

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Three Lenses of Evidence-Based Policy

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This article discusses recent trends to incorporate the results of systematic research (or ‘evidence’) into policy development, program evaluation and program improvement. This process is consistent with the New Public Management (NPM) emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness. Analysis of evidence helps to answer the questions ‘what works?’ and ‘what happens if we change these settings?’ Secondly, some of the well known challenges and limitations for ‘evidence-based’ policy are outlined. Policy decisions emerge from politics, judgement and debate, rather than being deduced from empirical analysis. Policy debate and analysis involves an interplay between facts, norms and desired actions, in which ‘evidence’ is diverse and contestable. Thirdly, the article outlines a distinction between technical and negotiated approaches to problem-solving. The latter is a prominent feature of policy domains rich in ‘network’ approaches, partnering and community engagement. Networks and partnerships bring to the negotiation table a diversity of stakeholder ‘evidence’, ie, relevant information, interpretations and priorities. Finally, it is suggested that three types of evidence/perspective are especially relevant in the modern era – systematic (‘scientific’) research, program management experience (‘practice’), and political judgement. What works for program clients is intrinsically connected to what works for managers and for political leaders. Thus, the practical craft of policy development and adjustment involves ‘weaving’ strands of information and values as seen through the lens of these three key stakeholder groups. There is not one evidence-base but several bases. These disparate bodies of knowledge become multiple sets of evidence that inform and influence policy rather than determine it.

Key words: *evidence-based policy, policy development, performance, program management*

In many of the mature democracies, the recent ground-swell of interest in ‘evidence-based policy’, on the part of both government officials and social researchers, represents both an opportunity and a challenge. For public managers and political leaders, the opportunity is apparent for continuous improvement in policy settings and program performance, on the basis of rational evaluation and well-informed debate of options. The prospect of mutual benefits for managers, researchers and citizens is alluring.

This is the modern promise of evidence-based policy improvement, albeit the attempt to link the social sciences and public policy has a much older lineage in the history of progressive reform movements.² The social sciences and

public decision-makers have not always had close and cordial relations; indeed, there has been a history of mutual distrust between these sectors during the last two centuries. However, scientific and technical knowledge has been greatly prized in the evolution of the modern state, initially because of its links to economic growth and national defence, and later to address the aspirations for social improvement by the citizens. Social sciences have been valued for their contribution to understanding and influencing social development and well-being. Democratic decision-makers have increasingly aspired to anchor many of their social reform programs in the ‘relevant’ and ‘usable’ knowledge provided by the social sciences.

The evidence-based movement in modern public policy is thus the latest version of the search for usable and relevant knowledge to help address and resolve problems. My argument is that this is linked to the modern emphasis on rational problem-solving, with its focus on accurate diagnosis and knowledge of causal linkages. It is also congruent with important modern strategic concerns with risk analysis and appropriate mitigation responses. In the more technocratic version of the evidence-based approach, the aspiration is to produce the knowledge required for fine-tuning programs and constructing guidelines and ‘tool-kits’ for dealing with known problems. Hence, the currently famous phrase that defines much of the movement – ‘what works?’ (Roberts 2005).

In the context of public policy, governments remain the major investors and users of applied social sciences. They do not simply receive, scan and utilise research; they engage on many levels to influence the processes and the products. Their direct methods of shaping the applied sciences include:

- investment in government-funded research units on specific problems;
- managing the policy-research functions inside many government agencies; and
- commissioning external consultants to undertake specific contract research (Saunders and Walter 2005).

Governments also exercise strong indirect influence through:

- determining national priority areas (eg, for allocation of competitive public funding of research);
- providing rewards and recognition for commercially-focussed knowledge and technical forms of scientific excellence; and
- encouraging contestability in some policy arenas by diversifying their sources of advice, including think-tanks and contractors (Stone and Denham 2004); and encouraging a wider range of instruments to deal with policy challenges, like market-based mechanisms and de-regulatory options.

Major investment in the applied social sciences is part of a cycle of producing, analysing, man-

aging and reinvesting in the ‘bank’ of useful knowledge. Large data sets are systematically collected. Evidence-based approaches claim to fill important gaps in the value chain as data is transformed into information and usable knowledge. Large organisations have introduced ‘knowledge management’ strategies to address the complex tasks of collection, analysis and dissemination. The management information (decision-support) systems on the desktop of senior managers are hungry for information to underpin performance indicators and monitor program or business trends. Some disciplines are seen as more valuable than others for these purposes, eg, the quantitative precision of financial accounting, cost/benefit analysis, risk auditing, and health economics may be more credible than the hermeneutic approaches of history and cultural sociology.

In short, the rise and promotion of ‘evidence-based’ orientations within government agencies is consistent with the public sector’s increased interest in efficiency and effectiveness. Evidence-based policy is believed to provide great assistance in answering some of the key questions of New Public Management (NPM):

- what options will ‘deliver the goods’?
- how can programs be improved to get greater ‘value for money’?
- how can innovation and competition be expanded to drive productivity?
- how can program managers achieve specific ‘outcomes’ for clients and stakeholders (rather than just ‘manage programs’)? and
- in summary, ‘what works?’ (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000; 6 2002; Reid 2003)

Context: Evidence for Addressing Complex Policy Problems

In the 1970s and 1980s the exponents of NPM managerialism used innovative analytical frameworks to tackle traditional problems and to improve program performance information in each portfolio area. During this period, the de-regulation of many policy domains and outsourcing of services by the state was linked to

the key focus on program performance issues, although this strategy posed some risk to the steering capabilities in some public sector agencies (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000; McLaughlin, Osborne and Ferlie 2002). However, by the 1990s there was a significant political shift towards tackling difficult interlinked issues, exemplified by the UK government's championing of evidence-based policy as a foundation for joined-up government (UK Cabinet Office 1999; Parsons 2002, 2004). This period saw an increased investment in central units for policy analysis and commissioning evidence-based consultancy reports. Dealing more directly with major complex issues required taking a more comprehensive approach towards policy design and service delivery (Schorr 1988).

The 1990s saw the rise of policy processes that were potentially less technocratic and more open to 'network' approaches. In essence, this meant that the new managerialist approaches were often supplemented by new mechanisms and process loops, variously described as community engagement, multi-stakeholder consultation, and partnering across stakeholder sectors (Kernaghan 1993; Kooiman 2000; Osborne 2000; Edwards 2003; Casey 2004; Head 2007). Greater levels of cooperation and partnership among governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and business, became associated with a widespread rhetoric promoting 'collaboration', 'joined-up' services, and multiple 'networks' linking stakeholders and sectors (Bruner, Kunesh and Knuth 1992; Bardach 1998; Head 1999; Mandell 2001; Bakvis 2002; Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; Reddel and Woolcock 2004).

Political leaders and public managers increasingly moved to tackle complex unresolved problems, in response to the demands and pressures of citizens for whom services remained inadequate, piecemeal or inappropriate. The frustration felt by managers in public agencies regarding the poor rate of return on major social program investments, led them to search more widely for new approaches. These new directions were facilitated by the willingness of major NGOs, professions and other stakeholders to engage in partnerships or collaborative approaches to addressing major issues. Endemic

social problems seemed to persist regardless of the massive funding directed towards their alleviation. Performance information showed that results were not being achieved. What could be done to deal better with domestic poverty; poor educational attainment; juvenile crime and recidivism; drug and alcohol abuse; preventable diseases; the appalling conditions facing many indigenous communities; and the systemic disadvantages suffered by peoples in developing countries?

This awakening of political interest created opportunities for the behavioural and applied social sciences to offer solutions, in the form of new approaches to gaining greater control over fuzzy and messy realities. Incremental adjustment around 'business as usual' would no longer suffice. Solutions based on old-fashioned ideological recipes became much less persuasive. New more integrated approaches to policy interventions were warmly welcomed in some agencies.

From the viewpoint of performance-based programs and evidence-based policy, the question arose as to what kind of investment in data/information would be needed to generate the necessary knowledge, both to understand complex problems and then to create viable solutions. This period saw a major increase in use of new technologies for data-gathering and data analysis in order to measure the nature and extent of problems, assess the current impacts of service systems, and provide benchmarks for judging future performance.

However, some social scientists and policy analysts began to question whether the persistence of complex social problems was really attributable largely to a lack of information, ie, 'gaps' in the database (Schon 1983; Schon and Rein 1994). They suggested that obtaining more data to fill the known gaps would not necessarily get us onto the highway toward good policy solutions, because much of the policy puzzle is about reconciling different value perspectives. Continuing to invest in building information banks for social scientists and decision-makers would still remain important. But what kinds of information would be of most value for stakeholders and decision-makers dealing with the challenges

of complex inter-related problems with many stakeholders?

'Evidence' Revisited: Types of Problems, Types of Knowledge

The problems addressed by policy-makers are many and varied. At one end of the spectrum, problems may be seen as discrete, bounded, and linked to particular sets of information and actors. In such policy arenas, a 'technical' approach to problem-solving by relatively narrow circles of actors may be dominant. This technocratic approach may be seen as sufficient to meet the requirements of efficiency and effectiveness by those involved. Technical expertise is important in most policy areas, but its dominant position in many areas is increasingly contested. For example, many policy areas in which scientific and engineering expertise had achieved substantial control (eg, transportation, energy, water supply) have now become subject to intense debate and uncertainty.

At the other end of the spectrum, problems may be seen as complex, inter-linked and cross-cutting. Simple technical solutions by experts are unavailable or unworkable. In these circumstances, a 'negotiated' and 'relational' approach to problem-solving may emerge (Innes and Booher 1999; Hemmati 2002; Lewicki, Gray and Elliott 2003; Lovan, Murray and Shaffer 2004). The latter approach is a prominent feature of policy domains that are rich in 'network' approaches, partnering and community engagement. It is argued here that a technical problem-solving approach to knowledge in each discrete policy area is increasingly inadequate. Policy development arrangements are experimenting with broader relational and systemic approaches. Networks and partnerships bring to the negotiation table a diversity of stakeholder 'evidence', ie, relevant information, interpretations and priorities. The argument is that addressing complex inter-linked problems requires a strong emphasis on the social relations and stakeholder perceptions inherent in policy direction and program systems. This has implications for how we think about problems, relevant knowledge, policy and

program design, implementation, and evaluation. In short, our ideas about 'evidence-based' policy may change character as we move from a technical approach towards a more relational approach.

Traditionally, the 'evidence' base seen as the foundation for evidence-based policy is the knowledge generated by applied research, whether undertaken inside or outside of government agencies. This includes the general evidence about broad trends and explanations of social and organisational phenomena, as well as specific evidence generated through performance indicators and program evaluations (Nutley, Davies and Walter 2002; Oakley et al. 2005). However, my argument is that the effectiveness (success) of policies and programs is not just a matter for applied social-science research (including program evaluation reports). As we come to a fuller appreciation of the complexities of modern inter-dependent problems, with a corresponding broadening in the focus of policy attention, it becomes clear that there are multiple forms of policy-relevant knowledge, that are vital to understanding the issues and the prospects for the success of policy interventions.

In this broader view, there is not one evidence-base but several bases (Pawson et al. 2003; Schorr 2003; Davies 2004). These disparate bodies of knowledge become multiple sets of evidence that inform and influence policy rather than determine it. In this broader understanding of policy-relevant knowledge, the prestige and utility of 'scientific evidence', validated by the standards of scientific methodology, remains a very significant input to policy development. Thus, rigorous and systematic research has great value, but needs to be placed in a wider context. Hence, it is argued that effective policy – its design, implementation, and evaluation – depends on several evidentiary bases. These are all involved, directly or indirectly, in the development and assessment of 'good programs' and help us to understand 'effectiveness' in a more holistic and networked policy environment.

The general milieu in which government policies and programs operate is of course the public sphere – of public debate, public

opinion, civic awareness and popular culture. This milieu both informs and responds to public policy, and colours the ways in which positions are argued and knowledge-claims are advanced. However, evidence-based policy is not primarily concerned with how the general political culture shapes policy directions. In a more particular sense, there are three important kinds of knowledge (and corresponding views of 'evidence') that are especially salient for policy. These forms of knowledge arise from:

- political know-how;
- rigorous scientific and technical analysis; and
- practical and professional field experience.

They provide three 'lenses' for policy analysis and three lenses for understanding the evidence-base(s) of policy debate (see Figure 1). They all work in their different ways with particular interpretations of the constraints and limitations of public opinion.

Three Lenses

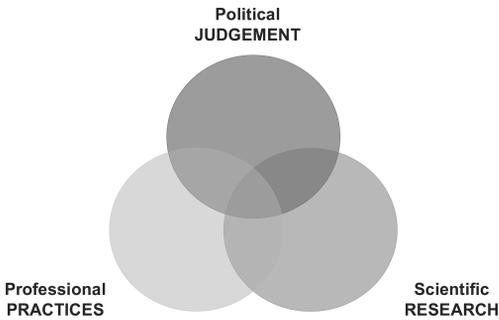
1. *Political knowledge* for this purpose is the know-how, analysis and judgement of political actors. These analysing and judging activities include several vital elements relevant to evidence-based policy – such as considering and adjusting strategies or tactics; undertaking agenda-setting; determining priorities; undertaking persuasion and advocacy; communicating key messages and ideological spin; shaping and responding to issues of accountability; building coalitions of support; and of course negotiating trade-offs and compromises. Making contextual judgements about the possible and the desirable are inherent in this form of knowledge.

This 'political' form of knowledge inheres primarily in politicians, parties, organised groups, and the public affairs media. But although some of the knowledge is private and esoteric, most of it is also widely dispersed in popular forms among the public and especially by and through the mass media. This knowledge is diffuse, highly fluid, and heavily contested owing to its partisan and adversar-

ial context. Policy, seen through the political lens, is about persuasion and support rather than about objective veracity.

Partisanship, and bias in knowledge, are not solely confined to the political sphere – with its characteristic polemics, debates, ideological assertions and counter-claims. However the implications of 'political' know-how for the use of 'evidence' are very significant. Most simply, a selection of convenient 'facts' may be harnessed to an argument; and large areas of other information are then either ignored, dismissed as tainted, or otherwise deemed irrelevant. This partisan usage of evidence is often regarded as 'typical' political behaviour and part of the 'game' of political argument. In the political game, it is widely understood that special pleading and deception are normalised. Sometimes the partisan use of evidence is tactical, casual or opportunistic; but sometimes it is more systematically linked to a cohesive ideological outlook, characterised by some commentators as faith-based politics.

Importantly for my argument, there are some areas of policy that become the subject-matter of clear government commitments. These commitments are no longer (if they ever were) open to further debates about the nature of the problem, the best policy solution, and the range of evidence relevant to assessing policy effectiveness. This means some policy positions are 'data-proof' or 'evidence-proof', in the sense that their evidence 'base' has been narrowed and buttressed by political commitments, perhaps closely linked to the values and ideological positions of political leaders or parties. Some policy preferences allow only certain kinds of 'evidence' to be noticed. Critical commentary under these circumstances is unwelcome. Some contentious problems may become defined in 'official' terms, in ways that tend to privilege some evidence as relevant and to rule out other evidence as irrelevant or merely ideological. In this context, the 'official' framing of a problem is also crucial in regard to what research is commissioned and its terms of reference. Relatively few research and consultancy projects are commissioned without some expectation that the reports may assist in upholding a certain viewpoint.

Figure 1. Three Lenses of Knowledge and Evidence

2. Scientific (research-based) knowledge, is the product of systematic analysis of current and past conditions and trends, and analysis of the causal inter-relationships that explain conditions and trends. In relation to policy review and program assessment, there is a range of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledges (economics, law, sociology, public administration, evaluation, etc) that make highly useful contributions to policy and program understanding and improvement. There is seldom any consensus among social scientists on the nature of problems, the causes of trends or relationships, and the best approach for solutions. Various scientific disciplines may have different methodological approaches, and may offer complementary or sometimes competing perspectives on complex issues. It is perhaps not surprising that inter-disciplinary approaches have come to the fore in recent decades for addressing multi-layered social problems.

Scientific (research-based) forms of knowledge primarily comprise the work of professionals trained in systematic approaches to gathering and analysing information. A concern with the quality and consistency of data is fundamental to a scientific approach to analysis. Nevertheless, methodological choices have to be made. At one end of the spectrum in the behavioural and applied social sciences, 'systematic reviews' apply rigorous standards to examine the state of current knowledge, giving recognition only to those studies which clearly focus on assessing the causal effects of specific interventions. The so-called 'gold standard' for a rigorous experimental approach – adopted in the medical, biological and healthcare sciences

– entails the use of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to test the efficacy of specific interventions (Cochrane Collaboration website). This approach, often championed as the most rigorous strategy for assessing 'what works' in a specific policy field, has also been promoted and applied in some social program areas, including criminology (Davies 2004; Petticrew and Roberts 2005; Campbell Collaboration website). Rigour is thus sometimes associated with a preference for quantitative behavioural data, although qualitative (attitudinal) data are increasingly seen as central in helping to explain the conditions and nature of behavioural change (Davies 2004; Percy-Smith 2005). At the other end of the spectrum, some methodologies associated with a hermeneutic approach, including a large proportion of 'action-research' projects, tend to regard policy and program assessment as more akin to iterative social learning projects than to the experimental sciences.

3. Practical implementation knowledge, in the present context of policy and program effectiveness, is the 'practical wisdom' of professionals in their 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998) and the organisational knowledge associated with managing program implementation. These professional and managerial communities are often segmented rather than well connected. They operate within and across the public sector, the private sector, and the not-for-profit NGO sector. Relevant occupational groupings include program delivery managers, contract managers, enterprise managers, and the diverse range of professionals and para-professionals who are engaged in direct service provision (Pawson et al. 2003) or who provide support services linked into the policy programs of government.

These managers and professionals wrestle with everyday problems of program implementation and client service. Their roles may require managing upwards, downwards, and outwards to external stakeholders (O'Toole, Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2005). Their practical experience in delivery often tends to be under-valued by the political and scientific sectors. The sphere of 'practice' operates with evolving bodies of knowledge that tend to be

specific to each professional niche. The training regimes for managers and professionals are often linked to concepts of 'best practice' and to relevant research bases for assessing 'effective' practices. Their formal bodies of knowledge evolve, and are subject to debate in 'communities of learning' (Wenger 1998). But they also tend to become systematised and codified, and linked to standards and guidelines. In large organisations, best-practice guidelines may become overlaid with bureaucratic rules and protocols.

While the pressure towards systematisation is significant, and the search for technical solutions (eg, build another IT system) is endemic, some areas of practice are less than impressed by the business and engineering models. The professional ethos in human services makes room for unique cases and for the meaning-systems of clients (Schon 1983). This provides the 'mental space' for creating organisational climates that are more favourable to case-based learning and more broadly the adoption of 'organisational learning' approaches. Social realities are not seen as cut-and-dried and controllable, but as evolving challenges with unique characteristics. Time is seen as a necessary ingredient of social and personal improvement. However, the influence of this more open-ended approach is severely tested whenever the political system shifts into crisis response mode, with a heightened demand for rapid responses, rigorous risk-management and standardisation.

Some Implications

It has been suggested above that there are three broad types of knowledge and evidence that are central to the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs. There is not one evidence-base but several bases. These disparate bodies of knowledge become multiple sets of evidence that inform and influence policy rather than determine it. The three lenses of policy-relevant knowledge comprise three perspectives on useful and usable information. Each of these types has its distinctive protocols of knowledge, of expertise, of strategy, and what counts as 'evidence', albeit it is also clear

that there are ongoing internal debates on such matters within each knowledge area.

How do these three lenses and forms of knowledge fit together? There is a considerable case-study literature on 'policy communities' and 'policy networks' that may include participants from more than one institutional or industry sector. There is also a considerable literature in public administration concerning managerial challenges and processes in various portfolio areas. There is also a literature on specific managerial knowledges and other professional knowledges; but rather less on how the sphere of management practice interacts with the other spheres of policy choices by politicians and the findings of systematic research. In fact, there has been surprisingly little research directly on the question of how the three clusters of political, research and professional/managerial knowledge interact. By contrast there has been increasing attention to the bilateral relations between public policy and the social sciences (Davies, Nutley and Smith 2000; Stone 2001; UKCSS 2003; Edwards 2004; Saunders and Walter 2005).

Some useful research questions about the three lenses might therefore include the following:

- is there a low or high level of mutual awareness, recognition and understanding of each other's approaches?
- is there is a substantial 'cultural divide' between these forms of knowledge (Shonkoff 2000), and if so, are there any useful mechanisms/incentives to promote working together more closely?
- in the jostling for salience or in the competition between these sets of ideas, does one form of knowledge typically 'trump' the others – eg, in the policy domain, does politics typically predominate over science and practice?

Answers to all these questions are likely to vary greatly in different situations. From the viewpoint of government, there is an expectation that research findings will assist but not determine policy directions and adjustments (UK Cabinet Office 1999). There is a robust debate about where and how the research contributions can

‘add most value’ to the policy process. For example, is research most useful to government processes at the commencement of the ‘policy cycle’ (identifying and scoping a problem), or in a later stage of options analysis (examining different costs and impacts), or in the program evaluation phase when effectiveness is being re-considered? Researchers are themselves sometimes naïve about what kind of policy analysis will be seen as relevant, and about how to communicate and package their research outcomes most effectively for government officials (Edwards 2004; UKCSS 2003).

Governments tend to have a strong expectation that the managers and professionals who deliver services and implement programs will do so with technical skill and efficiency. For those employed within the public sector, effective implementation is the key consideration, and the government’s control over priorities and program design is very clear. For those employed at arm’s-length from government, efficient implementation is reinforced by contractual relations and accountabilities for service delivery. With a few powerful exceptions, communities of practice may feel disenfranchised, especially when those who are practical experts in delivery are not centrally involved in early discussions about how programs are designed and delivered. The political executives of government are not especially adept at hearing and seeking out the voices of implementers, especially those who suggest that the program goals cannot be delivered because either the framework is flawed or resources are clearly inadequate. Nevertheless, some sharing of perspectives occurs. For example, both public sector managers and political leaders are successful only by making astute practical judgements about priorities, garnering support for taking action, and persuading stakeholders about trade-offs and preferred options.

Researchers may believe that problem-definition and analysis should be closely linked to the data assembled by systematic research. However, in the realm of public policy development, governments are in the business of framing issues and agendas. Strategic policy work is conducted in the context of debates about issues and agendas. Thus, pol-

icy decisions are not deduced in a neutral and objective manner from empirical-analytical work, but from politics, judgement and debate (Majone 1989). Policy debate and analysis involves interplay between facts, norms and desired actions, in which ‘evidence’ is diverse and contestable. Different stakeholders within the business, NGO and government sectors are likely to have divergent views on what is the key problem. For governments, problems and issues become seen as worthy of investigation owing to a confluence of circumstances, such as:

- a perception of crisis or urgency;
- the role of political mandates and priorities;
- the role of expert judgement and advice (consultants, inquiries, etc);
- organisational and issue histories; or
- the changing context of social values and public opinion.

The definition and focus of problems are also likely to be viewed differently through the three lenses of research, professional practice and government policy-making (and of course there will be some debates within each of these).

Some policy arenas are more divergent and strongly contested than others. Over time, as Mulgan (2005) suggests, some fields may become relatively stable and consensual; others may be subject to ‘profound disagreements’; and others again may be lacking a solid information base or a track record of on-ground experience. The implications of these differences in the nature of policy arenas are potentially significant. Contentious (ie, unsettled and turbulent) policy areas may tend to generate more heat than light, as the terms of evidentiary debate may be overwhelmed by partisan voices, despite the best efforts of those who wish to retain an ‘objective’ stance. Current policy examples might include strategies to address major emergent issues such as climate-change responses; value-based issues at the intersection of bio-ethics and bio-technologies; and debates about procedural and substantive ‘fairness’ for workers and employers in industrial relations reform. Researchers who seek to make an objective contribution in such areas may risk being harnessed to positions proposed by strong

advocates on one side of the debate and accordingly disparaged by others.

Conclusions

The demands for efficient and effective government have fostered the need for performance information. This has provided leverage for applied social research, concerned with program evaluation, implementation effectiveness, and new models for tackling complex issues using new policy instruments and processes. This served to legitimate the general concept of evidence-based policy. However, there is a large difference between a technical problem-solving approach to knowledge, and a broader relational and systemic approach to knowledge that is located in multi-stakeholder networks.

This article has suggested there are three main kinds of challenge to the rational mission of 'evidence-based' policy. One arises from the inherently political and value-based nature of policy debate and decision-making. Policy decisions are not deduced primarily from facts and empirical models, but from politics, judgement and debate. Policy domains are inherently marked by the interplay of facts, norms and desired actions. Some policy settings are data-resistant owing to governmental commitments.

Secondly, information is perceived and used in different ways, by actors looking through different 'lenses'. From this perspective, there is more than one type of relevant 'evidence'. I have drawn attention to 'three lenses' that are especially important, centred on political know-how, systematic research, and professional practice. These perspectives all provide important contributions to policy development, but defensiveness and negativity are as common as cooperation. Although the context of decision-making is dynamic and negotiated, these key actors are anchored in institutional settings that make shared perspectives difficult to attain.

The third challenge to a rationalist concept of evidence-based policy is that the complex modern arrangements of networks, partnerships and collaborative governance are difficult to harness to the traditional forms of knowledge

management, policy development and program evaluation in the public sector (Agranoff and McGuire 2003). Networks bring to the table a diversity of lived experience and therefore a diversity of 'evidence' (relevant information, interpretations, priorities, and perspectives), not only about what works but also about what is worthwhile and meaningful. The evidence-base for understanding success factors for complex policy design and implementation may need to address the conditions under which innovation, new thinking and new solutions may emerge in a dynamic environment (Osborne and Brown 2005). The three-lenses approach suggests that there may be importantly divergent perspectives on whether and how to increase mutual understanding and shared objectives.

Endnotes

1. The author is grateful for comments on these ideas from a number of colleagues over several years, including John Alford, Meredith Edwards, Geoff Gallop, Richard Mulgan, John Wanna, and the anonymous referees for AJPA, none of whom bear any responsibility for remaining errors of argument and interpretation.

2. The *historical* roots of such an alliance between political power and systematic knowledge reach back to the late Enlightenment, whose leading thinkers sought to undermine the traditional capacity of governments to rely on appeals to precedent, authority and religious values as the basis of government legitimacy (Staum 1996; Head 1982; Berry 1997). Systematic social science later fortified the progressive impulses for social improvement underlying New Liberalism, early social democracy, and the foundation of institutions such as the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1895 (Lichtheim 2000: chapter 4).

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