



ANZSIG Insights

Parliamentary Triangle Seminar Report

Getting Evidence into Policy-making

MEREDITH EDWARDS AND MARK EVANS

Like any human venture, government can be full of error, fallibility and hubris. But the bigger danger for governments today is not excessive hubris but rather that they might succumb to the myth—often propagated by a sceptical media—that they are powerless, condemned to mistrust and futility. If they do so succumb, they will fail to rise to the great challenges, from climate change to inequality, that they alone can tackle.

Geoff Mulgan, Director, Young Foundation.

Proposition

This article examines the case for getting more evidence into policy-making. It begins by evaluating the national and international contexts that have given rise to the latest renaissance in thinking on evidence and policy. It then draws on contributions to the ANZSIG Parliamentary Triangle Seminar and companion papers, to identify four critical obstacles to the achievement of evidence-based policy making in government.¹ The article outlines a range of strategies for getting evidence into policy. It concludes by arguing that in most part evidence-based policy-making remains demand-led, and that developing and embedding a culture of 'strategic commissioning of evidence' at the level of political and permanent leadership is the fastest way of getting evidence into policy-making and achieving more strategic government. Here the SES has a particularly important role to play in championing evidence-based policy-making and forging strong working relationships with knowledge institutions through action learning processes which can help mitigate risk in public sector innovation, facilitate solutions to public policy problems and incubate ideas to support future decision-making.

¹ We would like to take this opportunity to thank James Cameron (National Water Commission), Jonathan Lomas (Canadian Health Services Research Foundation), and Mary Ann O'Loughlin, COAG Reform Council, for their contribution to the ANZSIG Parliamentary Triangle Seminar on 'Getting Evidence into Policy-making' which was held at Old Parliament House on 29 March 2011.

Definitions

The latest rediscovery of evidence-based policy-making may be viewed as part of a longer historical search for usable and relevant knowledge generated through rational scientific methods to help address and resolve social problems. This quest dates back to the enlightenment but finds its modern expression in the rational model of decision-making developed by Herbert Simon (1945) in the seminal *Administrative Behavior* (New York: Macmillan), and, Herbert Simon and James March's (1958) *Organisations* (New York: Wiley). Simon attempted to develop a theory of policy formulation which dealt with 'the processes of decision as well as with the process of action' (1945, p. 1). Simon argued that:

...rational decision-making involves the selection of the alternative which will maximise the decision maker's values, the selection being made following a comprehensive analysis of alternatives and their consequences.

As Brian Head (2008, p. 2) notes, in more recent times, the aspiration for evidence-based policy-making in Australia 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?'

Domestic and international contexts

The 2009 KPMG *Benchmarking Australian Government Administration Performance* report identified two areas in which it claimed that the Australian Public Service (APS) performs comparatively poorly or has an opportunity to strengthen:²

its capacity for coordinated, informed and strategic policy; and
its tools, methods and institutions for integrating external expertise and the views of citizens into the policy development and service design process.

In the subsequent report on the Reform of Australian Government Administration, *Ahead of the Game*, Terry Moran couched this problem in terms of the need to enhance policy capability:

The APS needs to strengthen its capacity to undertake rigorous research, gather and analyse data and provide the highest-quality strategic policy advice. The reforms also propose a greater focus on policy implementation, through improved guidance, greater networking between service delivery agencies and implementation governance boards to oversee high risk projects.

As Jonathan Lomas noted, this problem is not confined to Australia but appears to be a general malaise in Westminster style democracies. Indeed his own organisation, the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, emerged in response to the failure to integrate research and innovation into Canadian governance and politics and rising concern with the observation that many management and policy decisions were not based on research evidence. Claudia Scott (2008) reports similar concerns in the New Zealand context in her paper delivered to the *IPS Futuremakers Series* in Wellington. The Blair government's 1999 *Modernising Government* White Paper represented an acknowledgement of the need to modernise policy and management at the centre of government. It argued that Government 'must produce policies that really deal with problems; that are forward-looking and shaped by evidence rather than a response to short-term pressures; that tackle causes not symptoms' (Cabinet Office, 1999). The

² Paradoxically, the evidence base underpinning this report is far from 'evidence-based'.

Government's aspiration was given institutional expression through the creation of the Centre for Management and Policy Studies which had a clear mandate both to establish more productive relations between government and academia in order to generate high quality evidence-based research to inform practice and to consider the broader training needs of the civil service. The Cabinet Office's (2001) *Better Policy-making* mapped out an evidence-based approach to policy for achieving the former based on: reviewing existing research; commissioning new research; consulting relevant experts and/or using internal and external consultants and considering a range of properly costed and appraised options (CMPS, 2002). While the Cabinet Office's (2005) *Professional Skills for Government* programme dealt with the skills and training requirements of the civil service.

There has subsequently been an explosion of intellectual and discursive activity around the evidence-based practice approach in the UK including the establishment of the ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy-making and Practice at Queen Mary College, University of London and even an academic journal (*Evidence and Policy*). ANZSOG has recently followed suit with the announcement of the launch of a new journal, *Evidence Base*, under the editorship of George Argyrous at the University of New South Wales.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that no progress is being made in the Australian public service on these issues. *Ahead of the Game* has sharpened thinking on the institutional conditions necessary to facilitate an evidence-based culture in policy-making and operational delivery. And, of course this requires strong linkages with reforms which attempt to inspire public sector innovation. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether the SES will become key agents of change in this regard or simply pay lip service to what they perceive to be yet another public management fad. Luckily for those of us who see merit in evidence-based policy-making, role models do exist across the Commonwealth. Look at the work of the ANAO under Ian McPhee or DIAC under Andrew Metcalf or the work of James Cameron and Mary-Ann O'Loughlin and their colleagues at the National Water Commission and the COAG Reform Council and we can see knowledge-based organisations in action leading international policy development in their respective arenas.

Barriers to the provision of evidence-based policy-making

So what are the main barriers to getting evidence into policy? Four central barriers loomed large in our discussion.

Institutional constraints on the use of evidence in policy-making arising from the three year electoral cycle.

Inability to utilise existing capacity, learn from the front-line and share evidence of better practice.

The absence of strong productive working relationships between government and knowledge institutions.

Failure to attract the best and the brightest.

It is important to note that these barriers are not omnipresent – as noted above, there are examples of departments and agencies achieving successes in removing such barriers. What is evident is that such practices have not been mainstreamed into the culture of the public service.

Each of these barriers is assessed in greater detail below together with a range of strategies for circumventing them.

Achieving strategic, innovative, outward-looking, evidence-based policy

a) Beyond the electoral cycle

The 'OzMinster' system is particularly vulnerable to charges of short-termism as the three year electoral cycle means that the window of opportunity for policy change is rarely open for more than two years at a time and the next election campaign is always on the horizon. Moreover, limits to parliamentary legislative procedural time present further constraints to reform processes. This is why the strategic commissioning of research at the level of political and permanent leadership is so crucial to affecting the cultural change necessary to get policy advisors to think beyond the electoral cycle. Moreover, the use of long-term funding compacts with all-party support in areas of national concern underpinned by evidence-based research could also be an important way forward. As James Cameron noted, the National Water Initiative provides an important illustration of what can be achieved when political will exists. In the Australian context, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and COAG provide the most important institutional venues for achieving this aim.

b) Utilising existing capacity

The RAGA Discussion paper identifies a number of barriers "impeding the ability of the APS to develop and deliver high quality policy advice to government" (2009, p.21). While there is considerable scope to strengthen the APS's overall policy capability, what is not canvassed are some of the barriers to better using strategic policy advice skills that already exist within the APS, learning from the front-line and sharing evidence of better practice.

At the 2009 IPAA National Conference, David Borthwick informed the forum that a bigger question than that of the quality of policy advice provided by the APS is the quality of the decision making process itself. The possible reasons for the lower than desirable quality of decision making include:

- the sheer workload arising from many more cabinet submissions than in the past and frequent COAG meetings and consequent paper preparations and briefings taking key strategic thinkers away from their main game (the 'crowding-out' effect);
- the speed with which some policy decisions are made and which involve Ministerial policy advisers asking for short cuts in process which prevents a more strategic and evidenced-based policy approach being adopted. (the 'hasty-decision' effect);³ and,
- insufficient understanding of government priorities (identified in the KPMG report as the third area of comparatively poor performance).⁴

In addition, the poor quality of the decision making process could reflect the fact that public servants in contact with ministers or their offices at the time the KPMG data was gathered (2005-07) frequently found it difficult to be apolitical, impartial, professional, accountable and at

³ See also Submission 65 to the RAGA process from DIISR.

⁴ This was identified in the KPMG report as the third area of comparatively poor performance.

the same time actively engage with government without facing potential or actual conflicts of interest (see: KPMG 2009, p.33; RAGA, 2009, p.15).

It should also be noted that the RAGA paper puts considerable emphasis on policy integration. Missing from this observation is recognition of the possible tension between different policy objectives, including the “core” objectives of a policy area and its impact on other policy objectives. For example, in social housing policy under the Rudd government we saw housing programs being used to achieve economic and employment objectives arising from the global economic crisis. This led to an emphasis on new construction. However objectives for social housing include having housing well located in relation to transport, employment and services. Purchasing existing housing will often achieve these objectives better than new construction. Similarly concern with the environment can lead to requirements for housing to meet energy use requirements and so on, however these are likely to increase the cost of housing and thus may inhibit achieving the housing policy objective of providing affordable housing.

The above observation points to the need for a balance between achieving the “core” objectives of a policy area and integration with objectives from other areas. The RAGA paper’s suggestion of creating a “streamlined, unified leadership cadre at the pinnacle of the APS, with a clearly articulated role to consider and progress cross-government strategic priorities” (2009, p.19) would not be likely to encourage the development of such a balance unless concerted attempts are made to identify potential consequences of action. This requires the use of evidence.

Finally, as we are constantly told by public sector innovation gurus, most enduring innovations tend to emerge not from policy wonks but from the front-line (Mulgan and Albury, 2003). Capturing evidence and sharing better practice from the front-line must therefore be a crucial component of any reform attempt to get evidence into policy. Notably, the ANAO provides a rich reservoir of learning in this regard but is the evidence being integrated effectively into decision processes?

c) Building strong productive working relationships between government and knowledge institutions

Jonathan Lomas identified four key aspects of this barrier to evidence-based policy-making (see also Edwards 2006 and Evans, 2007):

1. separation, mistrust and poor understanding between the worlds of ideas/research and action/practice;
2. a static view of academic research as a product and system decision-making as an event vs a dynamic view of both as social processes that need to be linked in ongoing exchange;
3. few skills or incentives in universities to do applied research; and,
4. few skills or incentives in the system to use research.

Crucially, he sees the problem as lying both with government and knowledge institutions. For many decades now there has been much discussion about how to obtain a better match between the kinds of research that governments want (the demand side) and the kinds of research that researchers undertake (the supply side). Indeed, there appears to be some disconnect between these two.

Peter Shergold, in launching an Academy of Social Sciences book on *Ideas and Influence* (2005) referred to the 'fragility of relationships' between public policy and the social sciences. He saw, '(t)he relationships between social science and public policy, and between academic and public servant, are ones of the utmost importance.' But he went on to say: 'They are not, I think, in particularly good shape' (ASSA, 2005, p. 2). He elaborated little but could have gone on to mention, as others have, that academic research often deals with issues that are not central to policy and management debates, and can fail to take the reality of peoples' lives into account in setting research questions. Conversely, when research tries to be relevant, it can be seen as being driven by ideology dressed up as intellectual inquiry. And a frequent complaint is the lack of timeliness in academic research. Such are the frustrations of many policy makers (Edwards 2010, p. 55).

The perspective of academic researchers has been well put by Saunders and Walter, in the introduction to their book, *Ideas and Influence* (2005, p.13), the lack of attention by policy practitioners to the subtleties and qualifications of their research findings and a fear that "those driving policy are seeking to justify actions already decided by 'cherry-picking' from among the available evidence with little regard for the robustness or validity of the material selected" (2005, p.3). They go on to point out that "those involved in policy development often have little idea of how or where existing research can contribute, or what is needed to help resolve outstanding issues" (2005, p.13). To this could be added an anti-intellectual approach sometimes formed within governments; a risk-averse attitude by public servants to findings that could embarrass the Minister; the short time-frames under which governments operate; and a lack of both respect for the independence of researchers and of incentives needed for researchers to produce policy-relevant material (Edwards 2004, p. 3).

In addition, of course, not all research is undertaken in order to influence policy and when it does, this tends to be through what Carol Weiss has called "the enlightenment effect" (Weiss, 1982). Research may be used simply to raise awareness although it may start to shape policy thinking through ideas, theories and concepts (Nutley et al 2007, p. 2).

So, while few would disagree that there is a profound problem with the research-policy nexus, the complex nature of the relationship complicates the development of practical next steps. A tailored approach which is sensitive to the context for each policy problem is likely to be required if research is to be effectively harnessed; and each issue may require different types of research output or engagement, depending on the stage in the development of policy. By implication the research needed could be: descriptive, analytical, diagnostic, theoretical or prescriptive (Solesbury, 2002, p. 94).

Despite the complexity of the research-policy relationship, this article sharpens its focus now in dealing with research that aims to contribute to public policy decisions. In this context, there is one relatively recent and important insight that promises to bridge the perceived cultural gap between government decision-makers and researchers. A relatively recent synthesis of evidence shows that the traditional linear relationship of the separate processes of research and policy formulation is being seen as generally inferior to an interactive and ongoing relationship between policy-makers and researchers covering both the production and take-up of knowledge. That is, research stands to be more effective when it is part of the decision-making process rather than a stand-alone activity (see: Nutley *et al* 2007; Waddell 2007; and, Edwards 2010). And engaging with researchers at an early stage in the research process "...is a key factor in helping to ensure that the research findings are subsequently taken up and exploited" (British Academy 2008, p. 44).

In addition, recent evidence points to:

- the value of collective or team approaches in use of research and decision-making as distinct from the tradition of focusing on the output of individual researchers;
- the value of intermediation where many voices and agencies are brought into policy processes; and
- the value of a broader definition of research to encompass a range of types of knowledge generation and dissemination.

Alongside this understanding has come greater emphasis by governments on problems that cross disciplines – requiring coordinated effort across government agencies - e.g. climate change, terrorism and security, globalisation, and ageing. Moreover, many governments over the last decade have placed greater emphasis on the need for more “evidence-based” (or more realistically, “evidence informed”) policy-making, to help solve what appear to be increasingly complex public policy problems (Banks 2009). As we mentioned earlier, this emphasis was seen recently in the Rudd Government’s blueprint for the reform of public administration, *Ahead of the Game* (2010). Policy makers are increasingly aware of the need to use researchers’ knowledge and at the same time realise that research potentiality is not being fully tapped.

A strengthening of strategic policy capability could be assisted in the ways suggested in the RAGA Discussion Paper (2009, p. 25). There would appear much merit in trying out *Strategic Policy Hubs*, in particularly:⁵ the creation of a Charter of policy making principles including better practice approaches;⁶ developing relevant learning and professional development arrangements; and, our own suggestion, engaging in action based research activity which brings together the best of theory and the best of practice in a creative fusion.

What follows are a range of suggestions aimed at strengthening innovative strategic policy advice. Many of them would be particularly relevant for the ways in which ANZSOG and its academic researchers could assist the APS enhance its policy capability skills, university researchers are critical to public sector innovation and yet the relationship between policy and practitioner officials and academics is too often “fragile”. It can be too easy to paint a picture of the “ivory tower academic” on the one hand and the practical policy maker on the other, and bemoan the fact that their different perspectives make it difficult for the two to relate for any meaningful purpose. While these stereo-types can be exaggerated (see: Edwards 2004; ANZSOG 2007; CST 2008) they insulate prejudices on both sides which need to be confronted (Evans, 2007).

In the light of the finding that Australia ranked very poorly on the indicator of the influence of academics in the decision-making process in the KPMG assessment – 5/10 compared to 9/10 for New Zealand – there is a need to overcome the cultural barriers in this key relationship between public servants and academic researchers. These can be overcome through the following devices.

⁵ However, see the DIISR submission for some essential conditions to be met, including the feedback loop to implementation.

⁶ See below for greater detail on Better Practice Guides more generally.

Interactions throughout the policy process – the popularity of roundtables

Evidence is emerging about the considerable value of interactive mechanisms for enhancing the use of research in government. The traditional linear relationship of the separate processes of research and policy formulation is being seen as generally inferior to an interactive and ongoing relationship between policymakers and researchers covering both the production and take-up of knowledge.

Recent interviews with senior officials across Australasian jurisdictions (ANZSOG, 2007) pointed to a strong demand for facilitative or interactive research related mechanisms that would assist practitioners address their current policy and management challenges. By far the most commonly favoured mechanism mentioned by senior officials was for ANZSOG to facilitate roundtables or workshops involving both public servants and expert academics. This was especially so for emerging and ‘wicked’ issues, and also wherever there was an interest in practices in other jurisdictions and an interest in the “how-to” questions, for example, jurisdictional comparisons of certain aspects of service delivery.

In this context, a recent UK Council for Science and Technology (CST) report on *How Academics and Government Can Work Together* addressed the ignorance of the benefits that interaction can deliver and concluded that:

A key problem appears to be the commissioning of academic work without academic input, meaning there is less understanding of the research, how to ask the right questions or how the response can be challenged and used. This can be especially important when addressing the big, cross-departmental questions where academics can have a vital role (2008, p. 9).

There are essentially two broad roles that academics can play to assist in the policy process: by “challenging, re-conceptualising and generally thinking innovatively about practitioner agendas” and “the more traditional role of the ‘expert’ offering advice on how to do things” (Pollitt 2006, p. 261). Some of Australia’s most innovative policies have arisen from ideas and other input from academics (e.g. the Child Support Scheme and HECS).

The use of ‘innovation intermediaries’⁷

Knowledge Brokers

Senior officials who were interviewed about the potential research role of ANZSOG also expressed considerable interest in using some form of “knowledge broker” linking the academic and government sectors. Four possible models were identified which could operate under the ANZSOG umbrella:

- (a) An academic working from a university who acts as a *collaborative research entrepreneur* (such as under the Emerging Issues Program in NZ (KPMG 2009, p. 36) or the ANZSOG Institute for Governance at the University of Canberra.
- (b) A senior ex-public servant working within a University (*Executive in Residence*) who would have relevant government connections.

⁷ A term used by KPMG, 2009, p. 35.

- (c) A “*Chief Government Social Researcher* (as in the UK) or *Chief Social Scientist* working from within government with similar functions as above.
- (d) An *Academic in Residence* attached to a central agency – a recent practice in the Australian Public Service Commission.

A fifth additional model could be added here:

- (e) The establishment of an ‘*International Senior Practice Fellowship Scheme*’ on the lines recently proposed by the ANZSOG Institute, in which senior practitioners from overseas would be invited to Australia on a six month secondment to support reform processes.

UK knowledge transfer teams

Not mentioned in the KPMG report is a range of knowledge transfer activities undertaken in the UK by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the activities of its Knowledge Transfer Team (ESRC 2009). The Team’s many linking activities would be worthy of study with a view to widening the influence of the ARC to include more dissemination and interactive activities (see Edwards 2009a). Since 2005, and following a pilot process, a unit was set up in Scotland with a “Knowledge Transfer Team” within the Office of Chief Researcher. The Chief Researcher is “head of profession” for all government social researchers and provides advice and support within the Scottish government on social research knowledge and transfer issues, with an impressive array of joint programs with the ESRC (ESRC 2009).

A key un-researched area in this context is the issue of what type of broker would most effective in promoting evidence-based research in what type of setting and policy issue (see: Nutley et al 2007, p. 317). Because ‘Knowledge Brokering’ is in its infancy, much could be learnt through piloting different types of broker arrangement in different settings as has occurred, for example, in Scotland. One possibility which could be tried in Australia is the appointment of a Chief Social Scientist, to work alongside its Chief Scientist with the aim of assisting in leading whole of government and social and natural science perspectives on national policy priority issues.

Secondments out of the public service

Both the Discussion Paper and the KPMG report place much attention on various forms of secondment of non-government players into government. Of equal, if not more value, is to permit public servants time out of the public service to concentrate on key policy issues. An example is the arrangement the Treasury has with the ANU. The Child Support Scheme had its origins in the 1980s when a senior public servant was given six months paid leave (by the APS) to work at the ANU to research some complex and emotive issues around child support reform which led to a radical tax based solution collection/enforcement proposal. Indeed a paradigm shift in policy along those lines may not have been possible without prior deep research.

Supply side incentives

The options that we have reviewed so far have dealt with demand-side challenges that face policy makers in enhancing policy capabilities. There are also challenges facing policy makers in ensuring that researchers are able to participate and engage in policy processes.

A prominent issue in discussions with academic researchers interested in public policy processes is the lack of appropriate incentive structures to undertake this activity (ANZSOG 2007, pp. 34-5). Currently in Australia and elsewhere, academic promotions and other rewards strongly favour publication for peer reviewed journals – particularly in prestigious international journals (Howard 2008, p. 10). Winning grants from ‘gold standard’ research funding bodies (such as the Australian Research Council (ARC) in Australia) is another key esteem indicator for promotion. There is obviously a significant tension here between the way in which universities are funded by government to reward researchers through publications and competitive research grant capture and governments wanting to encourage more policy-relevant research.

Government funded research bodies could be much more pro-active in encouraging processes and infrastructure to support linkage and exchange activities across both the academic and government sectors and across disciplinary boundaries (Howard 2008). The Australian government has recently announced “mission based compacts” with its universities to reward university collaboration and knowledge exchange (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research 2009, p. 63). This could well assist in gaining a “whole of university” approach to government policy priorities. If the Compact also included some form of acknowledgement by government of any “valued engagement” of researchers in non-traditional forms of research, as is the case in the Research Excellence Framework in the UK, this could enhance researcher incentives to assist government achieve its policy agenda (British Academy 2008, p.36; CST 2008, p. 21).

The use of action-based research programs

What do we mean by action-based research? The intellectual origins of the study of public administration and public policy lie squarely with the pioneering work of the English Fabian thinkers Sydney and Beatrice Webb in their classic studies of local government in England and poor law administration. The Webbs sought to combine rigorous social investigation with reformism based upon rational planning. The emphases that they gave to establishing a rational technocratic and meritocratic bureaucracy informed by social scientific reason as an instrument of social transformation was given institutional expression with the establishment of the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1895 as a centre for training a meritocratic administrative cadre for governing a new Britain. The pragmatic linkage in Fabian thought between social investigation and political action resonates strongly in contemporary debates about policy and evidence.

The ANZSOG Institute for Governance addresses these academic and professional dilemmas through the development of a ‘reflexive’ approach to public administration which argues for the integration of the world of thought and the world of action through the creation of inclusive action-based research communities devoted to ‘enlightened’ prescription. Action-based research refers to the production of research which has ‘explanatory’, ‘descriptive’ and ‘prescriptive’ objectives. It differs from applied research in two respects. *Firstly, it includes senior practitioners in both the production and the analysis of research findings.* Secondly, *it aims to produce research which can immediately be integrated within decision processes.* This approach recognises that academic knowledge about public administration should be used for its betterment not just because all that we do as scholars of public administration and public policy is rooted in practice but that because the defence of bureaucracy and the achievement of social progress demand it. Furthermore, engaging in ‘enlightened’ prescription founded on strong principles of inclusiveness, academic freedom and social scientific rigour helps to improve explanations and understandings of administrative subjects.

The above observations implies a government commitment to a fundamentally different relationship between research and policy activities with corresponding changes to cultures, structures and processes on both sides of the current “divide”.

d) Recruiting and retaining the brightest and the best

Recruiting and retaining the brightest and the best is fundamental to enhancing strategic policy capability. However, this aim largely rests on improving employment conditions, providing internationally competitive salaries, empowering individuals in the workplace and ensuring that the public service commands social respect in society. The RAGA paper stresses the importance of mobility of personnel, both within the public service and between the private and the third sectors and the public service. There is also an evident need for movement between staff working at different levels of governance to build the type of trusting working relationships which can make cooperative federalism more than an empty slogan. But again a balance is needed, this time between the degree of mobility required and the element of stability and expertise within an area. Too much mobility can lead to a lack of policy expertise for an area and diminished corporate knowledge. Openness to new ideas and an understanding of relationships with other areas and organisations are valuable, but effective policy making also requires an in depth knowledge of the policy field. For in depth policy knowledge to exist some personnel need to have lengthy experience in the area. Such people, if they are to stay, need to have promotion opportunities within an area and feel that their expertise is valued and rewarded and this will not be the case if the appointment of outsiders (whether from outside the service or another area of the service) is preferred as a matter of policy.

Having staff with significant experience in a given area can also assist with citizen centred Government and the transition from policy to administration. The effective involvement of citizens in administration and policy requires that citizens deal with officers who can easily explain policy and procedures to the citizen and who understand the situation and concerns of the citizen – this will require that some of the staff in an area have reasonable experience in that area. Moreover, effective implementation of policy requires a detailed knowledge of how programs are administered in the area and the circumstances that can affect their implementation – this is unlikely without a proportion of staff having reasonable experience in the area.

In Conclusion

If we are to increase the policy capability of government, we need to embed a culture of demand for evidence based policy-making at all levels. The role of leaders, both political and permanent, in this process is crucial. They can emphasize the importance of evidence by shaping their demands for policy advice in more strategic terms through placing an emphasis on the medium to long-term. Moreover, Jonathan Lomas’s suggestion that it be incumbent on policy-makers to identify the evidence underpinning any policy proposal would help to foster a more reflexive approach; dare we say it – a strategic learning approach to policy development in tune with the aspiration of being ‘Ahead of the Game’. But if leaders do not show an appetite for long-term strategic thinking and the use of evidence then policy advisors will simply not attempt to offer such thinking; preferring to offer a ‘quick’ win to cope with immediate budgetary concerns rather than achieving policy goals.

This report therefore argues for the integration of the world of thought and the world of action through 'enlightened' evidence-based learning founded on strong principles of credible evidence, verifiable theory and the capacity to 'speak truth to power' not just because it will help to improve our understandings of administrative and policy subjects but because social progress demands it.

If you have any comments on this paper, please email them to mark.evans@canberra.edu.au and we will post them on the seminar website.

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