

43 ASSID CONFERENCE
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**EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH
& THE POLITICAL PROCESS: A
DOUBLE HELIX EFFECT**

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Evidence Based Research (EBR)

EBR is the conscientious, explicit and
judicious use of current best evidence in
making decisions.

The practice of EBR means integrating
individual researcher expertise with the
best available external evidence from
systematic research.

Origins of EBR

EBM- Evidence Based Medicine
(Greeks & Romans)

Social Sciences & related disciplines:
Management, Education, Social Work,
Social Services have all joined the
quest to inform practice with evidence


Weak & Strong Meanings of EBR

- Weak meaning refers merely to some
input of empirical data into policy.
- The strong meaning refers to data from
randomized controlled experiments that
are sufficient in size to give accurate
answer & conducted in circumstances
sufficiently similar to those being
considered.

EBR- Some Questions

1. Does current enthusiasm for EBR imply that research, or policy-making in the past has not been based on empirical evidence?
2. What weight can or should decision-makers give to research 'evidence' in the (necessarily political) process of policy development?
3. What kinds of evidence do promoters of EBR advocate in the political process?
4. Are researcher-based concepts of 'evidence' narrowly based on scientific method that prefer certain methods over others?

RESEARCHER



POLITICIAN

Some Really Good Reading

Marston, G. & Watts, R. (2003).
 Tampering with the evidence: A critical appraisal of evidence-based policy-making.
The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs, 3(3), 143-163.

Authors both from the School for Social Science & Planning, RMIT

POLITICS & POLITICAL PROCESS

- **Politics** is the process by which groups of people make various decisions. It consists of "social relations involving authority or power"
- **Political Science** is the study of political behaviour and examines the acquisition and application of power

Political Science

- Methodologically diverse.
- Approaches : classical political philosophy, interpretivism, structuralism, & behaviouralism, realism, pluralism, & institutionalism.
- uses methods & techniques relating to kinds of inquiries sought:
- Primary sources: historical documents & official records,
- Secondary sources: scholarly journal articles, survey research, statistical analysis, case studies, model building.

In Political Process Evidence takes many forms

- Expert knowledge
- Published research
- Existing research
- Previous policy evaluations
- Internet
- Consultation outcomes
- Policy option costings
- Economic & Statistical modelling

UK Public Sector

EBR shapes knowledge considered closer to the truth in the decision-making process (Nutley et al.2002).

Evidence primarily derived from:

1. Research & Statistics
2. Policy Evaluation
3. Economic Modelling
4. Expert Knowledge

Secondary sources:

1. Clients of Services
2. Public consultations

EB Policy Movement in UK

- The Campbell Collaboration
- <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org>
- The Cochrane Collaboration
- (<http://www.cochrane.org/index.htm>)

- UK CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY & PRACTICE

Aim: To conduct systematic reviews of the best evidence on effects of social & educational policies and practices"

Bring social science research & researchers much closer to governmental decision-making processes

EBP IN USA

US COALITION FOR EBP

Aim: Promote government policy-making based on rigorous evidence of program effectiveness

Via randomised controls

=

Resource-rationing tool

EBP in AUSTRALIA

Cwlth DHFS (1998)

“Need to translate EB medicine into EB Policy”
= Provision of safe, cost effective & beneficial treatments

Cwlth NHMRC (2003)

Practitioner Fellowships to contribute EBP development in Australian health systems

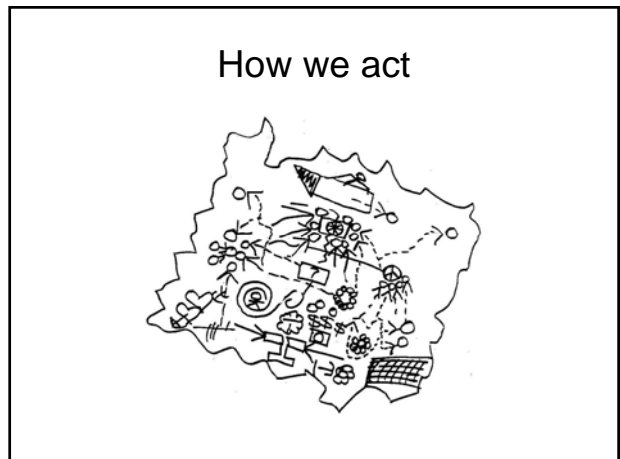
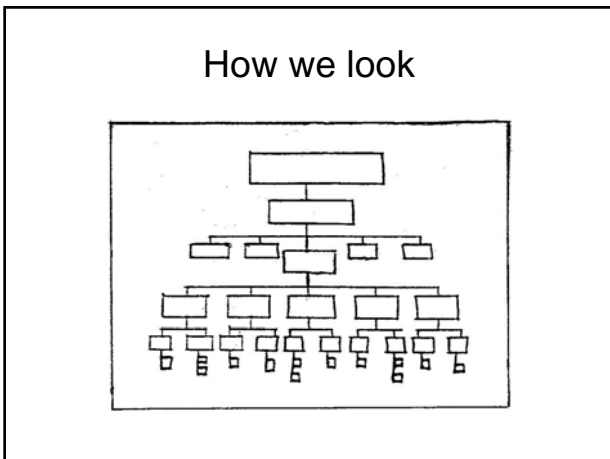
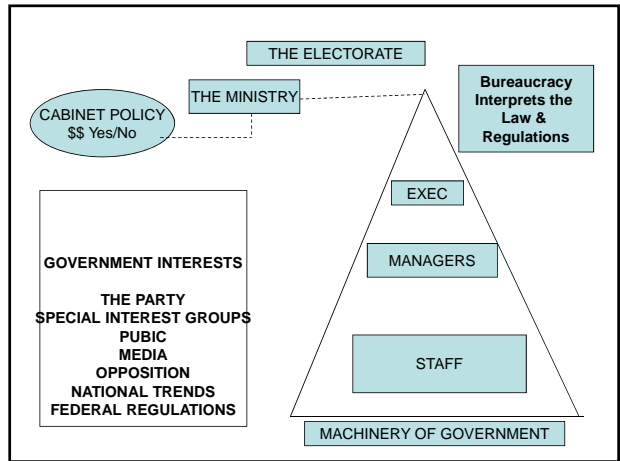
Centerlink (2002)

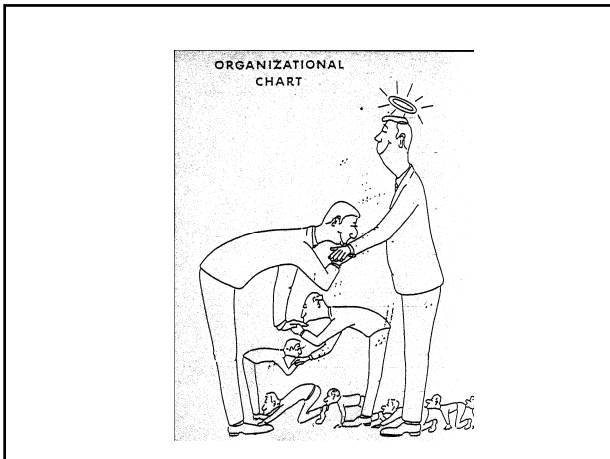
“key player in developing & delivering EBP solutions for customers, agencies, community & government”

NSW STATE GOVERNMENT

- **BIG BUSINESS**
- **COMPLEX STRUCTURE**
- **HUGE BUDGET**

150 Separate Government Agencies
130 Required under DSA Sec. 9 to produce formal disability plans





STRUCTURE OF A POLICY SECTOR

1 MORPHOLOGY

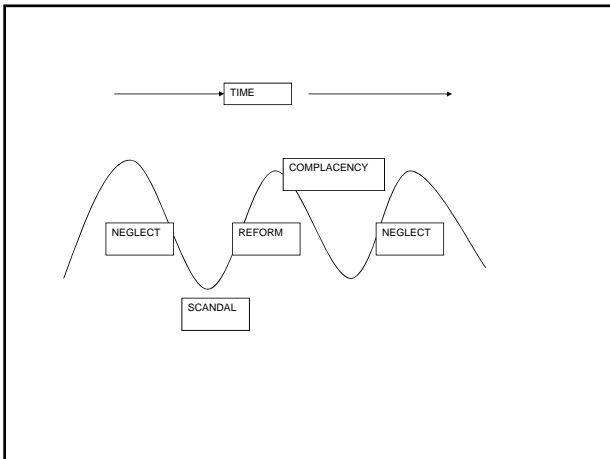
Administrative arrangements &
Resource dependencies

2 DEEP STRUCTURE (Positive & Negative Selection Rules)

Coordination Service Providers

Service Consumers Service Brokers

Admin Groups



PROBLEMS FACING MANAGERS

- **COMPLEXITY** Heterogeneity
 Coordination
 Integration
- **SIZE** Left hand v Right hand
 Identity Loss
- **ECONOMIC STRUCTURE**
- **SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**
 Cybernation Tech Advances

POLARITY IN POLICY MAKING PROCESS

Rational Actor (Research has major role)

↑

↓

Political Model
(Research just one of many inputs = Evidence influenced)

FORMAL HIERARCHIES IN THE POLICY PROCESS

Ministerial Advisors
Senior Public Servants
"Insiders"- policy elites

University researchers generally have limited knowledge of government decision-making processes- so limited capacity to make the most of research findings

EB POLICY & INSTRUMENTALIST
MANGIERAL REFORM

Emphases:

Value for money, effectiveness,
efficiency

Procedural competence

Perspective:

Academic research means to economic
& social development rather than
cultural end in itself

EVIDENCE IN THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

“Rooting policy in evidence has all the
appeal of motherhood & apple pie”

Rhetoric is cheap & easy

Term acts as catchphrase for
'scientific', 'scholarly', 'rationality'.

=

Attempt to modernise policy-making &
professionalise human service
practice

Precedent Citation

Appeal to the authority of evidence that
characterizes EBR practices does not
increase objectivity

but rather *obscures* the subjective
elements that inescapably enter all forms
of human inquiry.

ARCHITECTURE OF EVIDENCE-BASED CLAIMS

Core features of all EB arguments have
following elements:

- An implied or identified question
- A claim or proposition that X is the case
- Evidence adduced in support of claim
- Set of assumptions that have assisted in
shaping the question, selecting what will count
as relevant evidence & link evidence to claim as
warrant.

ELEMENTS OF A POLICY ARGUMENT

QUESTIONS + EVIDENCE = KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS

ASSUMPTIONS

ASSUMPTIONS?

Provide the stuff that makes up the great systems
of belief we adhere to in varying measures of
consistency, exclusivity or eclecticism

Reliance on assumptions helps us focus on those
things we wish to know or already know so that
we can see what we need to see to make our
case about a state of affairs.

(Marston & Watts, 2003).

IDENTIFYING ASSUMPTIONS

- What kind of question is the researcher asking? what kind of answer is s/he looking for? Is the question descriptive? Taxonomic?, Analytic? Interpretive? Explanatory? Evaluative?
- What assumptions about the nature of the world does the author make in determining what kinds of evidence will be relevant?
- What kind of evidence does the researcher rely on to warrant the potential links between the evidence & the claims made?

EBR- EBP CASE STUDY

- Agency CEO approaches Minister
- Minister requires research major International Conference approaches.
- Bureaucrats write Terms of Reference
- Research project advertised
- Research undertaken
- Bureaucrats obfuscate
- Government changes.
- Report rejected- Researchers paid
- Life moves on.

There are many instances in medicine, criminology, education, social welfare, etc where none - not the experts, the administrators, the politicians, the pressure groups - really know what the best course of action is.

Plausibility, recommendation by experts, and empirical support from studies of low methodological quality are not enough.

Conclusions

- No opposition to EBR or EBP
- Does adoption of EBP mean that policy-making is reduced to technical calculation & option costings?
- Increase of control by policy elites?
- Is transfer of principles of EB Medicine into human services a good thing?
(Facts/Evidence v Values)
- Relationships between research, knowledge, policy & practice are likely to remain loose, shifting & contingent.
- Does rational decision-making & professional policy-making produce better outcomes than those based on hunches & intuition, or un-professional policy-making?