Organizational culture and use of evidence in the Brazilian public sector: a case study
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The Veredas Institute is a nonprofit organization specializing in evidence-informed social interventions. The Institute works in partnership with universities, public agencies and civil society.

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Funding
This case study was developed at INASP as part of a professional placement for the Master of Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford. The author’s participation in the course was made possible by a scholarship generously offered by the Lemann Foundation.

Competing interests
The author declares no competing interests.

This document may be cited as
Executive Summary

This case study seeks to understand how organizational culture affects the uptake of evidence across different public institutions in Brazil.

Evidence is critical to better understand policy problems and to identify and improve potentially effective solutions. However, it is common for public institutions to struggle to use evidence in their routines.

Eight aspects related to organizational culture of evidence use were investigated:

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The investigation was based on six in-depth interviews with Brazilian experts. All interviewees are public servants, familiar with the debate on evidence-informed public policy, and champions of the use of evidence in their institutions.

The interviews show that the culture of evidence use in Brazil is still incipient. Some new initiatives may be indicating a path forward, and the public sector is increasingly interested in using evidence, but the disregard of evidence in favour of other interests remains the predominant trend. The overall public sector culture does not seem to value evidence as a critical resource and there are many gaps for the uptake of evidence in terms of institutional capacity.

Institutional limitations to a culture of evidence use involve conflicting interests, lack of protocols and resources, organizational inertia, lack of incentives and untrained staff. One strength that stands out is the intrinsic motivation of some employees.

Several strategies were pointed as options to improve the culture of evidence use. These include interventions to change structural aspects of the public service in general or of particular institutions, the development of “evidence-to-policy” initiatives, and finally specific recommendations on how specialized “evidence-to-policy” units can improve their services.

**Keywords:** evidence-informed public policy, public sector, organizational culture, Brazil, case study, interviews Brasília: Instituto Veredas, 2020.

**About this report**

This case study was developed at INASP as part of a professional placement for the Master of Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford. First, I would like to thank the Lemann Foundation for the scholarship that allowed me to take this course. I would also like to thank INASP’s team for opening their doors to me and for all their support during the placement. A special thanks to Emily Hayter, for her generous supervision and insightful inputs throughout the project. I also wish to thank Leandro Echt, from Purpose & Ideas, for his help developing the interview protocol and analyzing the data. Finally, I’d like to extend my gratitude to all six anonymous interviewees, who kindly shared their time and insights with me, making this project possible.
This case study seeks to understand how organizational culture affects the uptake of evidence across different public institutions in Brazil.

Policymaking is always a process full of uncertainty and risks. Managers and politicians do not have complete information on the problems they are facing, nor on the better options to tackle them, and even less on the future issues that will arise. Decision-makers must often take a gamble. They need to rapidly consider the demands of different stakeholders, government objectives and institutional limitations. And that must be done knowing that they will be judged only by the outcomes of their choices, regardless of how sensible a decision might have been given the uncertainties of the past.

This is why using the best available evidence is critical in government. Evidence sheds light on a problem. It helps to better understand what is happening and to identify and improve potentially effective solutions. It can also allow for different ways of framing the same problem. Using adequate evidence does not eliminate uncertainty in decision-making, but it does reduce it where possible, while making uncertainty explicit and transparent.

However, it is common for public institutions to struggle to use evidence in their routines. Several factors lead to this, such as the complexity and inscrutability of technical knowledge, the rapid time of public policies compared to research processes, or the lack of know-how by public servants (Oliver et al., 2014). Many of these factors are present in the context in which public institutions operate. In this regard, the Context Matters Framework (CMF) (Weyrauch et al., 2016) provides a tool for analysing how a wide range of contextual aspects affects the interactions between knowledge and public policies.

In this case study, we apply the CMF to the Brazilian context in order to investigate how the contextual dimension of culture influences the interaction between knowledge and practice in the Brazilian public sector. To our knowledge, there have been no studies to date that have investigated the culture of evidence use in the Brazilian public sector.
Applying the Context Matters Framework

The CMF identifies six contextual dimensions that influence the use of evidence: Macro context, Intra- and inter-relationships, Culture, Organizational capacity, Organizational management and processes, and Core resources. Understanding how these dimensions affect the use of evidence is key to improving public organizations’ capacity to use evidence and, in doing so, develop effective public policies.

This case study focuses specifically on the dimension of Culture, understood as the “set of shared basic assumptions learned by a group” (Weyrauch et al., 2016, p. 23). Culture refers to the ideas, values and behaviours reinforced by a community, leading to common practices. The culture of an organization will inevitably affect what type of evidence is used and in which way. For instance, one institution might value research in general, and develop processes to use it, while another organization might disregard research as relevant, emphasizing experiential knowledge.

Within Culture, the CMF presents four main sub-dimensions: Values and beliefs; Openness to change and innovation; Incentives; and Motivations. These four aspects have been directly explored here. In addition, we have also examined what evidence is currently used at different public organizations, the barriers to and trends in the use of evidence, the influence of tacit institutional agendas, and possible entry points for change.

**Therefore, eight aspects were investigated:**

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Motivations: if people are intrinsically motivated to use evidence;

Institutional agenda: what are informal institutional priorities and how does that affect the use of evidence;

Entry points for change: what can be done to improve the use of evidence.

Although the focus of this project was to investigate organizational culture, all contextual dimensions are intrinsically interconnected. Therefore, elements from other dimensions are also discussed where relevant, such as the availability of resources or organizational capacity.

Within this case study, we refer to evidence as to any kind of information produced through systematic processes. Examples of sources of evidence are: academic and scientific research, results of institutional protocols for data collection and data analysis, formal consultations with civil society and other stakeholders, results of policy monitoring and policy evaluation processes.
This project is a case study developed through six in-depth interviews with experts. All interviewees are public servants, familiar with the debate on evidence-informed public policy, and champions of the use of evidence in their institutions. To provide a diversity of perspectives, the interviewees come from both the executive and the legislative branches, from all levels of government (federal, state and municipal), and from different regions of the country (south-east, centre-west, and north-east). All six work on different policy areas. Three interviewees are women and three are men. Further details about the participants were omitted to preserve their anonymity.

Regardless of the interviewees being a diverse group, this was not a representative sample of the Brazilian public sector as a whole. Therefore, the findings here presented should not be immediately generalized to other agencies.

The interviews were semi-structured, and lasted about one hour each. All interviews occurred in August 2020. The interviewees were asked to answer the questions considering their specific units, but reflections on other units they have worked, their institutions as a whole or other institutions were also included in the analysis. The interview protocol (Appendix I) was based on the eight aspects presented above.

Notes with the main elements of each answer were taken during the interviews. The responses were later categorized and synthesized. Below we present a summary of the findings. To preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, the different institutional aspects are presented either in an aggregated form or removed of details.
First, we investigated what types of evidence were most commonly used in each unit and to what extent decisions were informed by evidence. This investigation intended to provide a general view of the ecosystem of the Brazilian public sector regarding the use of evidence.

The six units investigated showed a great diversity regarding what types of evidence are used and how this use occurred. One unit, specialized in evidence to policy, listed various kinds of evidence that are produced by it, while indicating that the usage by the government is minimal. On the other hand, a similar unit has a much narrower scope, working mostly with institutional databases, but government decisions overall rely on these data as a support. Academic research, however, is commonly used to justify decisions that had already been made:

“Inwards we use more institutional bases. For the outside community, these are political decisions, we go and fill them up with references from academic publications. But not as much as a way of learning, and more as a support to decisions that had already been made”

A different scenario was found in a unit that is very politically exposed and needs to continually react in a short time to a plurality of demands. There, the primary source of evidence is consultations with experts, complemented by some rapid explorations of government public databases. These sources are used for most of the relevant decisions made. When referring to the influence of experts, it was pointed out that credentials matter significantly, such as if the advice comes from a renowned university or from the United Nations.

One interviewee mentioned that, in a unit they previously worked at, there was no use at all of evidence:

“In my previous position, there was a very dramatic situation regarding the use of evidence. The person in charge arrived with a very clear mission of supporting some private company interests. Participative processes were only cosmetic, with no real policy implication. No kind of evidence was used to support decisions”

In another case, a theoretical divide is present in the policy area and in the conceptual literature. That lead to the alignment of the unit to one specific perspective on the topic, while other studies and perspectives were totally dismissed. One sector was
described as very closed to new policy ideas or adaptations, so evidence was only used to bureaucratically report actions. Two areas reported systematically using evidence to inform the policy design stage, and no area reported adequate use of monitoring and evaluation. Finally, there are two sectors that rely heavily on civil society participation. In one of them, civil society is used both as a source of evidence about local stakeholders and as a source of academic and technical knowledge. Its inputs are a key factor in informing the sector’s policies.

Different policy areas also seemed to rely on evidence in very different degrees. Even though in the health sector people were very critical of the level of evidence use, it was clear that the use of evidence in health is profoundly more entrenched in the policy cycle when compared to other areas.

A second topic investigated was if the interviewees perceived a trend in the use of evidence in their context, and what barriers they identified. This aimed at further characterizing the Brazilian ecosystem regarding the use of evidence and understanding the other factors which underpin the culture dimension, helping to situate it within the broader picture.

Most interviewees perceive a slow but positive trend when it comes to the use of evidence to inform policy. Four interviewees said they had seen some growth in the area in the last years. The recent creation of units specialized in evidence to policy was indentified as an important indicator of that. It seems that the paradigm of evidence-informed policy is starting to spread across the Brazilian public sector, although it is still embryonic:

“From 2016 onwards, there is a dissemination of the paradigm. People have been talking more about evidence-based policy. However, in terms of organizational change, it is still very limited.”

One interviewee referred to this as a natural consequence of the consolidation of Brazilian democracy. As different stakeholders take part in the processes of policymaking, through governance and transparency mechanisms, public organizations need sounder arguments to defend their positions, which increases the need for higher quality evidence. Related to that, the growth in the use of evidence was also referred to as a reaction against the emergence of anti-scientific perspectives in the country. Only two interviewees reported no positive change in the last few years, one even pointing to a setback in their government due to a new political leader.

The interviewees also mentioned several barriers to the uptake of evidence in their organizations. These relate to how organizations manage their processes and projects, the availability of resources, and the skills of the staff. Units varied significantly on all these aspects.
Some had well-established processes to apply evidence to policy, while others are struggling to develop basic skills:

“The problem is much more basic. We are talking about producing research, but the staff does not know the minimum. We may fund amazing studies, but it is pointless if the ones who are implementing the policies do not know how to turn on Excel. This is why we started focusing on training first, instead of producing research.”

Another interviewee pointed to how the culture of transparency can have a negative effect on the use of evidence:

“The political factor is very important. There is a fear of producing evidence, and seeing what it can generate. Recently, an evaluation was cancelled due to the fear of information falling in the press and the consequences of it. I am sad to see how the need for transparency in public management ends up having a perverse effect. People think: “as we are going to have to disclose this information, so it is better to not do the evaluation, instead of doing it and running the risk of a negative result”.

Organizational inertial was also mentioned a few times: “there is a path-dependence, people say “it has always been like that, we cannot do otherwise”.”

Relating to organizational dynamics, the main barriers indicated were:

- Patrimonialism;
- Electoral, political and personal interests;
- Disregard for institutional formal planning and objectives;
- Constant change and improvisation in policymaking, leading to limited time for decision-making;
- Culture does not value evidence in general, and even less a rigorous, systematic and transparent use of it.
- Lack of organizational and political incentives for the use of evidence;
- Lack of demand and use of evidence by organizational leaders;
- Very restricted use of monitoring and evaluation.

The lack of appropriate resources was also raised as a limitation. The interviewees mentioned:
→ Lack of research on specific policy problems;
→ Blocked access to relevant data;
→ Absence of qualified and sufficient staff;
→ Lack of funds;
→ Limited governance, including proper application of managerial tools and processes;
→ Lack of institutional records, including:
  • Databases
  • Processes
  • Policy plans
  • Institutional memory
→ No standardized procedures and protocols on evidence use and knowledge translation.

Regarding the necessary qualification of staff members, the skills highlighted as relevant and absent were:

→ Managerial skills;
→ Policy implementation skills;
→ Digital literacy (including basic use of email and Excel);
→ Research skills;
→ Knowledge translation skills;
→ Scientific communication.

Against this backdrop of changing Brazilian governance context, strong political interests, and limited human and financial resources, in the next five sections we focus on the cultural aspects that affect evidence use in Brazilian public organizations.
Beliefs and values within public organizations

Beliefs and values, in this work, refer to how an organization values evidence as a relevant resource for decision-making. Most units investigated seem to value evidence, each of them giving priority to different types, such as institutional data or expert opinions. On the other hand, most of the interviewees reported that their institutions, as a whole, do not value evidence. Decisions are often made based on the views and values of the decision-makers, and staff has little training on how to find, produce or apply evidence. This difference between the interviewees’ units and their organizations can likely be explained by the fact that they are all interested in this debate, so that they will be both drawn towards units that use evidence, and they will also promote the use of evidence internally, changing the unit’s culture.

One way we used to assess how evidence is valued was investigating how people react to evidence contrary to their previous beliefs. In this regard, all but one interviewees highlighted that, as a rule, decision-makers are open to using evidence, yet things change when the evidence clashes with political agendas. When this is the case, either the evidence is ignored or accepted partially and reluctantly. There was only one unit in which evidence seemed to be actively disregarded, as the priority was to fulfil political goals and, otherwise, to keep things running as they always have. One interviewee said:

“It depends a lot on the time and the policy. For example, now with the pandemic, it is very difficult to discuss evidence-based policies, as this is a very politically sensitive topic”.

The third topic of investigation was if and how the units ensure that the evidence they use is broadly representative of different social groups. Brazilian society is permeated by several social cleavages, such as gender, racial, educational, class and regional disparities. These cleavages naturally affect how policy is made and what evidence is valued. Here all units reported limitations. Most evidence is produced and applied by middle-class, white, educated people. Overall, there are no formal or informal procedures to compensate for this or to widen the scope of the collected evidence:

“I don’t see diversity. The experts consulted in general have a position similar to that of the management. They are generally white, middle-class people. We have no contact with social movements, for example, which could be a source of perspectives from other social groups”.


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One interviewee reported a preference for evidence produced internationally, especially in English-speaking countries. There is one unit that actively makes sure to include people from different sociodemographic groups when collecting data, but not when analyzing and discussing it. Gender was not stated as a barrier when debating evidence, except for one unit, comprised mostly of engineers, that seems to be resistant to institutional agendas that are championed by units with more women. Only one unit was reported to actively include representatives of the target populations as staff members, so as to ensure the perspective of this social group is present in all steps of the policy.

4 Openness to change within public organizations

Openness to change describes to what extent “organizational culture may enable critical inquiry, curiosity and support risk-taking and innovation” (Weyrauch et al., 2016, p. 42). Regarding openness to change, most interviewees reported that there is a partial disposition. Their units seem to be especially open when compared to the rest of their institutions, but still, they are limited by political and institutional priorities. Interviewees suggested that their institutions are not especially interested in evidence-based changes, and many changes described were due to other factors, such as political interests or change in management. The presence of public servants who have been working in the same positions for many years, without incentives for continuous learning, was also identified as a barrier to change. On the other hand, aside from the main political objectives, coordinators, directors and other leadership have a fair amount of autonomy. That leads to a situation where the characteristics of the leaders heavily influence how each unit will behave:

“It is very open to change. But this has a lot to do with the leadership that is here. And since it has a lot of turnover, it changes frequently. But nowadays, the sector is open, because of the leadership profile.”

Overall, the interviewees seem to be part of sectors more dynamic than average, with leaders that support innovation and learning from mistakes. Again, this is probably due to the personal motivation of the interviewees, that makes them look for active and challenging units to work at. Only one unit seemed to be largely impervious to change.
Incentives for civil servants

Incentives are institutional rewards or facilitators that encourage employees to act in certain ways. These can be monetary or moral rewards, or processes that enable and support certain tasks. The presence of offices specializing in research and knowledge translation within the institutions was identified as an important enabler of the use of evidence. Training and research communication were also mentioned as a positive way institutions encourage the use of evidence. A few units are organizing educational activities to improve the capacity of using evidence. These are targeted both to the units’ staff members and to other employees of the same organ, to improve the organizational culture. At some organizations, performance management is applied, but apparently it never achieves its purposes, for instance, because volatile institutional agendas make performance appraisal impossible, or because every employee receives the same evaluation regardless of their real performance:

“In terms of institutional policy, performance evaluation is terrible. All team members always receive the highest score”.

Only one interviewee reported the existence of a unit in their organization where evidence was systematically used to inform policy. Although there is a lack of institutional processes to promote the use of evidence, most interviewees stated that, in their units, employees can question their superiors based on evidence. Local and institutional knowledge seem to be particularly respected. In some cases, especially in topics that are more politically sensitive, they said that this is done with caution, and only to the extent that it is possible. Only one person mentioned the case of someone being fired for disagreements with the leadership, and this was apparently a case of radical differences that were constantly surfacing. Two interviewees reported their sectors as being focused on “business as usual”, and so giving little room for suggestions from the staff.

Motivations of civil servants

Motivations refer to the intrinsic drivers for action. Here, we investigate what factors lead to employees to be interested and look for evidence autonomously. The CMF highlights that a work environment that values autonomy, competence, and relatedness tends to increase intrinsic motivation. Most interviewees said people in their units feel motivated to use evidence:

“The people who are here do it because they like it. I see very motivated people here, who push themselves a lot to develop a good job.”
The interviewees identified a number of aspects that fuel this intrinsic motivation:

- **Time in the organization** - people who joined the organizations the latest seem to be more interested in using evidence;
- **Educational level** - the higher the individual's academic level, the more they seem to seek evidence;
- **Peer-pressure** - organizational culture that uses evidence forces people to use evidence themselves;
- **Pressure from external stakeholders** - such as well-informed civil society members;
- **Vanity** - leaders and technicians that want to show off their competence and achievements;
- **Activism** - people use evidence to support their own policy views within the organizations;
- **Work environment** that encouraged creative thinking, collective collaboration and personal engagement with the tasks.

Despite the absence of institutional performance management, interviewees mainly indicated that their units do value individual performance, which can often facilitate the use of evidence:

“Yes, due to my boss. There is a strong incentive for me to be in academia. This is valued. My boss encourages people to participate in congresses, to write papers, to consume academic research. But this is a value of my current boss, it varies a lot from unit to unit”.

One interviewee referred to an “internal meritocracy”, which was not an organizational policy, but ended up being enforced by staff members. Again, this seems to be heavily influenced by the individual profile of the leader. If the leader values performance, the team adapts to that. There was only one unit where most of the team seemed to be strongly engaged with the work, and that was a place where employees deeply identified with the unit’s mission, and where a horizontal management style had been created. In this unit, all staff members had space to engage and considerable autonomy in executing their tasks. This combination of personal identification, horizontal management and autonomous work led to employees regularly using new sources and bringing new ideas to the table.
Apart from the formal, explicit objectives every public organization has, there are also tacit organizational goals that shape institutional processes and choices. In this section, we discuss what are these other objectives and how they affect the use of evidence. The interviewees point to many factors that influence institutional agenda apart from formal documents such as laws, regulations and other internal processes. These factors lead to goals that might be parallel or even opposite to explicit formal goals, which affects what and how evidence is considered. Lobbying, electoral interests, career goals and patrimonialism were reported as leading to selective use of evidence: giving priority to information that could help institutional processes of interest and dismissing other information. One interviewee, for instance, reported that an internal meeting was cancelled by an external actor that has a lot of power over their organization:

“[...] these political interests directly affected policies. To the point of scheduling a meeting to discuss a policy technically, and the meeting being cancelled by a stakeholder, because they did not want to discuss it at that time, as it could weaken their political agenda”.

In a unit specializing in evidence to policy, the involvement of researchers in the process added a new challenge to the use of evidence: researchers have incentives to publish their studies in academic journals, which require originality. Thus, researchers often resist having their studies turned into institutional publications and being openly accessible.

While the lack of institutional controls allows for patrimonialistic usages of public institutions, it also enables engaged teams to further pursue the organizational agenda. One interviewee reported that it is easier to have a balanced use of evidence in areas that are not in the political spotlight, where the technical staff has more room of manoeuvre. This relates to another force that influences institutional agendas, namely personal political views and preferences. Staff members can often become activists for a specific policy objective:

“My boss is not a politician, neither is very career-oriented. But he is very vain. Extremely vain. [...] So he picked this fight [for a specific policy agenda] as a personal goal. [...] For the younger employees, on the other hand, this situation created a window of opportunity to do interesting work, something more impactful and professional.”

One interviewee shared how their unit’s staff, motivated by their personal engagement with the policy, was using evidence to strengthen their negotiation capacity across the institution and increase the reach of their work. On the other hand, another interviewee mentioned cases of people rejecting available evidence due to personal convictions about what the policy should look like:
“There are some areas that don’t adhere [to evidence] that they don’t like. There was a situation where the area asked for evidence to support a policy. We looked for studies, and we didn’t find any evidence. They were not happy with the results and never came to us again.”

Institutional inertia was also presented as a factor that influences institutional agenda. Organizational change was reported as hard to achieve. Thus often processes were perpetuated regardless of their misalignment with the current goals and contextual changes. Pressures from other institutions, including auditing organizations, other branches of government, and the media similarly influenced policy plans. Some bureaucratic steps, for instance, were required by comptrolling agencies, even though they were regarded as inefficient by the unit. In other cases, the emergence of a social problem in the media would rechannel resources for a new policy response.

Entry points for change

Finally, we investigated the experts’ perspectives on how to improve the use of evidence in their organizations and in the Brazilian public sector as a whole.

The interviewees listed various recommendations Some of them were about directly tackling the barriers listed above, such as providing training on relevant skills for staff members and stakeholder, or advance public records. We will not list these again here. Below we present the recommendations that were not represented in the list of barriers.

The first group of recommendations relate to the broad institutional context in Brazil. One interviewee, for instance, said:

“The effect of social participation surprised me. Qualified social participation raises the bar for everyone. So that you cannot go to a meeting unprepared and be embarrassed. To have to present the rationale of what you intend to do in participatory processes imposes a certain limit [to how unprepared you can be], even if it is only to avoid embarrassment. So accountability and transparency help to give strength to the people in the organization that want to work with evidence”.

The main recommendations related to contextual aspects were:

→ Increasing social participation, accountability and transparency;
→ Requiring for bills of law to be supported by evidence;
→ Investing in organizational culture more open to innovation and creativity;
→ Investing in the research area of evidence-informed public policy;

→ Expanding the use of qualitative research in policymaking.

Another set of recommendations focused on the creation of “evidence to policy” initiatives:

“A structure, within the organization, that has a group of researchers, holding hands with the management, bridging the gaps between academia and policy. So that they know about research, but they also understand the interest of the policymakers.”

The recommendations were:

→ Creating “evidence to policy” offices and centres;

→ Hiring evidence advisors – researchers that work close to policymakers;

→ Hiring scholar-practitioners – people with academic training to support policy processes;

→ Implementing scientific communication strategies:
  • Periodic talks with experts for public servants;
  • Sharing of institutional research;

→ Creating platforms of knowledge translation, with methodological and policy-related resources.

The final set of recommendations addressed more specifically the tasks of “evidence to policy” units. One interviewee advised:

“The closer you get to the manager and understand what their aims are, the more you can convince them that these studies will help, and so you maximize the impact of scientific evidence. [...] The manager says: “this 150-page study? I’m not going to read this”. Basically, what are they saying to me? That I’m not presenting the evidence properly. It has to be on one page. In other words, what are they telling me? They are telling me to innovate in the area of knowledge translation.”
To improve the “evidence-to-policy” units, the experts suggested:

- Focusing on processing organizational data and making it useful for decision-makers;

- Looking for “quick wins”, such as starting supporting units at the base of the institution, to gradually gain credibility and institutional capital;

- Working closely to managers, so to best understand their needs and to be able to show them how evidence can be of help;

- Using evidence to help framing policy problems in different ways. This can help decision-makers to see opportunities for policy, it can also enable internal and external consensus about a problem;

- Making clear the methodological strengths and limitations of the available evidence;

- Helping policymakers to weigh evidence against other factors when making a decision, so that if the evidence clashes with other aspects, it does not need to be either wholly disregarded or blindly adopted at the expense of other considerations;

- Giving special attention to the area of knowledge translation - it is not enough to deliver a report, it is necessary to customize the findings in a way that fits the decision-maker needs, views, priorities and capacities. How to present a study is a crucial part of promoting the buy-in by the stakeholders;

- Developing partnerships with the institutional communication team.
Conclusion

The expert interviews allow us to better understand the Brazilian context. Fortunately, it seems the public sector in Brazil is increasingly interested in using evidence, and many new efforts in that direction are arising. However, there seems to be a clash between a growing but still limited trend of using evidence to support innovation and effective policies on one hand, and the disregard of evidence in favour of other interests on the other hand. The overall public sector culture does not seem to value evidence as a critical resource and there are many gaps for the uptake of evidence in terms of institutional capacity.

As institutions have sought to enhance the use of evidence, they have faced limitations such as conflicting interests, lack of protocols, organizational inertia, lack of incentives and untrained staff. One strength that stands out is the intrinsic motivation of employees. The staff members in the units of the interviewees were reported to be overall engaged with work and motivated to use evidence.

Several strategies were pointed as options to improve the culture of evidence use in the Brazilian public sector. These include interventions to change structural aspects of the public service in general or of particular institutions, the development of “evidence-to-policy” initiatives, and finally specific recommendations on how specialized “evidence-to-policy” units can improve their services.

Appendix I - Interview Protocol

1. Structure

These will be semi-structured interviews.

The scope of the interviews is fixed. The interviews will investigate seven dimensions: use of evidence, beliefs and values, opennness to change, incentives, motivations, institutional agenda and entry points for change.

The wording and the order of the main questions are fixed as well. The interviewer will have the flexibility to use probes to explore relevant topics as they emerge in different conversations. The probes might be taken from the below pre-defined list or can be improvised according to the context.

Each interview shall last about 1:15 hours. The first five to ten minutes of each interview will cover “preamble” and “context”. Each dimension will be discussed for about 10 minutes. For each dimension, there are two main questions. The last 15 minutes will be used for final remarks or to provide breathing room in case one or more dimensions run over time.

Below, in the “2.3 Questions” session, the main questions are numbered, and the probes are presented in bullet points.

2. Interview

2.1. Preamble ¹

I - Introduce myself and present the scope of the interview

⇒ Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview

⇒ I'm an independent researcher developing a project in partnership with INASP to investigate how organizational culture affects the uptake of evidence in the Brazilian public sector.

¹. Adapted from protocols developed for the 2020 Research4Life user review led by INASP, https://www.inasp.info/project/research4life-user-review.
II - Recording/Confidentiality/Other concerns

→ Are you ok with me recording our conversation today?
  ▶ If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.
  ▶ If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

→ Your answers are confidential. Our report will never identify individual participants or contain information that could allow others to identify participants.

→ You can always interrupt me as we go along if you feel you have a question you would like to ask. Also, if at any time during the course of the interview you wish to stop just let me know.

→ We are aware that we are working in unusual times at the moment with the COVID-19 pandemic. Where possible, please could you reflect not just on your immediate situation (which may have been affected by the pandemic) but also on the situation prior to the pandemic?

→ Do you have any questions before we begin? [Discuss questions]

2.2. Context

Define evidence and delineate “evidence-informed public policy”

→ For the sake of this interview, I'll be referring to evidence as any kind of information produced through systematic processes. Some sources of evidence are, for instance: academic and scientific research, results of institutional protocols for data collection and data analysis, formal consultations with civil society and other stakeholders, results of policy monitoring and policy evaluation processes.

→ Some examples of the use of evidence are: using systematic qualitative research methods, such as interviews, to understand local needs and values; using quantitative databases to understand the main features of a policy problem; basing a public policy on an impact evaluation, etc.

→ Evidence can be used to inform the different stages of public policy: agenda setting, problem diagnosis, policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

→ In this context, we refer to “evidence informed public policy” because we understand that evidence can help improve decisions, but there are other factors that shape a final policy decision.
2.3. Questions

I - Assessing the use of evidence

1. **What type of evidence does your unit use?**
   - Does it use any system or database to understand and characterize its policy problems?
   - Does it use academic papers?
   - Does it investigate local applicability of policies?
     - Does it investigate stakeholders perspectives, needs and values?
   - Does it have MEL protocols and systems?
   - Who are the stakeholders usually responsible for bringing evidence to decision-making processes?
     - Do you think the type of evidence that is used would change, if other stakeholders were more active in this role?

2. **In your opinion, to what extent does your unit use evidence to inform policy decisions? Why is that?**
   - To what extent different sources of evidence inform each of the policy cycle stages?
   - Does your unit have clear guidelines on how its members should produce and use knowledge to perform their work? (e.g. diagnosis, needs assessment, policy options, policy design, monitoring and evaluation, a research unit)
   - Is evidence used differently in the different stages of the policy cycle?
   - Does the staff of your unit have the skills to produce, find, appraise and use evidence in policymaking processes?
   - Does your organization have specialized units for tasks like these?
   - Could you please share some examples/practices of successful evidence use within your unit?
   - If a person is presenting new evidence that is potentially relevant to policy, does the gender, race, class or other social characteristics of the person affect how the institution reacts to this evidence? How so?
Beliefs and values

3. In your opinion, does your unit value evidence as a necessary resource for decision-making? How so?

→ What kinds of evidence are most valued? Why is that?

→ Do people in your unit believe that evidence is necessary to implement effective policies?

→ Are collection and appraisal of evidence a regular part of the policymaking process?

→ What are the perceptions about those who often promote the use of knowledge?

→ Are there differences across units in your organization regarding how evidence is valued? What are those differences about?
  ▶ Are there differences between leadership and operational levels? Or any other groupings that you can think of?

→ How do you or your organization make sure evidence considered in decisions is broadly representative (in terms of gender, race, class, or other social characteristics)?

4. How do you think people in your unit react when presented with evidence that is contrary to their prior beliefs?

→ Have you witnessed any situation like this? How did the person react?

→ Have you seen your unit adapting policies based on new evidence?

→ Have you seen your unit suspending or cancelling policies based on new evidence?

→ Are there differences across units in your organization regarding how people react to contrary evidence?
  ▶ Are there differences between leadership and operational levels? Or any other groupings that you can think of?
  ▶ How do you solve situations in which you have contrary evidence?
III - Openness to change

5. To what extent do you think your unit is open to change?
   → How is innovation supported?
   → Who is usually responsible for leading processes of change?
   → Does your unit have a culture of learning from its failures?

Ask if suitable:
   → Can you share an example of your unit reacting to failure?
   → Are there instances of reflection and constructive criticism?
   → Does the organizational culture of your unit enable critical inquiry, curiosity, and support risk-taking and innovation?
     ▶ How does that work?

IV - Incentives

6. What kinds of processes or mechanisms exist to encourage the production and use of knowledge?
   → Does your organization reward or punish based on performance?
   → Does your organization use performance management indicators?
     ▶ How does that work?

7. Do you think employees are able to question their superior’s views and decisions based on evidence?
   → Can you share examples of situations when someone shared evidence contrary to their superiors’ views?
     ▶ What was the outcome?
   → What are the incentives and disincentives for this?

V - Motivations

8. Do you think people in your unit are overall motivated to use evidence? Why is that?
   → Do you think that employees, on average, feel they are autonomous?
   → Do they feel valued by the organization?
   → Does this affect how they use evidence?
9. In your opinion, does the culture of the organization value competence and individual performance?

→ Have you seen this affecting how evidence is applied?

→ Do the employees produce or find evidence themselves? (ownership)

VI - Institutional Agenda

10. What are the formal attributions of your unit?

→ How do the formal attributions of your unit affect the use of evidence to inform policy?

→ How do the formal procedures of your unit affect the use of evidence to inform policy?

→ Are there any documents or protocols that systematize how to use evidence? What are they?

  ▶ Such as a monitoring, evaluation and learning protocol or guidelines on who to characterize policy problems and identify policy options?

11. How do the informal goals of your unit affect the use of evidence to inform policy?

→ What are informal institutional goals that you can identify in your unit? (for instance electoral interests, managers using their position to benefit their careers, compliance with procedural norms, corruption, signalling competence by doing much even if not effective etc).

→ What are informal priorities that you can identify in your unit?

  ▶ How do they affect the use of evidence to inform policy?

→ Do you recognize different patterns in the way people value and use evidence across different genders, races, social classes or other social characteristics?

  ▶ Why do you think there is this difference?

VII - Trends, barriers and entry points for change

12. Do you see changes in the trends of this debate in your institution?

13. What are the main barriers that you identify to the use of evidence in your context?

14. What could be changed to increase the use of evidence by your unit?

→ How would you address some of the issues you have raised here so far?