Setting the agenda: practitioner knowledge needs in woodland restoration

Alys Daniels-Creasey, 4th June 2025
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Facilitators: Andrew Irving, Rachel Orchard

Project aims:

To understand practitioners' knowledge needs

To consider the co-development of future research strategies

Some definitions…

Woodland restoration

Efforts to achieve functional, resilient and quality woodland habitats that deliver for nature and people

Knowledge need

An area where there is a perceived gap in understanding and a desire for it to be addressed
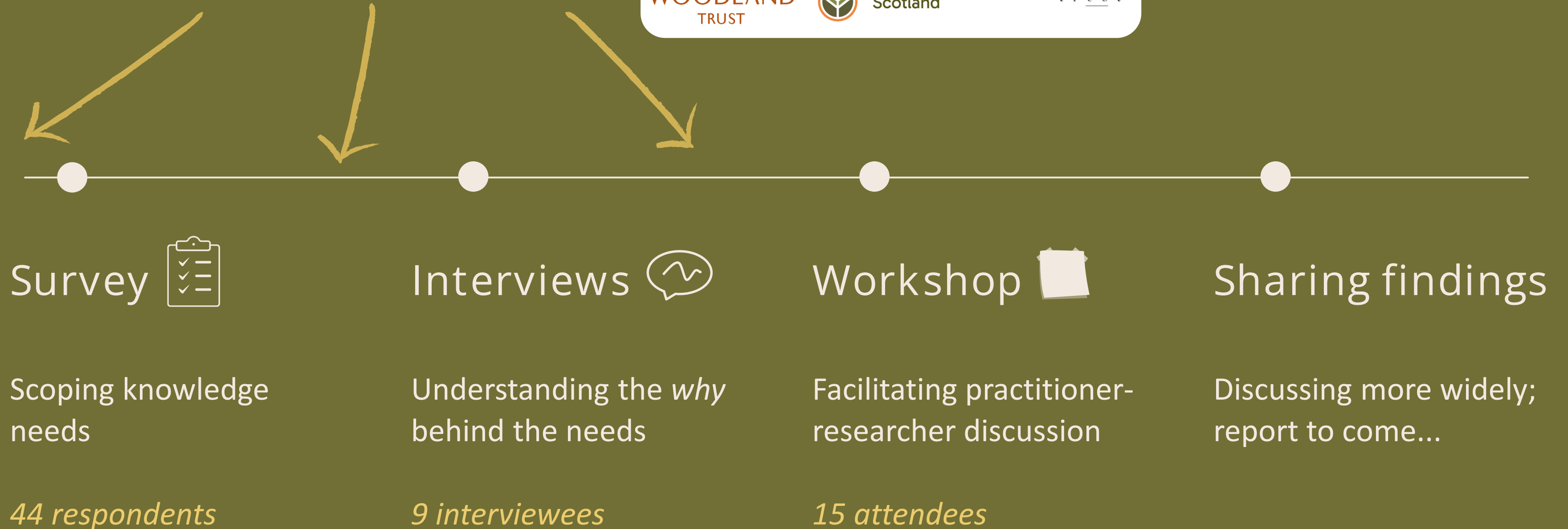
Practitioner

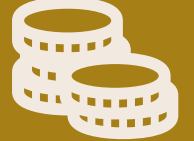Someone whose primary role is doing or organising restoration activities

Mentimeter link

The project

steering group input

Trees for Life

WOODLAND TRUST

Future Woodlands Scotland

The Borders Forest trUSt

Survey

Scoping knowledge needs

44 respondents

Interviews

Understanding the *why* behind the needs

9 interviewees

Workshop

Facilitating practitioner-researcher discussion

15 attendees

Sharing findings

Discussing more widely; report to come...

Scoping out knowledge needs

Ecological 🍃		
Tree establishment and species		
Herbivore management and management of impacts		
Other species and biodiversity		
Carbon		
Changing environments		
Other environmental impacts (water, fire)		
Data and tools		

Scoping out knowledge needs

Ecological 🍃	Social 👥	
Tree establishment and species	Understanding and managing perceptions	
Herbivore management and management of impacts	Managing conflicts	
Other species and biodiversity	Understanding social impacts	
Carbon	Community involvement	
Changing environments	Community connection	
Other environmental impacts (water, fire)	Understanding woodland histories	
Data and tools		

Scoping out knowledge needs

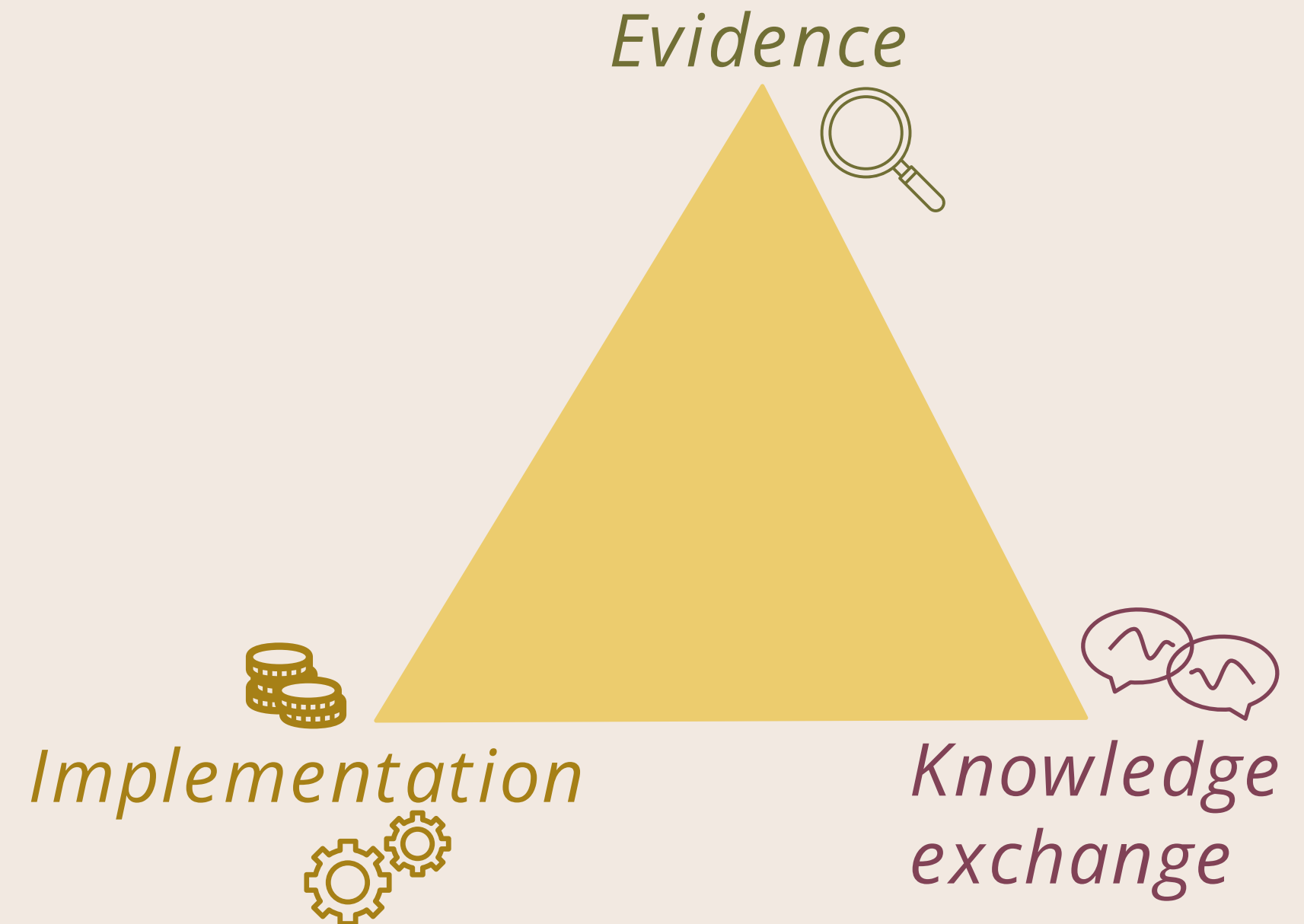| Ecological 🍃	Social 👥	Financial 🪙
Tree establishment and species	Understanding and managing perceptions	Understanding nature markets
Herbivore management and management of impacts	Managing conflicts	Funding and grant schemes
Other species and biodiversity	Understanding social impacts	Cost effectiveness
Carbon	Community involvement	Commercial interests
Changing environments	Community connection	
Other environmental impacts (water, fire)	Understanding woodland histories	
Data and tools		

Unpacking knowledge needs

Evidence gap:
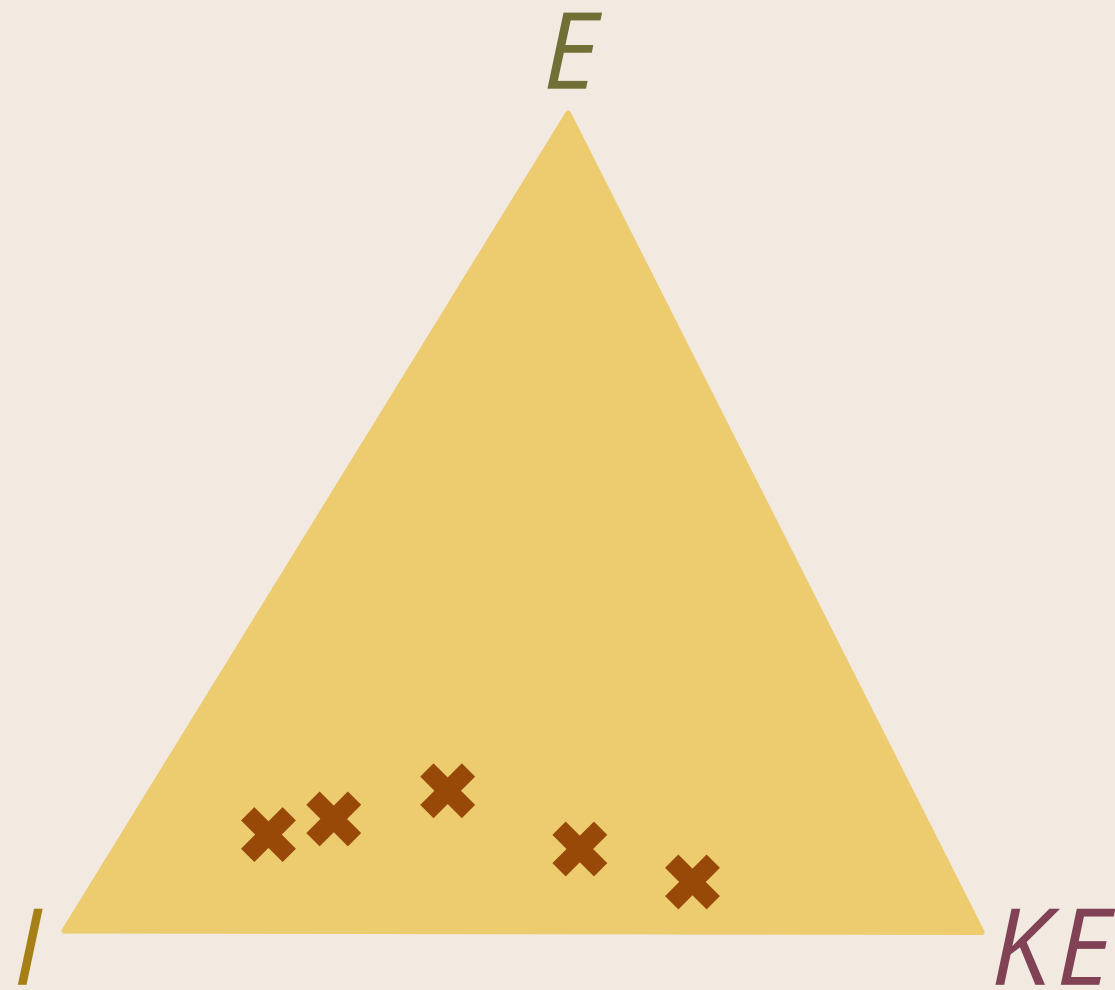due to lack of scientific understanding

Knowledge exchange gap:
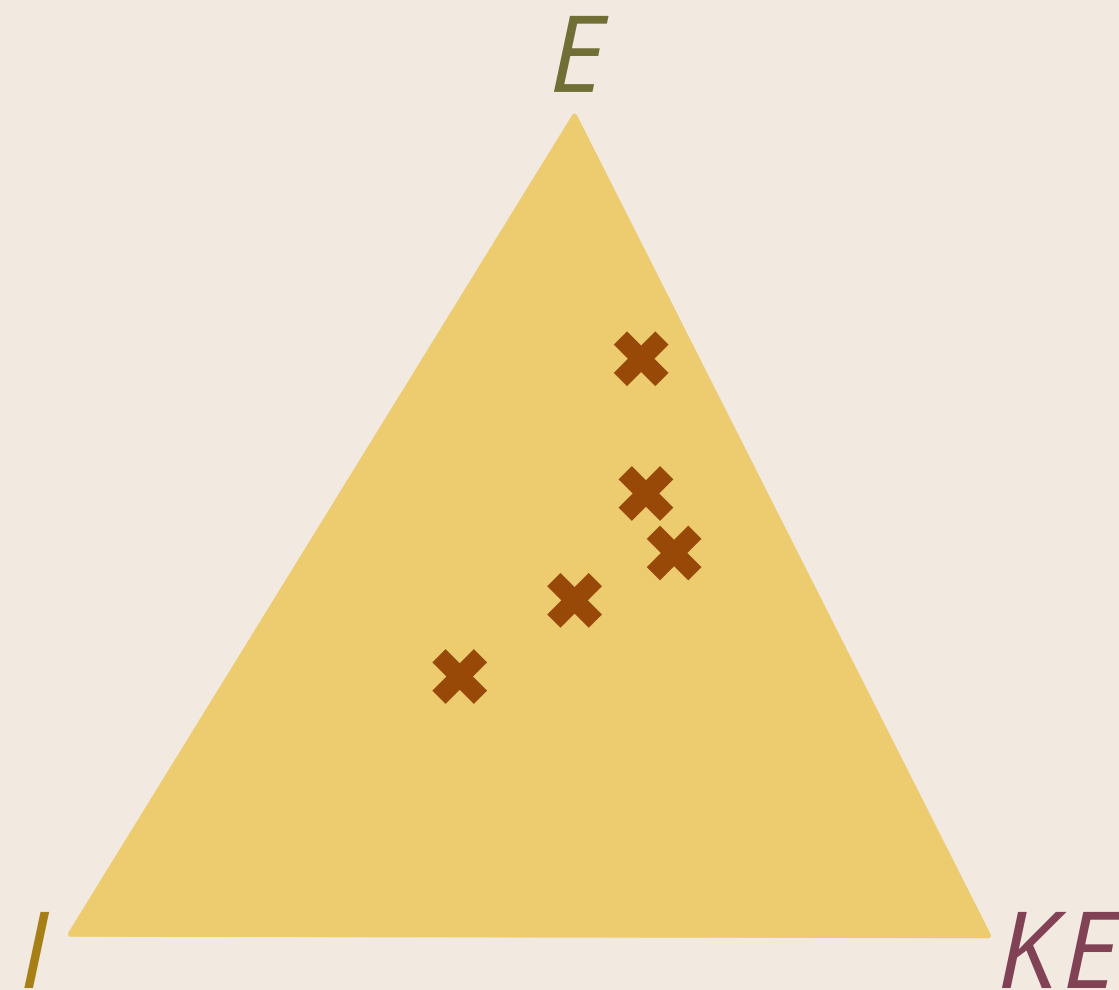due to ineffective sharing of scientific understanding

Implementation gap:
due to wider contextual factors that limit required action

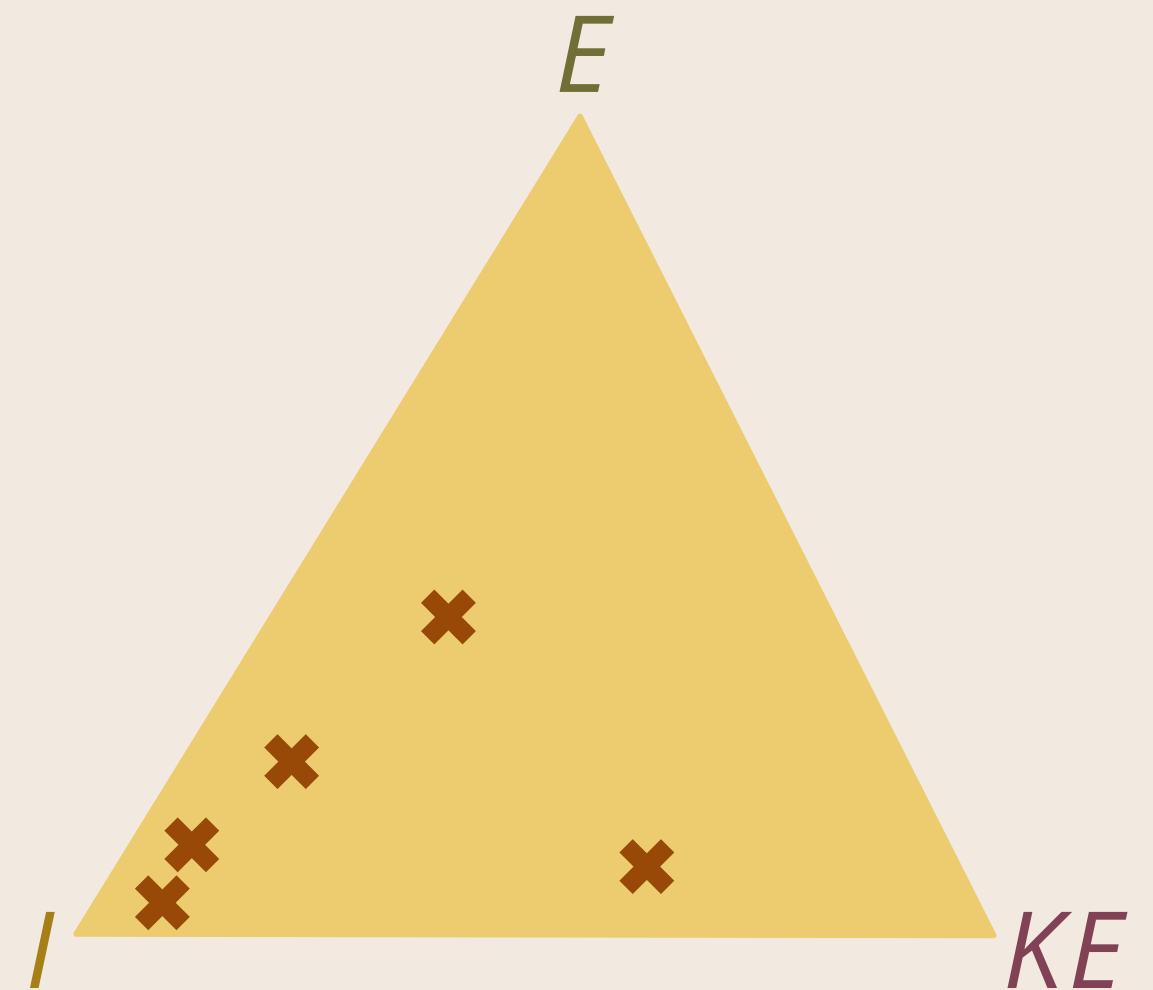*Evidence*

Implementation

Knowledge exchange
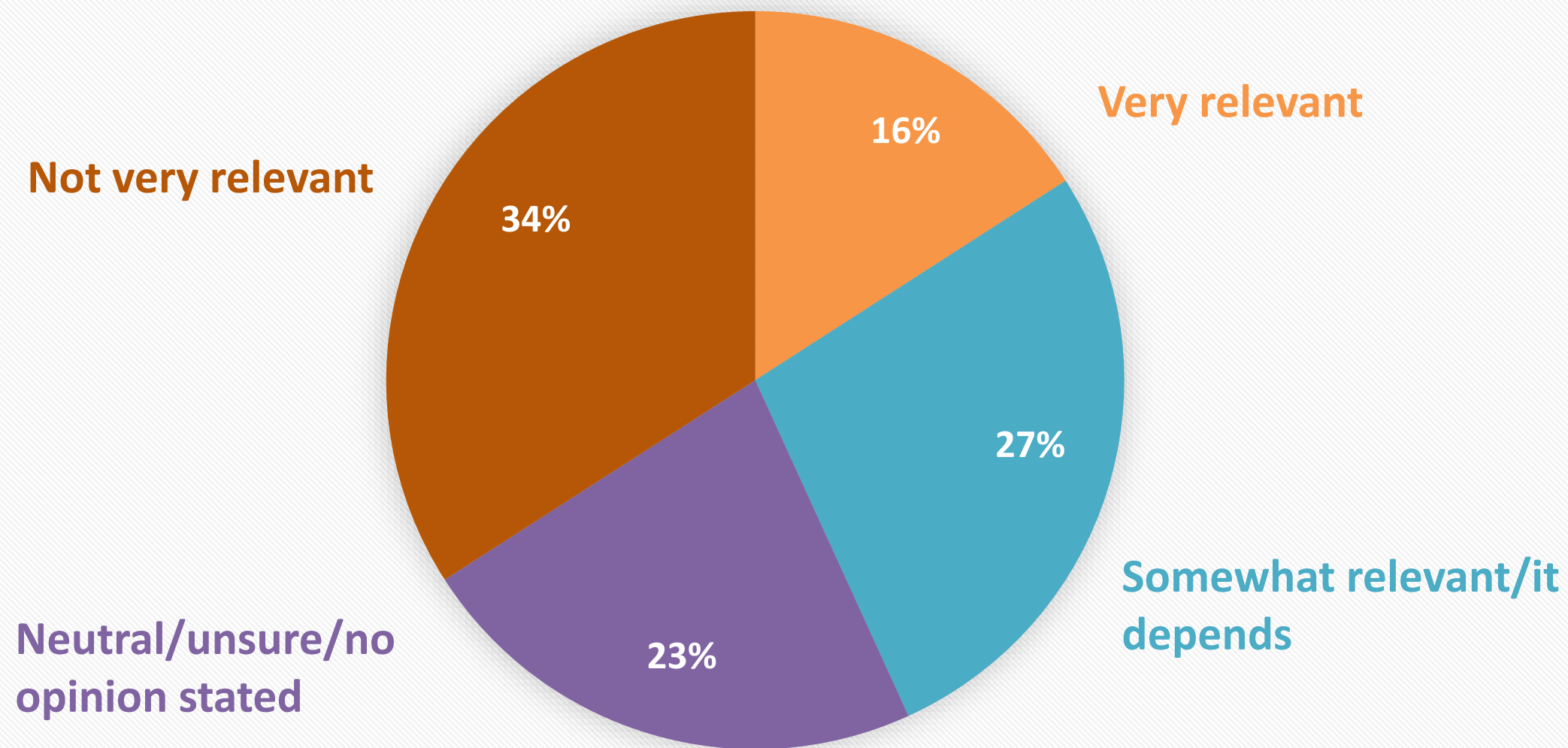
Fire risk and recovery

Nature markets

Best deer management practice

- It's not always about generating evidence
- How to address each knowledge need looks different
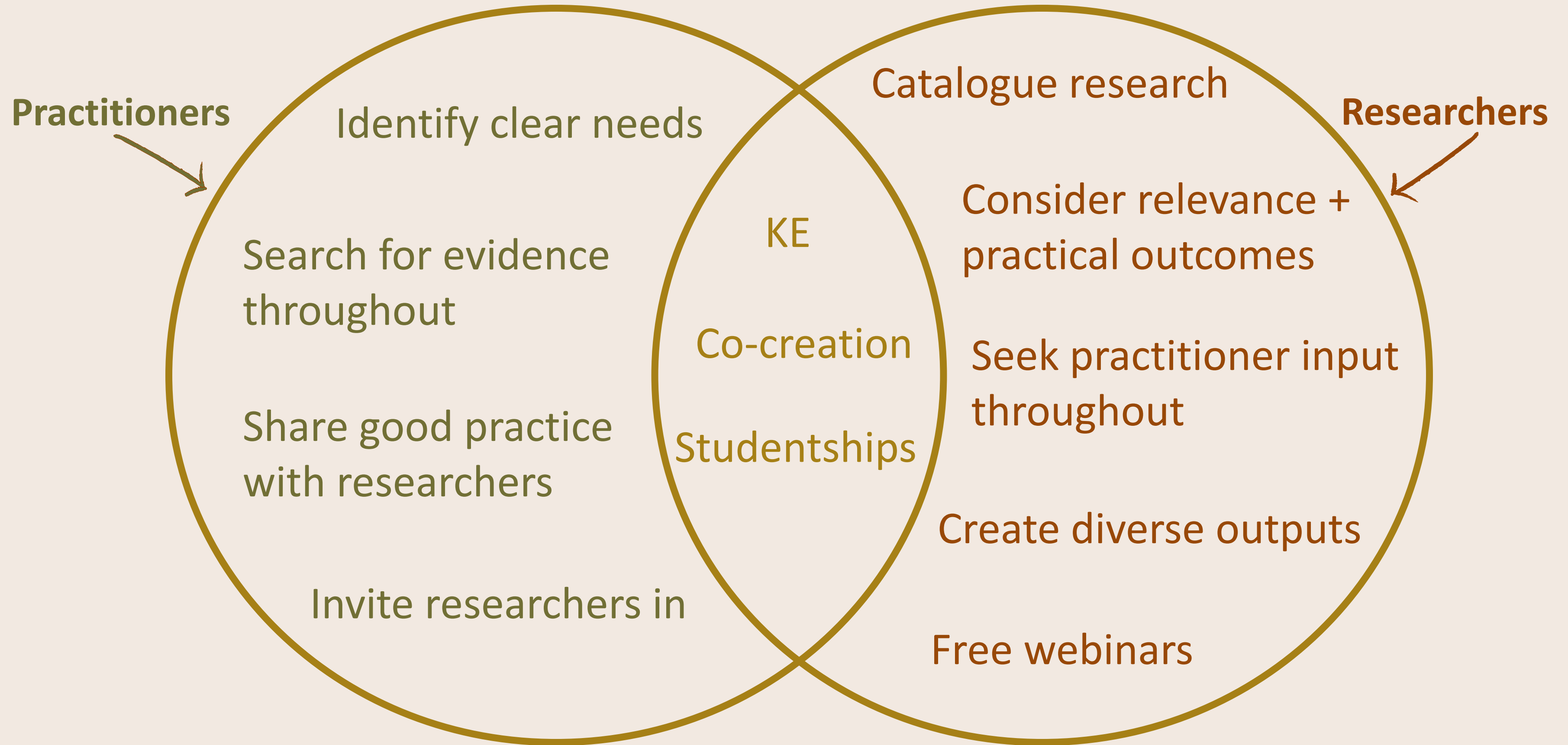
Practitioner-researcher dynamics

Respondents' opinions of research relevance

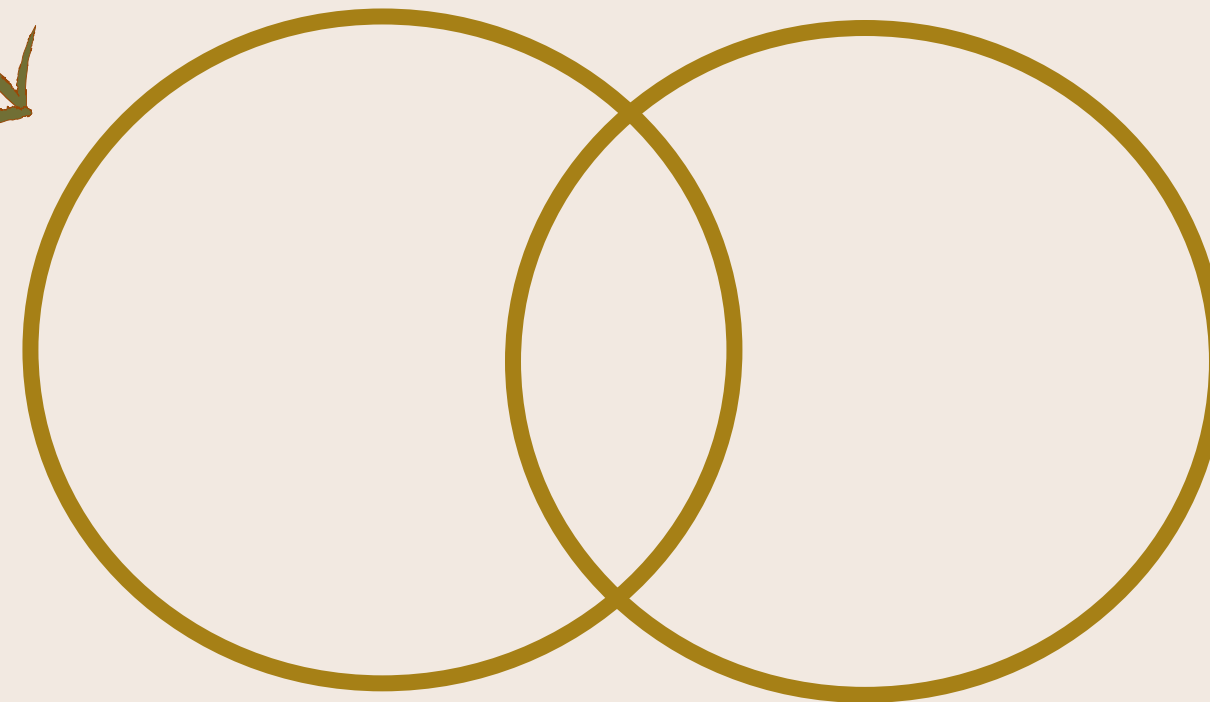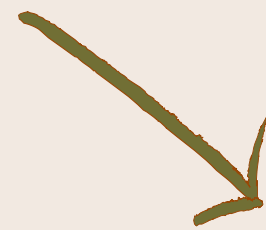- Very relevant — 16%
- Somewhat relevant/it depends — 27%
- Neutral/unsure/no opinion stated — 23%
- Not very relevant — 34%

Lack of...
- Application
- Accessibility
- Practitioner input

Practitioner-researcher dynamics

Practitioners

Researchers

Identify clear needs

Catalogue research

Search for evidence throughout

Consider relevance + practical outcomes

KE

Co-creation

Studentships

Seek practitioner input throughout

Share good practice with researchers

Create diverse outputs

Invite researchers in

Free webinars

External barriers

Funding and funders

Field-specific pressures

Political will

Etc...

Vision for future research

Restoration efforts should be: grounded in practice; underpinned by evidence

Thus, research should be:

- Solutions-focused; outcome-driven; rooted in the long-term

- Collaborative; co-produced

- Innovative; iterative; adaptive

Panel discussion

Shireen Chambers, *Future Woodlands Scotland*

Kirsty Park, *University of Stirling*

Marc Metzger, *Centre for Sustainable Forests and Landscapes*

Chair: Patrick Meir, *Centre for Sustainable Forests and Landscapes*

Further questions about the project, please contact Alys: S2461791@ed.ac.uk