Building engagement into research design: Constructing socially robust solutions to complex policy problems

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Context: What was LETR?

- Review of the legal education and training system governing regulated titles (legal services) in England & Wales

- Two phase project –
  - 2011-13 first phase – research and report – recommendations – see http://letr.org.uk
  - Phase 2 – regulatory action (continuing)

- First phase:
  - A 'cradle to grave' review (degree-PLT-continuing)
  - Sector-wide
  - Regulation-led
  - Evidence-based (so far as possible)

SETTING STANDARDS

THE FUTURE OF LEGAL SERVICES
EDUCATION AND TRAINING REGULATION
IN ENGLAND AND WALES

June 2013

The final report of the Legal Education and Training Review independent research team

letr

"Socially complex" problem

- High stakes ('one shot' at solution)
- Multiple stakeholders
- Limited agreement as to nature/scope of problem(s)
- Significant scope for reasonable (normative) disagreement over outcomes
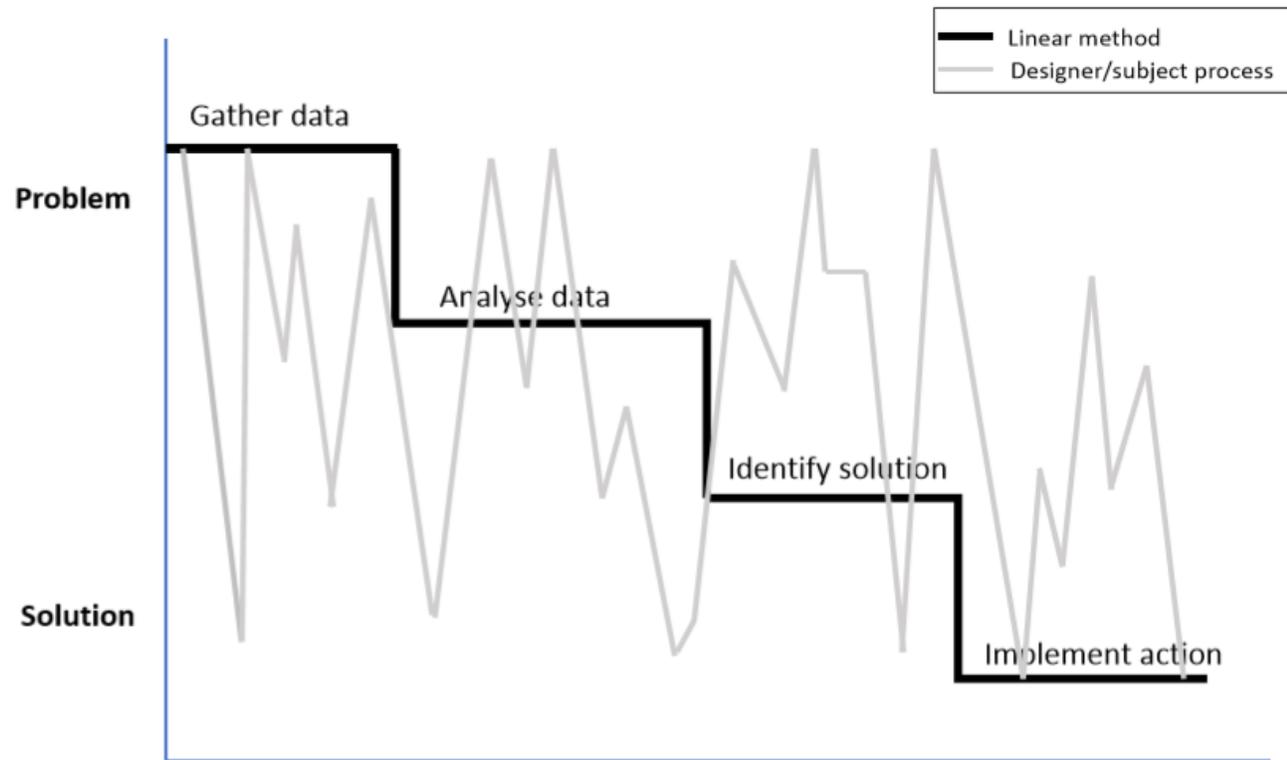- Existing research and evidence base was thin/poor quality

Solution(?) – engagement and KMb at the heart of design

"Knowledge mobilization is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities relating to the *production* and use of research results, including knowledge *synthesis*, dissemination, transfer, *exchange*, and co-creation or co-production by researchers and knowledge users."

- SSHRC - https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/policies-politiques/knowledge_mobilisation-mobilisation_des_connaissances-eng.aspx
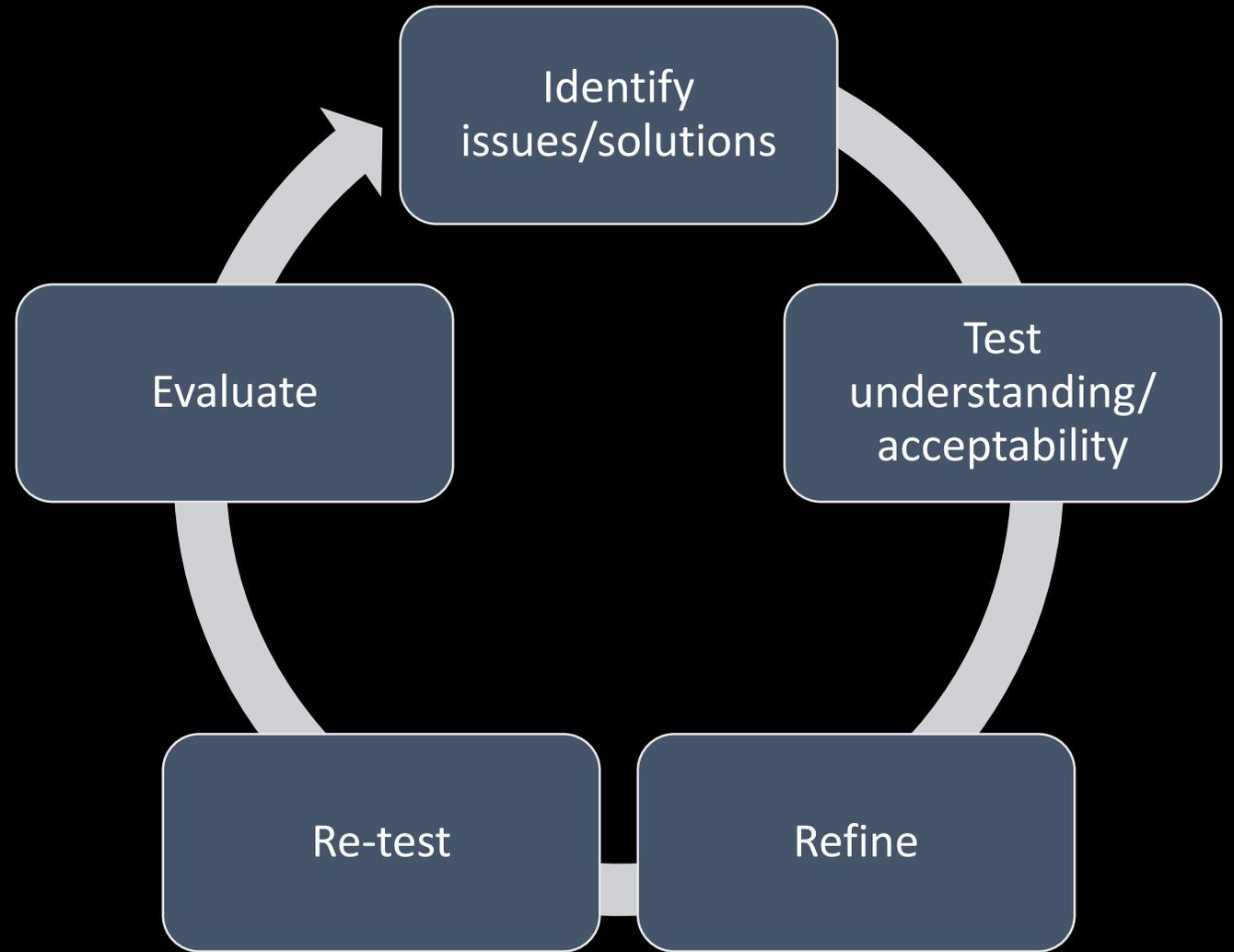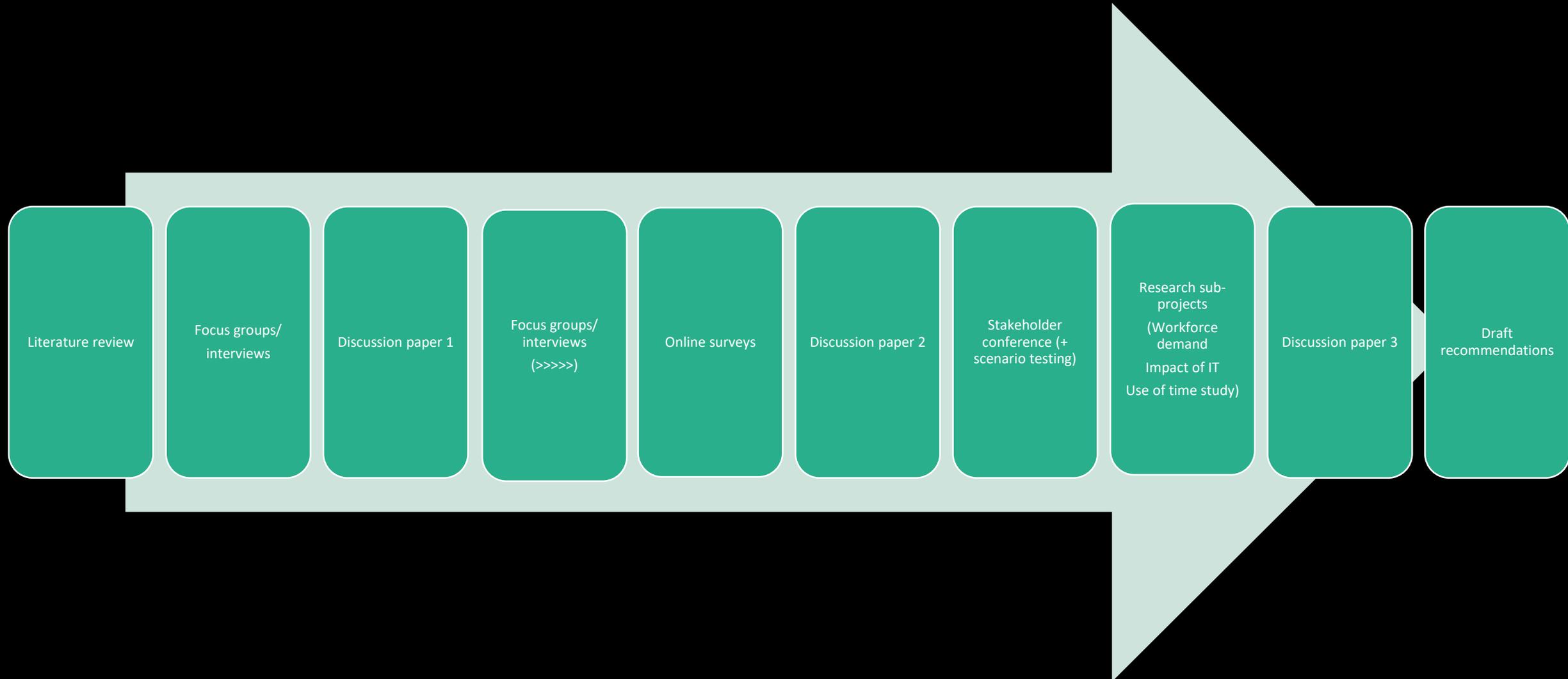
Research design

Jeffrey Conklin, *Dialogue Mapping: Building Shared Understanding of Wicked Problems* (New York: Wiley 2006)

Iterative process

Identify issues/solutions

Test understanding/ acceptability

Refine

Re-test

Evaluate

Mixed methods – a search for 'socially robust' outcomes

Literature review | Focus groups/ interviews | Discussion paper 1 | Focus groups/ interviews (>>>>>) | Online surveys | Discussion paper 2 | Stakeholder conference (+ scenario testing) | Research sub-projects (Workforce demand; Impact of IT; Use of time study) | Discussion paper 3 | Draft recommendations

Did it work?

- Highly transparent

- Defensible recommendations

- Outcomes relatively conservative > reasonable level of adoption

- Did not please every(any?)one!

- Problems of scale and complexity hard to mitigate

- Limited by tight project timeframe

- Less successful in breaking down regulatory and knowledge silos than we had hoped