinder research and knowledge utilisation at the workplace environment level by examining the responses from the everyday research users. It also considered the observed barriers and enablers to staff accessing and using research and/or expert knowledge.

Consideration of external drivers that may impact on research utilisation in the immediate work environment of the case study organisation such as the legalistic and media environments that the Agency intersects with was examined. There was also consideration of how different workplace environments within the internal operations of the case study organisation interact with each other - whether this facilitates or hinders an evidence-informed way of working. Examination of a possible differential impact on rural staff versus metropolitan staff and Head Office staff was undertaken regarding equity of access to existing program and strategies that promote the use of research and expert knowledge in the workplace. I argued that there are key factors that impact on research utilisation, the most prominent being a supportive management relationship and time factors, and that there is an identifiable difference to the equity of access for staff based in rural locations which when combined with time factors which inhibit access to and utilisation of research, demonstrate a further disadvantage for rural based staff.

There are clearly some key contextual factors that enable the use of research and expert knowledge by the Agency and also by practitioners. If these key factors are not well supported, they then become factors that hinder the research utilisation practices. The data
examined showed that to establish a workplace environment or climate of research and expert knowledge usage requires:

- effective support at the management or leadership level
- autonomy - the work role you hold within the organisation
- time to be able to undertake research utilisation processes and reflect on findings
- access to quality materials that are relevant and user friendly
- an infrastructure and resources to support an evidence-informed work practice environment.
- communication/promotion, and
- education to establish and maintain skill level.

These factors as outlined above need to be in play to affect an evidence-informed way of working. If they are not in place, then these factors themselves become hindrances to staff. It was reported that there was a majority view that the existing strategies and dissemination methods employed in the workplace were effective. However, it has been established that there is a Head Office/metropolitan verses rural and remote divide creating inequity of access for those staff based in more rural and remote locations regarding being able to access all research based activities other than those provided electronically by the Agency.

In Chapter 6 I explored the organisational factors that influence the use of research such as organisational culture and how it supports certain approaches such as evidence-based practice and policy-making. I also discussed whether organisational culture was used as a tool to bring about change, that is, a renewed focus on how policy and practice is delivered in an evidence-informed way. Other considerations included how the organisational parameters for practice and policy-making (rules, roles and responsibilities, and autonomy) impact, as well as the impact of leadership. It was argued in this chapter that without a fundamental culture that promotes and gives permission to enact a research based culture and way of operating, it would be extremely difficult to change the direction of practice to that of an evidence-informed way within the case study organisation. It was also argued that this research culture must go hand-in-hand with leadership both of which promote and model research utilisation processes and activities.
The analysis of the data indicated that key factors are required to be occurring within the organisational environment to engage and sustain an environment that is conducive for staff to actively seek out and apply an evidence-informed approach to their work. These factors include:

- leadership – effective modelling and practice
- alignment of organisation
- investment in infrastructure – human and financial (including resource allocation to permit effective time allocations within workloads)
- evaluation and refining strategies
- education
- delivering tangible results to enable change.

Leadership was considered the most critical factor at the organisational level in terms of both the promotion and demonstration of an evidence-informed approach. The executive must also produce tangible outcomes as this gives staff confidence in the approach and the motivation to engage and follow the vision of a research culture articulated by the executive. In this chapter, there was also significant reporting around ‘silo building’ within the case study organisation which could be to the detriment of enacting a fully inclusive evidence-informed approach by the Agency.

This current chapter (Chapter 7) examined how the three levels or ‘spheres of influence’ (organisational, environmental, and individual) impact and interact on the use of research and evidence-based practice within the case study organisation. The chapter also explored the uses of research (instrumental, conceptual and symbolic) and whether instrumental and symbolic uses of research provide a legitimatisation of the practitioners/policy-makers view (is it balanced or biased) in their delivery of decision-making and professional judgement.

The spheres of influence were examined to see whether they can co-exist, whether they are mutually exclusive or have fusion, and whether they are static or dynamic or can they be used at different times for different reasons. The uses of research were also examined in this way. It was argued that neither the spheres of influence nor the uses of research were static; they are dynamic in nature, they are not mutually exclusive. It was also argued that
one of the spheres of influence had more significance over the other two. It was established that the spheres of influence are not used in isolation of each other, nor are they static or mutually exclusive. It was concluded that all of the spheres of influence, may have similar factors across all three such as skill set/education and time, however, these factors have different impacts on the research utilisation processes due to the differing contexts. In order to affect research and expert knowledge utilisation, the spheres of influence need to interact positively and align so as not to inhibit or work against each other.

It was also established that the organisational sphere of influence was considered the most influential by the everyday research users cohort. It was initially considered that the individual sphere of influence (individual skill-base) would be the most important based on the assumption that if the practitioner had the fundamental skills and competence then they would be able to apply those skills regardless of the influence or the degree of impact of the other spheres of influence. This initial assumption was unfounded as it was reported that without the organisational sphere of influence which enabled the other two spheres of influence, research utilisation processes would be impractical within the case study organisation.

The chapter examined how staff in the case study organisation were using research and expert knowledge based on Stetler’s model\textsuperscript{303} of instrumental, conceptual and symbolic uses and whether these also worked in isolation and were either static or dynamic, and mutually exclusive. It was established that the uses of research were not static nor mutually exclusive; they were dynamic and can be used simultaneously. The same piece/s of research can be also used in different ways, for example used symbolically in a coaching situation and instrumentally in a technical competence aspect. It was identified that there was a potential fourth use of research\textsuperscript{304} - wider influence. In this situation, research and expert knowledge that was accessed and synthesised for no specific purposes but due to its availability, and/or by the participation in policy/practitioner networks which may create a catalyst for change or a different way of thinking and working. Whilst this may be closely related to conceptual use of research – it is research and expert knowledge that was not specifically sourced, but rather the unintended consequences (whether positive or otherwise) of coming into contact with the research.

\textsuperscript{303} Stetler, 1994
\textsuperscript{304} Refer to the discussion on wider influence of research and Nutley, Walter, et al., 2003
The application of research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation generally fell into three key areas of informing direct practice outcomes, development work, and professional development practices, with the most frequently reported reason for research and expert knowledge application being practice or work issue specific. This application of research and expert knowledge assisted the practitioners and policy-makers in legitimising their decision-making and professional judgement in both policy and practice settings. There was no indication that research and expert knowledge was viewed as a prescription for implementation, rather it was viewed as seminal pieces of information that needed to be considered in the context of practice to inform professional judgement.

7.6 **How staff use research to influence practice and policy within the case study organisation – a new ‘typology of research users’**

There are key factors that facilitate research utilisation within the case study organisation. These have been established and some of these are repetitive in theme; but have differing impacts depending on the spheres of influence they operate within. If the spheres aren’t all in play and interacting positively, then it directly impacts on the practitioner and policy makers in their ability to utilise research and expert knowledge (and to create and develop new knowledge).

It is established that the case study organisation is operating with a research culture and actively facilitating research and expert knowledge utilisation by the provision of infrastructure (for example the Research to Practice Program and Library Services). There are, however, areas that require focus such as an incentive based mechanisms encouraging research utilisation, as well as clear requirements to be evidence-informed in policy and practice environments. It is also recognised that research is used instrumentally, conceptually and symbolically for varying reasons and in varying ways that change depending on the situation. The key areas for research use within the case study organisation were for the purposes of informing direct practice outcomes (both by individuals, specialist staff and supervisors), development work, and professional development practices. The most frequently reported reason for research and expert knowledge application was for practice or work issue specific. The rigorous analysis of the collected data from the various cohorts has determined how and why staff access and use
research, the factors that help and hinder, and the complexities of the case study organisation that impacts on research utilisation of the individual.

It is important to also establish whether staff have a particular purpose or role as research utilisers in the case study organisation in influencing policy and practice. This raises the argument that there is currently not a way to classify the roles the various individuals have - it is not just about the factors that assist in, and the identification of how research and expert knowledge is used – but it is also about the role the individual has in research and expert knowledge use, for example are they facilitating someone else’s research use, is it for their own direct practice, is it proactive etc. Based on the responses from the focus group participants, the managers, and the everyday research users (and the information established from the previous chapters), I propose a new ‘typology of research users’. This will address how these individuals use research to influence practice and policy in a child welfare context in NSW (the original research question).

The ‘typology of research users’ has been developed as presented in Figure 7.7. It takes into consideration how the research participant engages with research and expert knowledge – that is, proactively and reactively, the frequency of that engagement, and the purpose for that engagement. Other considerations included the individual skill set such as competency of the research utilisation. I propose that there are four main types of research users within the case study organisation.

Figure 7.7 Typology of research users
**The Scholar** – is the individual who is research use competent, proactive in their research and expert knowledge utilisation, and has a constant engagement with accessing research. The Scholar sees research utilisation as a normal function in their professional lives and this is a way to maintain their continuous professional development. Research and expert knowledge is accessed for both development and issue specific reasons.

**The Seeker** – is the individual who is a competent research user and actively engages with research and expert knowledge, but requires a catalyst or reason to do so. They are more reactive in their approach to research, however are high research users. The Seeker may be the individual undertaking casework requiring direction for professional judgement, or a policy/project officer for development and change purposes.

**The Coach** – is the individual who is a competent research user who may not engage with research constantly, but does so in a proactive way to mitigate potential issues or to change thinking and practice. This is the individual that may not utilise research for their own benefit, but for the benefit of others.

**The Assumer** – is the individual who may or may not have well developed research user competencies, and may or may not be truly engaged with an evidence-informed way of working. This individual makes the assumption that all procedure and policy of the organisation is built on evidence-informed foundations (whether this is a correct assumption or not), and therefore believes that by implementing such procedures and policy, their work is in fact evidence-informed.

Figure 7.8 below provides an example of how the typology can be used. As previously stated the typology was developed by considering the 92 individuals across the three data cohorts. In this example, the everyday research users are classified against the proposed typology of research users. The classification for each of the participants may change over time as their roles, functions and level (seniority) within the organisation change. However, these classifications are based (as previously articulated) from the period of time (2009-10) when the everyday research user interviews were completed. By examining the transcripts of the interviews with the everyday research users (particularly around how, what and why research is accessed and used, whether they use this research and expert knowledge instrumentally, conceptually or symbolically; and the self reporting of
information literacy and knowledge management), and other information such as the role they have within the organisation, I have classified the participants against the ‘typology of research users’.

Figure 7.8 Classification of everyday research users by typology of research users

There were representations in the four types of research users from the everyday research users. The most represented type was that of the ‘Seeker’. As can be seen from Table 7.6, there was no significant pattern that was established when considering the demographic attributes of the participants that were classified into the ‘seeker’ category. Participants fell into all age groups, and have diversity in the periods of time they had worked for the case study organisation. There was a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate participants, and they represented all research locations. Again there were representatives from all levels within the organisation from Caseworkers to Managers. It was evident from the participants of the constant engagement with research and expert knowledge utilisation, and that there was a necessary competence of the individual skill base to ensure the effective use and application of research to practice and policy. These participants clearly articulated that there were specific reasons (reactive) for searching and utilising research and expert knowledge – this could be practice specific, for policy development or as the result of establishing ways to implement change within the broader organisation.

Table 7.6 Demographics of everyday research users by proposed typology
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<th>ID</th>
<th>Aboriginality</th>
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The next most represented group was that of the ‘Coach’. This category was made up of either participants who held management related positions or those that held specialist roles that facilitated professional development and quality assurance. There was no representation of participants either under 30 years or over 50 years of age. The majority of the participants in this category fell into the 41-50 years range which suggests experience and maturity of the professional is required in a coaching role. This data is clearly identifying how the role of coaching could be linked to the role of supervision and management, as well as the promotion of certain practices. Of particular interest was that none of these participants had postgraduate qualifications (however, two were studying to...
attain postgraduate qualifications). There was representation from all of the localities identified for this research in this category. These participants discussed utilising research and expert knowledge to encourage and promote professional growth and change or to provide timely advice that could result in going in a particular direction or change.

The ‘Scholar’ had a diversity of ages of participants, and a mixture of graduate and postgraduate qualifications. The types of roles these participants covered were more senior, that is Directors or Principal Officers of policy units and a senior field/operations manager. These participants hold positions of strategic importance that influence practice and policy within the case study organisation. Of note was that none of these participants are currently studying, however, the years since last qualification is relevantly recent. There is no rural representation in this category which is significant given the previous discussions relating to the utilising research for professional development purposes by rural and remote staff due to a lack of opportunity to physically access some research activities provided by the case study organisation. These participants constantly articulated how their engagement with research and expert knowledge was for their own professional development and contemporariness, but also could be issue specific.

The ‘Assumer’ had one participant who fell into this category. The participant was a relative newcomer to the Agency and was in a field based casework position. This participant, even though they reported that they had good research utilisation skills and a positive view of evidence-informed approaches, constantly articulated that they were hopeful that those in decision-making positions used research and evidence-informed materials which underpinned all practices within the Agency. It was the participant’s view that factors across all the spheres of influence impinged on the level of their research usage rather than enabling it. There was an assumption by this participant that an evidence-informed process had occurred before the participant was required to take an action. There was a generally observed scepticism to the actual use of research and expert knowledge in the workplace and greater organisation from the participant, however, this participant did believe in the philosophical direction of a research culture of the Agency.
7.7 Importance of understanding the type of research user

Different individuals have different roles and functions within the case study organisation. These roles are determined by positions descriptions, organisational goals and strategic directions. They are differentiated by level of seniority and program areas. Some have direct or more influence than others, some need to be effective research utilisers to promote professional capability, others are more focused on the individual level of undertaking specific work and/or decision-making.

By understanding the required type of research user for particular roles, for example generally specialist casework staff and manager positions fall into the research user type of the ‘Coach’, it aids the organisation in identifying the required competence and type of individuals/skill set required to fulfil certain roles within the organisation. Understanding the typology of research users also provides the organisation an opportunity to consider the diversity of learning styles (proactive vs. reactive). This aids the provision of meaningful supervision, professional development and learning strategies (and activities), and change management approaches to effectively target staff. This is particularly important for staff that fall into the research user type of the ‘Assumer’ where there may need to be alternate strategies to engage with staff to enact change or practice improvement. There may be little self-initiating research utilisation action by the Assumer, therefore more intensive strategies may be required to effectively engage with this category of staff. This also links to maintaining an effective organisational learning environment and recognising that there are different learning styles and that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not effective to either organisational or individual development and learning.

Some types of research users are more strategic in influencing the organisation at a senior level such as the ‘Scholars’ as they may be more contemporary and conceptual in their abilities, whereas both ‘Scholars and ‘Coaches’ may influence the broader work environment and individual contexts. However, this again relates to the role within the structure the individual research user holds, and the level of positional authority (autonomy) that sits alongside that role. Fundamentally the case study organisation requires different types of research users for its different functions. The organisation needs ‘Scholars’ who are contemporary, they need ‘Seekers’ who are the research competent
‘doers’ across a range of program areas, and they need the ‘Coaches’ to intercede and promote capability where necessary as part of a broader professional development strategy.

7.8 Conclusion: The NSW Statutory Child Welfare Agency and research utilisation

In this chapter I have explored the spheres of influence, how they interact and whether they are static or dynamic and whether they are mutually exclusive. I have also examined the spheres of influence and have found that the organisational sphere of influence has more impact or influence than others in facilitating the research utilisation processes within the case study organisation.

The chapter also examined how staff in the case study organisation were using research and expert knowledge based on Stetler’s model\[^{305}\] of instrumental, conceptual and symbolic uses and whether these also worked in isolation and were either static or dynamic, and mutually exclusive. It was established that the uses of research were not static nor mutually exclusive; they were dynamic and can be used simultaneously and the same piece/s of research can be also used in different ways. It was identified that there was a potential fourth use of research - wider influence.

The application of research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation generally fell into three key areas of informing direct practice outcomes, development work, and professional development practices, with the most frequently reported reason being for research and expert knowledge application was for practice or work issue specific. The application of research and expert knowledge assisted the practitioners and policy-makers in legitimising their decision-making and professional judgement in both policy and practice settings.

I proposed a new ‘typology of research user’ based on the role of the individual’s engagement with research and expert knowledge, that is identifying that staff have a particular purpose or role as research utilisers in the case study organisation in influencing policy and practice. I articulated the importance of having a diversity of research user types

\[^{305}\] Stetler, 1994
within the organisation. Further, by understanding the different types of research users within the case study organisation and the functions that they undertake, this aids the Agency in identifying role competence, learning and development strategies, and identifying the need for diverse engagement strategies with staff to effect change.
CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

In presenting this thesis, I have examined the issues of research, evidence and expert knowledge utilisation in the child welfare field in New South Wales, an area where there is little reported literature and research available. I considered a number of theoretical areas and literature from various fields that contribute to the understanding of research utilisation in a child welfare public sector context. I examined how organisation and structure impacts on the individual practitioner and policy maker in undertaking and engaging with research utilisation processes. The thesis establishes that research, expert knowledge and information have a place in the policy process and the subsequent service delivery outcomes in a social policy child welfare context. I established that the evidence-informed process sits within the broader policy process, acknowledging a hierarchy of evidence, and recognising the importance of having a non-linear process to inform policy, and to assist with the creation of new knowledge and evidence.

Whilst the evolution of New Public Management (NPM) several decades ago instigated public sector reform processes; the current evidence-informed approach is integral to enact ongoing reforms by providing a pathway to promote ‘what works in what context’ transparency, accountability and to validate community and citizen need. The very nature of NPM, and the ongoing reforms and changes to how and what public sector organisations look like and deliver, is core to the discourse and requirement for an evidence-informed practice and policy approach. Without such an approach, the legitimisation of organisation in the current operational environment of delivering public sector services as social policy function and any subsequent change is questionable.

By engaging with this research and posing the question how does research influence practice and policy in a child welfare context in NSW, I was able to explore a range of notions and factors that influence the successful process of research utilisation. I also examined the barriers and enablers to such implementation in a unique context of a

Davies, Nutley, et al., 2000
statutory child welfare agency (the case study organisation) which is mandated by legislation. This resulted in the exploration of a set of sub-questions which included:

A. for what purposes are practitioners, managers and policy-makers presently using research, that is, instrumental, conceptual or symbolic uses?

B. how do factors such as individual, environmental and organisational factors contribute to the use of research?
   (i) are all three spheres (individual, environmental and organisational) of influence on research utilisation dynamic and mutually exclusive?
   (ii) is research utilisation at optimum when all three spheres of influence (individual, environmental and organisational) are in play?

C. is there a difference between rural and metropolitan staff regarding research and evidence-based knowledge utilisation, that is, do contextual influences such as support, time, access, and organisational culture negatively affect research utilisation more so in rural and remote locations than metropolitan locations?

Initially the research was considered to be extremely difficult due to focussing on an organisation which may have been limited in responsiveness and flexibility due to the very nature of its operations and legislative mandate. However, it was established that this was not the case. The case study organisation which has clear directives, and policy and procedure, did not necessarily inhibit the individual in engaging with, and utilising research and expert knowledge to inform their professional judgement and decision-making processes. I approached the research from the direction of ensuring that I heard the voices of staff from a multitude of locations including rural, remote and metropolitan who were undertaking different roles and functions and at different levels of seniority across the organisation. I used a mixed methodology approach to capture their differing views and perceptions of research utilisation within the case study organisation and I scrutinised the data that I generated intensively to build a picture of research utilisation within the case study organisation.

I have argued throughout the research that there are key factors that influence how research utilisation processes are instigated and implemented, and that the three ‘spheres of influence’ are critical to this, as is the understanding of why and how research is accessed.
I utilised Stetler’s\textsuperscript{307} model of research use as basis for understanding this research use and generated new data for consideration. In Chapter 4, I argued that capability of the individual is paramount to the ability to access and utilise expert knowledge and research, and therefore necessary for effective knowledge management, knowledge creation and translation of information into practice and policy-making. In Chapter 5, I argued there were key factors that impacted on research utilisation, the most prominent being a supportive management relationship and time factors. I argued that there is an identifiable difference to the equity of access for staff based in rural locations which, when combined with time factors which inhibit access to and utilisation of research, demonstrate a further disadvantage for rural based staff. I argued in Chapter 6 that without a fundamental culture that promotes and gives permission to enact a research based culture and way of operating, it would be extremely difficult to change the direction of practice to that of an evidence-informed way within the case study organisation. It was also argued that this research culture must go hand-in-hand with leadership which both promotes and models research utilisation processes and activities. It was put forward in Chapter 7 that neither the spheres of influence, nor the uses of research were static; they are dynamic in nature, they are not mutually exclusive. It was also argued that one of the spheres of influence had more significance over the other two, that being the organisational sphere or macro level within the case study organisation.

With the generation of new data via the process of document analysis, focus groups, manager surveys and interviews with everyday research users, I was able to establish that there was a research culture in place and an active commitment to facilitate infrastructure and other mechanisms to promote research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation. The research participants articulated the shift in their own, and the Agency’s practice, to that of being more evidence-informed. I was also able to create new data. This data related to how and why research is used in the workplace as opposed to just considering the accessibility and dissemination of research. It also focussed on the individual’s engagement with, and purpose or role they play in accessing and utilising research and expert knowledge in the workplace. As a result I developed a new ‘typology of research users’ which gives insight to how this relates to required competencies, skills

\textsuperscript{307} Stetler, 1994
and attributes of individuals relating to differing positions or functions within the case study organisation.

There was a general consensus established from the literature that an evidence-informed approach rather than an evidence-based approach is more applicable in the social science or social care arena. This was reiterated by the research participants. Participants suggested that research, evidence and expert-knowledge was seen as one facet of decision-making - that is applied more so as a part of professional judgement and not as a prescription for a particular action or outcome. Even though the social science or social care field had learned from the approach of the medical model of evidence-based practiced – a broader view of what constitutes evidence and how it was applied is needed in the social care arena.

What was identified, was the role of the development of the New Public Management movement had on the shift to a more considered, transparent, accountable and evidence-based approach to ‘doing business’ in the public sector context. Further consideration was also the role of influence that this had on moving to a more evidence-informed process, and the subsequent change in focus of how and why research is undertaken. That is, research and evidence is seen as a foundation for informing policy and practice, and that evidence is formed from a range of differing knowledge sources. It was highlighted that evidence-based and evidence-informed practice and policy-making are not purely built on what is regarded as traditional research, but a whole range of knowledges such as practice wisdom and other communities of knowledge (such as organisational, policy, economic and service user knowledge). The issue of the impact of a linear policy process (and discussion on policy vs. politic including political risk taking and calculation) was critical in understanding the Agency work environment and how a bottom-up approach to policy and practice formulation at times does not occur consistently. This is recognition that a spectrum of evidence is required when considering an evidence-informed approach to practice and policy making. A spectrum of evidence is as critical to effective decision-making, as it is to “the need for a new emphasis in research and practice on the relationship

308 Head, 2008; Head, 2010
309 Althaus, 2008
between ethics, social responsibility, public accountability and control in implementation.\textsuperscript{310} Links are needed from parts to whole, research to practice, practice to program, program to policy, and policy to other social issues. These links will add up not to a single irrevocable conclusion but to the many things that can be understood, that need to be weighed, and can inform decision.\textsuperscript{311}

This shift in the research agenda from a push to a pull model, that is undertaking research to establish why things are occurring and what works as opposed to undertaking research for the sake of generating new knowledge for no specific reason, is also vital when considering the social welfare/social science arenas. The case study has identified an issue of relevancy and transferability of the research to practice and policy context. The requirement for practice leaders to engage with research generators is necessary for specific field related practice environments and further reduces any perceived research-to-practice gaps.\textsuperscript{312} This was further evidenced by research participants reporting that they would utilise internally generated material relevant to their practice that included components of how the evidence was translated to the context in which they operated, as opposed to other externally generated materials. However, the politicisation of research funding and research being used as a political weapon, further highlights the duelling cultures of research thinking vs. political thinking. It does raise the question of how research being used as a political weapon may also reduce informed democracy and demographic governance; however, it may also narrow the points of disagreement.\textsuperscript{313}

Organisational alignment was also identified as a significant factor to the research utilisation and evidence-informed practices of the case study organisation. It was established in the case study that there was a Head Office - operations divide (also identified as silo building activity) within the organisation. This had a significant impact on the perception of the workers in the operational field arm of the case study organisation by way of the lack of recognition of the existing practice expertise, and therefore not tapping

\textsuperscript{310} Barrett, 2004
\textsuperscript{311} Wilensky, 2000
\textsuperscript{312} Hutchinson and Johnston, 2004; Hird, 2005
\textsuperscript{313} Henig, 2008
into expert knowledge capability freely available to policy makers and decision makers within the Agency. Converse to this perception of lack of recognition for practice wisdom in the development of practice and policy was the ‘assumption’ that an evidence-base was automatically included in all aspects of policy and produce development which is not necessarily the case.

The general philosophy or view points of the research participants in this case study was that an evidence-informed way of working was the most effective and productive in facilitating both quality decision-making, and therefore outcomes for clients. It also facilitated the capability or professionalisation of the individual, both in aspects of their continuous development and quest for knowledge to ensure their practices and decisions were effective and well founded. It was established that the case study organisation was operating in the ‘organisational excellence’ model of research use\(^{314}\) - the Agency has invested in the structures, processes and the cultures of the Agency to embed and deliver an evidence-informed way of working. However, it is clear from the data sources that the case study organisation does not overtly provide any incentive or reward for staff to engage with and participate in an evidence-informed approach to their work.

There are areas of development that include the evaluation of the full impact of the implementation of an evidence-informed approach and the associated micro political processes. It also requires non-practice based functions within the case study organisation such as corporate human resources to consider and evaluate position descriptions, and the requirements or selection criterion for positions to ensure evidence-informed practice requirements are clearly articulated and understood. Another key issue that was articulated throughout the research was the ‘downgrading’ or ‘winding back’ of the corporate Learning and Development function. This may create considerable challenges for the case study organisation. It was established that training and skill development in research utilisation processes is deemed an absolute necessity. If this function is not contributing to the required level, it may produce the situation within the Agency of the Agency having a desire for a research culture with the general philosophy of being evidence-informed, but not providing the tools and capability to enact such on the ground. Even though there were distinct barriers to the effective implementation of research utilisation practices within the

\(^{314}\) Adapted from Nutley, Walter, et al., 2007
case study organisation, the benefits for such an approach were clear, and changes in both individual practices and the broader Agency practices to that of an evidence-informed approach were observed and reported.

8.2 Using evidence-based practice in a child welfare setting - how does research influence practice and policy in a child welfare context in NSW

As previously articulated, it was established that the staff of the case study organisation are immersed in the research culture of the organisation, and are enthusiastic and motivated in their access to, and use of research to assist in their decision-making and professional judgment. Those sources of research utilised were predominantly identified as being internally based or generated by the Agency, however, some other external mechanisms such as the internet and university libraries were also popular as sources to access research and other knowledge based material. It is important to revisit the research question/s and draw some conclusions.

For what purposes are practitioners, managers and policy-makers presently using research, that is, instrumental, conceptual or symbolic uses?
The data collected indicated that research is used instrumentally, conceptually and symbolically in the case study organisation and applied in different ways. It was also established that the same piece/s of research can also be used in different ways, for example, used symbolically in a coaching situation and instrumentally in a technical competence aspect. Different individuals may use the same pieces of research in different ways depending on the context it relates to and also their depth of understanding on the topic. It was identified that there was a potential fourth use of research - wider influence. In this situation, research and expert knowledge was accessed and synthesised for no specific purposes but due to its availability. It is clear that the uses of research are also dynamic and not mutually exclusive - that is they are not used in isolation of each other. The uses of research can occur simultaneously in different contexts for different audiences. The reported reasons for the application of research and expert knowledge within the case study organisation generally fell into three key areas of; informing direct practice

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315 Refer to the discussion on wider influence of research and Nutley, Walter, et al., 2003
outcomes, development work, and professional development practices. The most frequently reported reason for research and expert knowledge application being practice or work issue specific. The application of research and expert knowledge assisted the practitioners and policy-makers in legitimising their decision-making and professional judgement in both policy and practice settings. There was no indication that research and expert knowledge was viewed as a prescription for implementation, rather it was viewed as seminal pieces of information that needed to be considered in the context of practice to inform professional judgement.

**How do factors such as individual, environmental and organisational factors contribute to the use of research?**

There are factors within each sphere of influence that contribute to the use of research and expert knowledge in the case study organisation. What is significant is that these factors can either be barriers or enablers. I identified both the barriers and enablers throughout the case study chapters of the thesis. I then presented a reflection of the various determinants and factors that positively influence effective research utilisation and evidence-informed practice (or that need to be in place) across the three spheres of influence. This was provided in Chapter 7 (Table 7.2 Key determinants that impact on the individual across the three spheres of influence within the case study organisation). There were identified areas of commonality across each of the spheres of influence such as time, competing priorities, individual skill base, support/leadership, and the value placed on using research and expert knowledge. These commonalities however, have quite distinct impacts to each context that they related to.

**Are all three spheres (individual, environmental and organisational) of influence on research utilisation dynamic and mutually exclusive?**

They are dynamic and they are not mutually exclusive. It was reported in the thesis that the spheres of influence (as was the uses of research) do co-exist and have fusion. It was concluded that even though there are different factors and determinants within each sphere of influence, in order to affect research and expert knowledge utilisation, the spheres of influence need to interact positively and align so as not to work against each other or inhibit research utilisation processes.
Is research utilisation at optimum when all three ‘spheres of influence’ (individual, environmental and organisational) are in play?

It was established through the research process that all of the spheres of influence need to be interacting together to ensure optimal engagement and implementation of research utilisation processes. They all play a role, however, it was reported that the organisational sphere of influence (factors and supports) is the most important\textsuperscript{316} in providing the platform and infrastructure to enable the other two remaining spheres of influence (individual and work environment). The organisational sphere of influence provides the framework and permission for the others to operate in. If the three spheres of influence are working against each other, then the identified enablers of influence that facilitate research utilisation will in fact themselves become barriers. Without the alignment of the spheres of influence, it would be difficult to actively facilitate research utilisation processes. It would also impact on the capability of the case study organisation to develop and create new knowledge and evidence relevant to core business.

Is there a difference between rural and metropolitan staff regarding research and evidence-based knowledge utilisation?

It was established from the data collected that there was a distinct inequity in the availability of, or access to all research based functions and activities generated by the case study organisation. This did not apply to general intranet or internet based research and literature based activities as this technology is available state-wide in the Agency. It was reported however, that the ability to attend research seminars and forums which were predominantly held in the metropolitan areas due to both time and distance which impinged on both human and economic resources, was a significant barrier. This reduced the level of interaction that these staff had with others and did not provide opportunities for debate and discussion with peers on research related matters. Research participants suggested better use of technology was one solution to overcoming the barriers of accessibility to research. However, participants generally articulated that they felt the opportunities that their metropolitan and Head Office counterparts were able to access was cause to not apply for and work in rural and remote settings. They were not afforded the same level of value or support as workers from the executive of the case study organisation. It would also impact on the ability of the Agency to remain contemporary to

\textsuperscript{316} Retsas, 2000
research utilisation and an evidence-informed approach, and therefore evolve and adapt as an organisation as required.

8.3 The creation of a new typology of research users

Whilst it was important to collect data on this issue of research utilisation, it did create the opportunity to explore the function or role of how individual managers, practitioners and policy-makers engaged with research or the purpose for that engagement - how does research influence practice and policy in a child welfare context in NSW. The understanding and dimensions involved of why individuals utilise research, expert knowledge and information as opposed to their role in engaging with such (the function for engagement) have resulted in expanding the work by Stetler, Water, Nutley et al, and Weiss on research use, in constructing a new typology of research users. As outlined in Chapter 7, I proposed a new ‘typology of research users’ (as opposed to the existing typologies on research use) and identified four main types of research user within the case study organisation. These are the Scholar, the Seeker, the Coach and the Assumer. By closely examining the variety of responses from the focus group participants, managers, and everyday research users, the typology of research users was formed. The new typology takes into consideration how the research participants engage with research and expert knowledge – that is, proactively and reactively, the frequency of that engagement, and the purpose for that engagement. Other considerations included the individual skill set such as competency in research utilisation practices and processes.

This new typology will provide insight to those involved in the research utilisation field as it aids organisations in identifying the required competence and type of individuals/skill set required to fill and fulfil certain roles within organisations. In understanding the typology of research users, it also provides organisations with an opportunity to consider the diversity of learning styles (proactive vs. reactive) and this can also be applied to assist in the provision of meaningful supervision, professional development and learning strategies, and change management approaches to effectively target staff.
8.4 Implications of research utilisation in a child welfare context in NSW

This thesis presents a critical engagement with the subject matter and has generated new data and analysis that addresses the current gap in both national and internal literature. The focus of the research and the subsequent thesis was not just about accessing research but exploring the actual engagement with, and application of research in a child welfare public sector organisation in which there are internal and external drivers that influence an evidence-informed approach to practice and policy making. The case study undertaken on a legislative mandated statutory child protection organisation does provide a unique insight into how research utilisation can be implemented within a public sector organisation – that is it was not constrained in adopting an evidence-informed approach and has enabled a research culture. The evidence–informed approach in this case study is employed for both internal (practice and policy-making) and external uses (policy making, bids for resources and influence). There are, however, spheres of influence (individual, work environment, and organisational environment) that do impact on the implementation and effectiveness of research utilisation. There are barriers and enablers identified in each of the spheres of influence that have been reported and discussed at length. I reflected on a range of individuals’ experiences and practices within the case study organisation and the way that they interact, engage and utilise research, expert knowledge and information in their everyday work environments. This highlighted various tensions between the discourse and practice of research utilisation processes.

There is a significant tension that relates to the role of continuous professional development and competency based training within the case study organisation. The issue is that it is not the sole responsibility of the individual - it is also an organisational responsibility. There is a requirement for research utilisation strategies and mechanisms to evolve within the case study organisation. The corporate training function will be vital to that evolution as will other key areas such as the Research to Practice Program and Professional Development and Quality Assurance Program. This reiterates the importance of effective and ongoing learning and skill development in the area of research utilisation. Currently there is a reported view that the corporate training arm is not fully evidence-informed itself and is being ‘shut down’. This goes to the core of the integrity of

317 Killeen and Barnfather, 2005; Mullen, Bellamy, et al., 2007
research utilisation processes of the Agency. This provides a conflict between the philosophy of the Agency to be evidenced-informed and a lack of training in the underpinning framework and skills to facilitate such an approach. In addition to ensuring a corporate responsibility to research utilisation education, there is also the requirement to recognise different learning styles which are fundamental to any learning and development, educational, or change strategies the Agency undertakes. It is necessary to not take a ‘one strategy fits all’ approach to educative and change strategies within the organisation. The role of training, as well as supervision and development planning, needs to take account of the diversity of learning styles.

Equity of access for those staff based in the more rural and remote locations of the state needs to be reconsidered and addressed, not only for the consideration of making available the same level and types of research based forums and activities, but to redress the perceptions of staff being less valued and less supported by the executive. This in itself is a geographical barrier to research utilisation that has a flow on effect to recruitment, staff supervision and maintenance strategies. The notion that a lack of equity access to research activities at times may be a ‘deal breaker’ in the ability to attract, maintain and retain staff in those localities is a significant one. It further highlights the Head Office/metropolitan vs. rural divide – a divide in the culture of the organisation. Technological solutions may redress the inequity that exists, however, this tension also goes to the core of the organisational behaviour and culture to provide the same development and support opportunities of all staff regardless of locality. This could also impact on the ability of the organisation to successfully adapt, develop and change. If there is a disparate workforce, it will be difficult to successfully promote and implement organisational change.

This is further impeded by the top down culture of the organisation and reported silo building with and between Head Office Units and field operations. Firstly is impacts on the policy making process (validity, integrity and the engagement with the fully policy cycle process) which is presented as linear within the organisation. It also impedes opportunities to harness practitioner wisdom and facilitate the generation of new knowledge and evidence. Organisational politics and conflict is a barrier to the functioning of the macro level or organisational sphere of influence which has the role of enabling research utilisation within the Agency.
There are also tensions of mechanisms and strategies that have been put into place to facilitate research utilisation processes. The lack of a clear expectation of organisational behaviour to be evidence-informed, and any associated incentive to promote such an approach requires examination. Instigating infrastructure to facilitate research utilisation and not devolving a level of responsibility (and incentive) for implementing an evidence-informed approach throughout the Agency creates confusion. Examples of discord include the tensions of agency and structure vs. autonomy and discretion, that is, it is implied that all practice and policy making will be evidence-informed; however, decision-making processes, seniority and autonomy (top down culture) may inhibit some practitioners and policy-makers to implement such an approach. Whilst there is a philosophy embedded within the culture of the case study organisation that promotes and enables research use, there is a reported barrier of agency and structure that inhibits research use.

Further examples include permissions and perception vs. practice such as the allocation of time in workload planners. There is a time allocation in workload planners for staff to undertake research utilisation and professional development processes, however, there is a discord between accessing that time as embargoed time, and the perception of staff being conflicted by work priorities, and a perception of needing permission from supervisors to use that time (and for using research). This is compounded by the perception that direct client work is more important than professional development and research based activities. These are key dilemmas for the organisation as it is clear that the link has not been clearly made between utilising such time as that identified in workload planners for research and development and the potential benefit to client and organisational outcomes.

Throughout the thesis there was a call for practice and research leaders to interact and engage in the process of research and knowledge creation. This was to establish an understanding of the value and purpose of research. That is, how industry wisdom could contribute to research, and how research could contribute to industry practice (research being need, push or demand driven) which is context relevant. It is important to understand the relationship that the Agency has with the various tertiary and research institutions when commissioning or jointly engaging with research activities. It is for the purpose of the Agency establishing an evidence-base for the organisation, to utilise, to review, refine and develop social policy and service delivery options based on what works. This is a significant shift in the role universities and externals researchers have previously had with
social care and public sector agencies. The direct integration of research, theory and practice application of what works, opens up a whole new world in how research is initiated, undertaken, understood and valued. Key to the success of such an approach is the ongoing monitoring of these external interactions to gain knowledge of the relationship between research utilisation, research production and the commissioning of research – why, when and for what purpose. It is also important to ensure that the purpose or reasoning for the commissioning of research firstly reflects the direction and core business of the case study organisation, and secondly, continues to be successfully utilised.

It was established that the Agency was operating in an excellence model; however, the embedded model of research use may be more beneficial to the organisation. I identified in the thesis the need to undertake further research and this would assist in identifying strategies to progress to an embedded model. These areas included research (or evaluation) into the holistic processes of implementation of research utilisation within the case study organisation. There is little available evidence or current strategies in place to obtain the evidence to gauge the full impact of an evidence-informed approach to core business within the case study organisation. This is compounded by the need to evaluate and refine strategies and infrastructure to address the evolving nature of research utilisation and the needs of the workers. Further consideration also needs to be given to embedding incentive and reward mechanisms for being evidence-informed in the practice and policy making of the individual. This needs to be encompassed in all processes including non-practice functions to ensure the requirement to be informed is clearly articulated and understood.

An evaluation process may consider a longitudinal research study to consider changes in practice and attitude towards research utilisation of individuals and the case study organisation over a period of significant time, cross referencing to the introduction of strategies and infrastructure (such as new research utilisation strategies and guidance tools, educational programs, and documented policy and practice changes). Colyer and Kamath discuss the impact of an evidence-based approach where practitioners use of research is still subjective in nature and therefore the monitoring and evaluation of strategies should be in place to monitor implementation of such an approach. Davies, Nutley et al suggest

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318 Nutley, Walter, et al., 2007
319 Colyer and Kamath, 1999
320 Davies, Nutley, et al., 2005
that impact assessments are also required to gauge “research/practice connectivity” which include uptake strategies. Denis and Lomas go even further to suggest that early involvement in evaluation processes by practitioners and policy-makers is essential in both the “framing of the evaluation and in the interpretation of the research”\textsuperscript{321}. This would have a positive impact on providing a commonality of understanding of the research and what is to be evaluated, as well as the reflection of how well certain processes are being implemented. It would also provide knowledge and data on how certain aspects of the different context or environments (spheres of influence) are impacting on research utilisation. This is also significant as it would form part of an evidence-based policy cycle\textsuperscript{322} that would in turn inform new policy, changes to delivery or maintaining the status quo. It is therefore suggested that a process of longitudinal research is undertaken to map and understand the change in practice of individuals and of the Agency (as observed and reported) to that of an evidence-informed approach. This relates to:

- changes in practice (quality decision-making and outcomes) and attitude towards research utilisation of individuals and the case study organisation over a period of significant time, and cross referencing to the introduction of strategies and infrastructure (such as new research utilisation strategies and guidance tools, educational programs, and documented policy and practice changes)
- evaluate changes to non-practice functions in their contribution to an evidence-informed approach, such as impact of a change to job requirements and selection criterion on practice expectations
- evaluate competency of individuals in research utilisation processes and techniques with a control cohort.

It is vital that research utilisation should continue to move forward within the case study organisation. The implementation of strategies and mechanisms does not automatically equate to effective research utilisation practices and processes and does not guarantee an evidence-informed approach to practice and policy making. It is constantly evolving and needs refinement as competency and capability increase. The case study presents a genuine enthusiasm for delivering quality outcomes, services, programs and policies based on an evidence-informed approach in a statutory child protection organisation. The case study organisation is demonstrating its commitment to delivering services and programs

\textsuperscript{321} Denis and Lomas, 2003
\textsuperscript{322} Bridgman and Davis, 2004
informed by evidence of ‘what works’, and being responsible in their delivery of public services. Whilst barriers and enablers have been identified, the benefits for an evidence-informed approach clearly outweigh any deficits of such an approach. In addition, understanding the purpose or role of how staff engage with research (typology of research users) can only assist in targeting strategies to effect the development of professional capability and competence within organisations.

The research and associated data has raised implications not only for the case study organisation in relation to enabling evidence-informed strategies and processes, but implications for child welfare practice. If child welfare organisations broadly do not embrace an evidence-informed stance to practice and policy-making, it could have dire consequences when considering the outcomes to those who are considered to be the most vulnerable in society - the child that needs care and protection. If the service system (whether it be on the prevention or statutory child protection ends of that spectrum) is not contemporary and reflective of the evidence and knowledge of what enables positive client outcomes, then it could be argued as to whether such services are providing the most appropriate supports. Are child welfare services providing out of home care services that foster and support the individual, do they engage with families and children and does this promote awareness to and prevention of child related abuse and neglect, do they understand the importance of collaborative working relationships that enable a suite of services to support the child and their developing need? These are all key questions that child welfare organisation need to reflect upon, and consider their actions and responses in the light of evidence, research and expert knowledge.

These implications are drawn from examination of a statutory child protection agency, however, they are also relevant to broader human service sectors such as the child care and educational sectors, for example, identifying actions and enablers to deliver the best possible service and life outcomes to individuals based on what works. A practice example may include appropriate child development, and the building of resilience and self of the child which would promote and encourage protective behaviours.

Whilst it is important to consider the processes of what to do to achieve evidence-informed practice, and gain an understanding how and why we engage with such an evidence-base,
what cannot be lost is the paramount consideration of the wellbeing of the child and ensure the effective delivery of evidence-informed child welfare services.

Other fields of practice can learn from the case study that has been undertaken, not just in considering the barriers and enablers, and understanding the typology of research users, or by examining organisational culture and learning, but by considering whether research utilisation and an evidence-informed approach is necessary or even urgent in other service delivery agencies and arenas. I do not suggest that New Public Management processes and reforms are selective and therefore only some fields of practice are advancing an evidence-informed culture. I argue the opposite, to provide public value and an engaged citizenry, public sector organisations are required to determine what works and be evidence-informed. Some fields of practice may have added urgency to evoke an evidence-informed approach to practice and policy making more swiftly that others due to the contexts and nature of the functions and services they provide. This case study provides a foundation and framework for public sector service delivery agencies to move towards successful research utilisation and evidence-informed practice and policy making.

I close with the final quote from an everyday research user which I believe sums up the position of research and expert knowledge utilisation within the case study organisation. That is, the approach of an evidence-informed way of working is at the front of the minds of managers, practitioners and policy-makers. It is also however, about a number of complementary strategies that need constant review and refinement. This is an important acknowledgement in striving for new goals in research and expert knowledge utilisation, and evidence-informed practice. It is also important for organisations to strive to become organisations of excellence in implementing research utilisation strategies and mechanisms to embed an evidence-informed practice and policy-making approach.

“It’s not so much what needs to be done, I think we all know what needs to be done but it’s about a multitude of strategies to get ourselves there”. Everyday research user M1.
# BIBLIOGRAPHY


Department of Human Services (2009). Position Description - Project Officer, Learning and Development.

Department of Human Services (2010). Position Description - Casework Manager.


NSW Department of Community Services (2006g). DoCS research report 2005/06. Sydney.


9.1 Additional Reading


# Appendix 1 Focus group prompt questions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>PROMPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is access to research important, and why?</td>
<td>when undertaking current work tasks/issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for policy and curriculum development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>when undertaking practice strategy/reflective practice including case reviews</td>
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<td></td>
<td>when it becomes available</td>
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<td></td>
<td>when undertaking special projects/presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>when undertaking learning and development/professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. When do you access research?</td>
<td>Research to Practice</td>
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<td>journals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>internet</td>
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<td>3. What research are you accessing?</td>
<td>to assist with decision making</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>when creating a research culture</td>
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<td>for procedural issues and feedback</td>
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<td></td>
<td>for training purposes</td>
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<td>for court</td>
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<td>4. Do you use the research to inform your practice/policy development?</td>
<td>access issues</td>
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<td>time constraints in using/absorbing research products</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ability to appraise relevance/identification of credible research</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. What helps or hinders access to and using research?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Is the Research to Practice Program making an impact on practice/policy? How?</td>
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## Appendix 2 Distribution list – Manager Survey

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Appendix 3 Manager Survey

The Research Utilisation Nexus: Putting Research into Practice
Manager Survey

This manager survey is part of a research study to establish whether practitioners, managers and policy-makers in a child welfare context in NSW use research to inform practice and policy-making, that is research and evidence-based knowledge and information utilisation.

The study is being conducted by Cate Thomas (PhD Candidate) and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy undertaken at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Dr Ariadne Vromen, Senior Lecturer.

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you are not under any obligation to consent to complete the survey. Submitting a completed survey is an indication of your consent to participate in the study. The survey will take between approximately half an hour to an hour to complete. Please return your completed survey in the attached envelope.

If you would like to know more at any stage or wish to withdraw at any time from the research, please feel free to contact Cate on 0423022032.

ABOUT YOUR STAFF:

1. Do you supervise/have responsibility for staff that utilise research and evidence-based knowledge in their work practices? Please fill in the appropriate circle:
   Yes ☐ No ☐

   If you answered yes, please list the traits and skills that you believe make these staff research use competent.
   a. __________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________
   d. __________________________________________
   e. __________________________________________

2. What are some factors that may help staff in using research in their practice in their immediate work environment
   a. __________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________
   d. __________________________________________
   e. __________________________________________

3. What are some factors that may hinder staff in using research in their practice in their immediate work environment
   a. __________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________
   d. __________________________________________
   e. __________________________________________
4. What are other factors that may help the use of research in practice in the broader DoCS organisational environment for the staff you supervise/have responsibility for?
   a. __________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________
   d. __________________________________________
   e. __________________________________________

5. What are other factors that may hinder the use of research in practice in the broader DoCS organisational environment for the staff you supervise/have responsibility for?
   a. __________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________
   d. __________________________________________
   e. __________________________________________

6. What are the types of research or expert knowledge/evidence-base your staff are accessing?
   Will the answer only be written material? What about phoning an expert??
   Please fill in the appropriate circle/s:
   DoCS Research Reports
   DoCS Research to Practice materials
   DoCS Library catalogues and resources
   DoCS Library databases and journals
   Peer reviewed journals
   Systemic reviews
   Meta-analyses
   Supervisor
   Professional Development Staff
   Other – please list: __________________________________________

7. How do your staff access/source the required research or expert-knowledge?
   Please fill in the appropriate circle/s:
   DoCS Online (Research to Practice)
   DoCS Library
   University Libraries
   Internet
   Professional Development & Quality Assurance Program
   Learning & Development
   Other – please list: __________________________________________

8. How frequently would they (staff) source research or expert knowledge on a weekly basis?
   Please fill in the appropriate circle/s:
   Caseworkers
   Once a week
   Twice a week
   More often
   Never
9. What are the main reasons your staff access research and expert/evidence-based knowledge?

Please fill in the appropriate circle/s:

- Casework/issue specific
- Assist professional decision-making and judgement
- Develop policy/procedure
- Develop training packages
- Develop options/position papers
- Ongoing professional development for self
- Other: please list:

10. Please nominate staff that are competent and active research users in your area of responsibility that you think may contribute to a focus group/interview that will look at these issues in more detail. These staff may be approached by the researcher to participate in a focus group. Consent would be needed from the nominated staff person in order to become a participant in the research.

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Appendix 4 Semi-structured interview questions

| The Research Utilisation Nexus: Putting Research into Practice | Individual Interviews |

**ABOUT YOU: please fill in the appropriate circle**

**Type of work you manage:**
- Fieldwork  
- Policy work  
- Project work  
- Other

**Location:**
- Rural  
- Metro  
- Regional Centre

**Length of time working for DoCS:**
- 0 – 5 years  
- 6 – 10 years  
- 11 – 15 years  
- 16 + years

**Gender:**
- Male  
- Female

**Age:**
- 21 – 30 years  
- 31 - 40 years  
- 41 – 50 years  
- 51 – 60 years  
- 61 years +

**Aboriginality:**
- Yes  
- No

**Non-English Speaking Background:**
- Yes  
- No

**What is your highest level of qualification:**
- Undergraduate  
- Post graduate  
- No qualification  
- Other (please list)________________________________________________

**Years since last qualification:**
- 0 – 5 years  
- 6 – 10 years  
- 11 – 15 years  
- 16 + years

**Are you currently undertaking any formal post secondary education course:**
- Yes  
- No

**ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL**

1. I am interested in your views about using expert-knowledge or research - your experience, knowledge and practice.
   a. How do you define expert knowledge?
   b. What does evidence-based practice mean to you?
   c. Is expert knowledge the same as research? Why/ why not/How?
   d. What type of research and/or expert knowledge do you use?
   e. How do you access research and/or expert knowledge?
   f. How often do you use research and expert knowledge?

2. I am interested in how and why you use research, and for what part of doing your job
   a. Can you tell me about ways that you use research to help determine a clinical or practice decision (instrumental use)
   b. Can you tell me about ways that you use research as a source of new ideas (conceptual use)?
   c. Can you tell me about ways that you use research to try and support your position and/or change someone else’s practice (symbolic use)?
d. Do you believe (or have experienced) the above ways of using research can only be used in isolation, that is, are they mutually exclusive or can be used in conjunction with each other? Please provide examples.

3. I’m interested in your information literacy and knowledge management skills.
   a. Have you had any training in how to access, use and manage expert knowledge and research for work and other purposes?
   b. What was the training?
   c. What do you think your level of information literacy and knowledge management is?
   d. Does having these skills give you confidence in using research in your work? How so?

ABOUT THE PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

4. Regarding your immediate work environment
   a. What are some of the barriers in the use of expert knowledge and research in your practice?
   b. Are there individual skills factors that are barriers?
   c. Are there immediate work and practice factors they are barriers?
   d. What about factors those promote best practice in the use of expert knowledge and research in your practice?
   e. What do you think are individual factors that promote best practice use of expert knowledge and research?
   f. What do you think are the immediate work and practice factors that promote best practice use of expert knowledge and research?

5. Have you seen a change towards an evidence-based approach over a period of time in the practice environment in your immediate work environment? What are some examples of this?

6. How has your practice changed with the availability of expert knowledge and research? What are the reasons or factors that lead you to a change (or not) in practice?

ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

7. What do you think are organisational factors within the Agency that are barriers to using expert knowledge and research in your practice?

8. What do you think are the organisational factors that promote best practice use of expert knowledge and research in your practice?

9. Do you perceive a change towards an evidence-based approach to practice and policy development in the organisational environment? Please provide examples
   a. What were the changes?
   b. Why do you think this has occurred?
   c. What were the key factors that facilitated the change?
   d. Over what period of time has it occurred?

GENERALLY

10. How do you think individual skills, the practice environment and the organisational context relate to one another (or not) in providing best practice use of expert knowledge and research in your everyday work. Please give examples.
    a. Can the factors of individual skills, the practice environment and the organisational context work in isolation of each other? Give examples
    b. Is one factor more important than another? Give examples