

Evidence-based Policymaking: Lessons from the UK for Developing countries

Literature Review of Evidence-based policy (EBP) debates

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20. Taylor, M. (2004) Bridging research and policy, Development studies association annual conference
21. Thomas, J.W. and Grindle, M.S. (1990) After the Decision: Implementing policy reforms in Developing Countries
22. Upshur, R., Van Den Kerkhof, E. and Goef, V. (2001) Meaning and Measurement: an inclusive model of evidence in health care
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1. Cabinet Office (1999) Modernising Government

The Modernising Government White Paper, which was published in March 1999, sets out a significant agenda for reform of how government in the UK works. Enhancing policy making was identified as one of its five key commitments. The white paper indicated policy making should be a continuous learning process and that policy makers should make “better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long term goals.”

Author: Cabinet Office

Date: 1999

Type of Publication: White Paper

Publisher: CM4310 London: The Stationery Office

Available online at: <http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/docs/modgov.pdf>

2. Cable, V. (2004) Evidence and UK politics

Cable outlined five ‘s’s that limit the ability of decision makers to pursue an evidence-based approach: speed, superficiality, spin, secrecy and scientific ignorance.

Speed: Policy makers are under severe time pressure and are forced to process information quickly. This requires improvisation and decision-making without all the necessary information. Occasionally, this leads to bad decisions.

Superficiality: Each policy maker has to cover vast thematic fields, and cannot possibly have in depth knowledge about every issue in those areas. They are therefore heavily dependent on the knowledge and integrity of the people who inform them. This raises difficult questions about who policy makers should turn to for advice, and how they can judge the advice given, especially taking into account the differing agendas of different groups.

Spin: In the political world, perception is very important. For example, even though evidence has shown that beat policing is not the most cost effective way of using police resources, this form of policing is still prioritised because there is a strong public perception that it will improve security. The same evidence can be shown in many different ways and therefore the reality is that perception guides political decisions.

Secrecy: Vincent also raised the question of how to relate to evidence that is secret. A recent example is Blair’s memorandum on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which formed the basis of political decisions.

Scientific ignorance: The public are increasingly suspicious of scientists and scientific evidence and this will have an effect on policies. One example of this is the public demand for zero rail accidents while road accidents are tolerated. This means that political decisions are made to invest far more in rail safety than in road safety. The public will not always respond rationally to scientific evidence.

Despite the challenges that these five ‘s’s present, Vincent concluded by pointing to positive examples where evidence has indeed informed policy. He also stated that research is having an increasing role to play in decision-making processes, and this trend is likely to continue.

Author: Cable, V.

Date: 2004

Type of Publication: Transcript of presentation

Publisher: Presentation as part of a ODI Meeting Series on ‘Does Evidence Matter?’

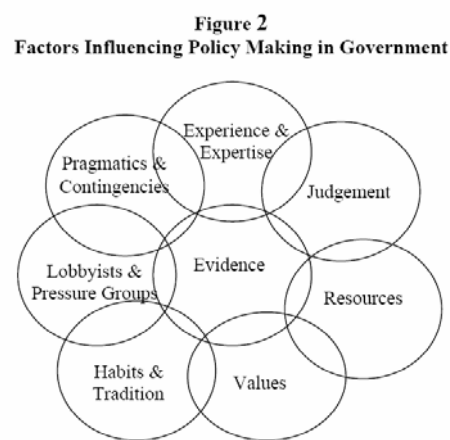
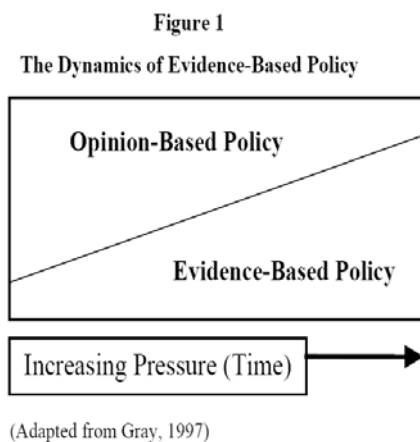
Available online at: http://www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Meetings/Evidence/Presentation_3/Cable.html

3. Davies, P. (2004a) Is evidence-based government possible?

This paper presents the case of the UK government as evidence-based. Evidence based policy has become a major part of the government's approach to policy making and the machinery of government. The paper attempts to define evidence-based policy and considers the role of evidence in the policy-making process. It presents a thorough examination of the different types of evidence in use, the methods used for gathering and appraising, with best practice examples.

What is Evidence-Based Policy?

EDP is a 'rigorous approach that gathers, critically appraises and uses high quality research evidence to inform policy making and profession practice.' Davies compares this to 'opinion-based policy, which relies heavily on either the selective use of evidence (e.g. on single studies irrespective of quality) or on the untested views of individuals or groups, often inspired by ideological standpoints, prejudices, or speculative conjecture.'



The paper goes on to consider other factors, other than evidence, which influence policy making and policy implementation. These include the experience, expertise and judgment of policy officials and Ministers, values and ideology, available resources, habits and tradition, lobbyists, pressure groups and the media, and the pragmatics and contingencies of everyday political life (see fig. 2). The paper considers the challenges that these competing factors raise for government, evaluation and analysis are also considered. Finally the paper reviews what is known about the mechanisms that need to be in place for evidence-based policy making to be effective.

Author: Davies, P.

Date: 2004

Type of Publication: Lecture

Publisher: Jerry Lee Lecture, presented at the 4th annual Campbell Collaboration Colloquium, Washington DC

Available online at: <http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/home/jerrylecture1202041.pdf>

4. Davies, P. (2004b) Policy Evaluation in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom Government uses a wide range of evaluation methods to ensure that policies, programmes and public services are planned and delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible. A major driving force for high quality policy evaluation in the UK is the Government's commitment to evidence-based policy making. This requires policy makers, and those who implement policies, to utilise the best available evidence from national statistics, academic research, economic theory, pilots, evaluations of past policies, commissioned research and systematic consultation with delivery agents.

The Government's strategy for public spending and taxation also provides the context within which policy evaluation takes place in the UK

This paper reviews the types of evaluation that are used by the UK Government, including impact evaluation, implementation evaluation, economic evaluation, and the use of descriptive and inductive statistics for evaluation purposes. The use of Performance Management for the allocation and accountability of resources by the UK Government is described, as is the machinery that has been developed in the UK to deliver better public services. The paper concludes by considering the role of factors other than evidence and policy evaluation in the UK policy making process.

(based on article's abstract)

Author: Davies P

Date: 2004

Type of Publication: Paper presented at the KDI International Policy Evaluation Forum, Seoul, Korea, May 19-21, 2004

Publisher: Prime Minister's Strategy Unit,

Available online at: http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/docs/policy_evaluation_uk.pdf

5. Hornby, P. and Perera, H.S.R. (2002) A development framework for promoting evidence-based policy action: drawing on experiences in Sri Lanka

Most developing countries have embarked on one form or another of 'health sector reform' as a result of the global trend for health and health care reform that has emerged during the past decade. One consequence is that the issue of health sector performance is moving higher on the agenda of many developing countries, and particularly that of the corporate performance of health sector staff. Along with this movement has come increased attention to strengthening evidence-based management decision-making. To date, studies on measuring health sector performance, have had little impact on developing country health systems and have been limited to explorations primarily at an operational level. However, there is a growing recognition that there is a need to strengthen the policy function of ministries and their ability to monitor policy impact.

Sri Lanka is one country that has identified the need to strengthen policy at national level. Many developing countries, like Sri Lanka, are familiar with input, process and output dimensions of operational performance. However, most are not ready to engage in routine performance assessment that can strengthen policy processes at national level. This paper explores (1) the implication and the use of indicators to support evidence based policy decision-making, and (2) the complexity of doing so in Ministries of Health that are undergoing some form of health sector reform.

The paper emphasizes that new forms of organizational support are required for performance management at policy level. A conceptual framework for managing the collection and use of performance evidence is developed, including proposals for the introduction of outcome indicators into that process. The paper concludes with recommendations on initiatives required to develop appropriate organizational and technical capacity to engage with performance management at policy level and for further research towards creating ministries of health as 'learning organizations' that can change and adapt with informed decisions.

(based on article's abstract)

Author: Hornby, P. and Perera, H.S.R.

Date: 2002

Type of Publication: Journal article

Publisher: *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp165-183.

Available online at: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/94515814/ABSTRACT>

6. Le Grand, J. (2003) Motivation, Agency and Public Policy: Of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens

This book by Julian Le Grand focuses on public policy and the role of the market. A key aspect of the discussions is whether providers of service do what they consider is good for society (knights) or do what they think is good for themselves (knaves). For BRP, the key is to identify which characteristic is present and concentrate on appealing to that. Unfortunately, life is not simple and public service providers may be motivated by both characteristics at once – with the implication that people will need to ‘appeal to both knightly and knavish instincts’ (The Economist, 1 November 2003, p 96).

Author: Le Grand, J.

Date: 2003

Type of Publication: Book

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Available online at: Not available online

7. Marston, G. and Watts, R. (2003) Tampering with the evidence: A critical appraisal of evidence-based policy-making

‘Evidence-based’ policy-making discourse is popular among a diverse range of policy communities. Following the United Kingdom, there is growing interest in evidence-based policy-making in Australia. The evidence-based policy movement raises important questions for those interested in public affairs and the politics of policy-making in Australia. However, the meaning and practice of ‘evidence-based policy’ are contested. The article attempts to critically appraise the emergence of evidence-based policy in Australia, addressing the question of whether evidence-based policy will live up to its promise as an idea whose time has come.

In order to address this question, the article seeks to explore and define the concept of evidence-based policy. It highlights the extent to which the meaning and practice of ‘evidence-based policy’ are contested. This critique indicates the very wide range of what can – properly – count as evidence, based on a premise about the irreducible richness and complexity of social reality. Evidence can exist in a wide variety of forms; possible sources include photographs, literary texts, official files, autobiographical material like diaries and letters, the files of a newspaper and ethnographic and particular observer accounts.

The article looks at the debate over the relative weight of these various inputs into policy-making. A hierarchy of knowledge is created which necessarily shapes what forms of knowledge are considered closest to the ‘truth’ in decision-making processes and policy argument. This categorises evidence as either ‘hard- objective’ or ‘soft- subjective’. ‘Hard’ Evidence includes primary quantitative data collected by researchers from experiments, secondary quantitative social and epidemiological data collected by government agencies, clinical trials and interview or questionnaire-based social surveys. ‘Soft’ Evidence includes qualitative data such as ethnographic accounts and autobiographical materials. This critique questions the assumption of evidence-based policy as scientific, scholarly and rational approach which is a neutral and objective policy tool which goes beyond political ideology. Consequentially the idea of a linear relationship between research and policy outcomes, which ignores context, is questioned.

It also raises other crucially important questions in respect to evidence-based policy; Does current enthusiasm for evidence-based policy imply that policy-making in the past has not been based on empirical evidence? What weight can – and should – policy-makers give to ‘research evidence’ in the (necessarily political) process of policy-making? What kinds of evidence do promoters of evidence-based policy advocate? Are their conceptions of ‘evidence’ narrowly based on conventional scientific methods that privilege certain forms of methods and knowledge over others?

Author: Marston, G. and Watts, R.

Date: 2003

Type of Publication: Journal article

Publisher: The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs Vol. 3 No. 3, pp.143-163.

Available online at: http://www.econ.usyd.edu.au/drawingboard/journal/0303/marston_watts.pdf

8. Moseley, A. and Tierney, S. (2004) Evidence-based practice in the real world

This paper presents the practical problems of implementing evidence-based practice (EBP) Despite growing awareness of and enthusiasm for EBP implementation of such practices is a demanding task and one which presents many difficulties. Three broad categories of challenges are detailed in the use of EBP in social care; cultural, (where action is valued over reflection) infrastructural (little investment in research training, reducing the incentive for practitioners to use research within practice) and practical (the difficulties of accessing and keeping up-to date with relevant research). Each area is explored using actual examples drawn from implementers. Despite these hurdles, creative, practical steps have been taken by social care staff to promote EBP within their workplaces.

Author: Moseley, A. and Tierney, S.

Date: 2004

Type of Publication: Journal article

Publisher: Policy Press - Evidence and Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.113-120.

Available online at:

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/ep/2005/00000001/00000001/art00007>

9. Mulgan, G. (2003) Government, knowledge and the business of policy-making

The author highlights the new environment in which governments are now operating; a far more knowledge rich context, and a more informed public. Although evidence based policy making is far from new, the current policy arena demands knowledge rooted in diverse sources, highly integrated in both theoretical and practical expertise.

Mulgan identifies three different types of policy field, which affect the way in which knowledge is used:

1. *Stable policy fields*. These are well-established areas in which knowledge is settled, therefore the most that can be expected is incremental improvements and the filling of knowledge gaps. Good innovations can be identified through systematic reviews and spread through formal networks. For example labour market policy

2. *Policy fields in flux*. These have a contested knowledge base where professionals entrenched in debate are defensive to change. New knowledge from outside may be useful to recognise promising innovations. For example education.

3. *Inherently novel policy fields*. These are emerging fields with no established evidence base and therefore no one is likely to know what works and what doesn't. Foundations at an arms length from government may be best placed to learn quickly from innovation. For example the regulation of biotechnology.

In these contexts, Mulgan notes that it is important to acknowledge the limitations of evidence based government decision making. Firstly that if democratic will lies contrary to existing evidence, the democratic will cannot be ignored. Secondly that full revelation in politics has the potential to be destabilising, undermine self and mutual respect and be counter-productive. Finally it is important to

recognise the different time scales on which researchers and policy makers are working. While researchers are thinking in terms of long-term societal gains, policy makers are pressurised by the short-term need to fulfil public demands.

Author: Mulgan, G.

Date: 2003

Type of Publication: Background paper

Publisher: Facing the Future Conference, Canberra, 23-24 April 2003

Available online at: <http://209.197.113.29/pdf/Mulgan%20Background%20paper%20Facing%20Future%20Conference.pdf>

10. National Audit Office (2003) Getting the evidence: using research in policy making, Report by the comptroller and the auditor general

This report assesses how government departments procure research and how well that research is being used to improve service delivery and develop policies. It is based upon an assessment of research activities in three government departments, as well as discussions with other department and stakeholders. Examples of best practice are presented : a fellowship programme jointly funded between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Economic and Social Research Council which explicitly aims to build research capacity in both technical excellence and strategic thinking; id21, an internet dissemination service (www.id21.org) established and funded by the Department for International Development to communicate research findings to policymakers and practitioners.

Conclusions

The process of getting research into practice is widely acknowledged to be a difficult process. Policymakers often describe research reports as being inaccessible and the passive dissemination of research findings is not sufficient to ensure that research findings are used to improve service delivery and to inform policy. The barriers to the effective use of science in policy making included the motivation of researchers to contribute to policy, their communication of research in a form relevant to policy, and the understanding of policy makers of the uncertainties inherent in the research and how to reflect them in formulating policy. On evaluation, although government departments carry out evaluations of ongoing and completed research, they have no systematic mechanisms for measuring the overall impact of their research effort, or for identifying and sharing best practice through interdepartmental benchmarking.

The report produced three main recommendations for Departments, with the support of The Office of Science and Technology. Firstly Departments need to be clear about their strategic research aims and establish coherent systems for procuring research - including its commissioning, quality assurance and use. Secondly Departments need to be proactive and innovative in the way they disseminate and use research findings. Finally Departments need to identify and share best practice and thus improve the effectiveness of commissioning, managing and using research.

Author: National Audit Office

Date: 2003

Type of Publication: Report

Publisher: The Stationary Office

Available online at: http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/02-03/0203586-i.pdf

11. National Audit Office (2003) An International review on Governments' research procurement strategies, A paper in support of 'Getting the evidence: Using research in policy making'

This report presents the results of an international review of how the governments of five countries in North America and Europe procure and manage research to improve service delivery and policy development. The paper

- describes how research and development is commissioned, managed and used in a number of different countries. The countries used for the comparison are Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and the United States;
- provides a basis for examining the research and development activities of the UK within an international context and for learning if and how innovative elements from other countries may be incorporated into or modified to suit the UK research and development model.

The key findings from the international review are:

- There is no uniform approach to determine research priorities and to set research strategies. However, there seems to be increased awareness and activity to make these strategies and priorities a more integral part of policymaking.
- There is growing emphasis on evaluating the policy outcomes of research and development expenditure.
- There is widespread acknowledgement that some research and development expenditure is high risk and will bring no short-term return, but that it is essential for long-term development.
- There are some innovative examples of how research users are incorporated into the research process, with the aim of increasing research utilisation.

The Executive Summary also reviews the significant similarities and differences in research and development practices among the selected countries and between the countries and the UK. First, investment in research and development is summarised, then priority setting and coordinating processes are compared, followed by selecting and commissioning practices and, finally, evaluation and research transfer are examined. The remainder of the report presents detailed information about the context of research and development activities in the five selected countries and describes the different and innovative approaches to research selection, procurement, implementation, management, evaluation and transfer in each.

Author: National Audit Office

Date: 2003

Type of Publication: Report

Publisher: The Stationary Office

Available online at: http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/02-03/0203586-ii.pdf

12. Nutley, S. (2003) Bridging the policy/research divide: Reflections and Lessons from the UK

'This paper draws upon data from the UK to argue that there is the potential for policy decisions to be better informed by research evidence than has hitherto been the case. This requires an investment in research, some rethinking of policy processes, and the development of mechanisms for bringing research and policy closer to one another.

There has been a significant increase in social research funding in the UK. This has been accompanied by exercises to: identify and plug key gaps in research knowledge; agree and develop appropriate research and evaluation methods; increase the use of systematic review methods to assist the process of knowledge synthesis and accumulation. All of these initiatives are aimed at improving the evidence base for policy and practice decisions.

The modernising government agenda in the UK argues that policy making should be based on the best available evidence and should include rational analysis of the evidence about what works. While this is a laudable aim, research evidence does not always, or even often, enter the policy process as part of a rational consideration of policy options. Instead, research tends to become known and discussed within policy networks through a process of advocacy. This suggests that other aspects of the modernising government agenda which seek to pen up policy processes, to make them more consultative and inclusive of stakeholder interests, are likely to be a more powerful vehicle for increasing research impact.

The implications for mechanisms to bridge the policy/ research divide are that many bridges are needed to link researchers with relevant policy and practice networks; government ministers and officials are not the only policy audience. Intermediary bodies (such as the Social Care Institute for Excellence in the UK) can play a key role in disseminating and promoting the uptake of research in both the policy and practice fields. Furthermore, there appears to be much to be gained from developing sustained interactions between researchers and research users through the development of partnership arrangements. Where partnerships operate throughout the research process, from the definition of the problem to the application of findings, they appear to increase both the quality of research and its impact.

Overall, it is easy to be cynical about the prospects for more evidence-based policy making: research rarely provides definite answers to policy questions and rational decision making rarely lies at the heart of policy processes. However, this paper argues that neither definitive research evidence nor rational decision making are essential requirements for the development of more evidence-informed policy.'

(Abstract from article)

Author: Nutley, S.

Date: 2003

Type of Publication: Keynote paper

Publisher: National Institute of Governance Conference; "Facing the Future: Engaging stakeholders and citizens in developing public policy", Canberra, Australia.

Available online at: <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/academiclinkages/nutley/tgls-nutley.pdf>

13. Nutley, S., Davies, H. and Walter, I. (2002) Evidence based policy and practice: Cross sectors lessons from the UK

This paper advocates for the rigorous use of evidence to improve and better inform public policy making and professional practice. Contrary to widely held views, evidence is commonly used in many circumstances; however the nature of this evidence varies greatly. However rather than promoting the need for evidence-based policy, the article recognises the sometimes limited role that evidence can, does, or even should, play. Consequentially the authors would prefer the term 'evidence influenced', or even just 'evidence aware' to reflect a more realistic view of what can be achieved, while at the same time emphasising the potential for methodological pluralism.

This paper draws out some of the key lessons to have emerged from the experience of trying to ensure that public policy and professional practice are better informed by evidence. It does this by highlighting four requirements for improving evidence use: an agreement on what counts as evidence in what circumstances; a strategic approach to the creation of evidence in priority areas, with systematic efforts to accumulate robust bodies of knowledge; effective dissemination of evidence to where it is most needed, and the development of effective means of providing wide access to knowledge; and initiatives to ensure the integration of evidence into policy and encourage the utilisation of evidence in practice. It then looks at how these issues have been approached in the UK, with comment on a range of public sector initiatives. The key theme to emerge is that simple and

unproblematic models of evidence based policy and practice – in which evidence is created by experts and drawn on as necessary by policy makers and practitioners – fail as either accurate descriptions or effective prescriptions.

To improve the use of evidence in policy making, one needs to address the much contested point of what constitutes evidence. Research and research findings are but one form of evidence. Different sectors have their own interpretations of what constitutes as evidence. It is unsurprising therefore that the UK Cabinet Office works with a broad and eclectic definition of evidence: “Expert knowledge; published research; existing research; stakeholder consultations; previous policy evaluations; the Internet; outcomes from consultations; costings of policy options; output from economic and statistical modelling” (The Cabinet Office Strategic Policy Making Team, 1999). This broad definition explicitly includes informal knowledge gained from work experience or service use and therefore illustrates that research is just one factor influencing policy making. The authors support a ‘horses for courses’ approach for deciding what counts as evidence.

<p>Box 5: Factors affecting the uptake of research</p> <p>Attention is more likely to be paid to research findings when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research is timely, the evidence is clear and relevant, and the methodology is relatively uncontested. • The results support existing ideologies, are convenient and uncontentious to the powerful. • Policy makers believe in evidence as an important counterbalance to expert opinion: and act accordingly. • The research findings have strong advocates. • Research users are partners in the generation of evidence. • The results are robust in implementation. • Implementation is reversible if need be. <p>Source: adapted and extended from (Finch 1986; Rogers 1995; Weiss 1998).</p>

(fig 1)

Box 8: Encouraging better use of evidence in policy making	
Increasing the pull for evidence	Facilitating better evidence use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require the publication of the evidence base for policy decisions • Require departmental spending bids to provide a supporting evidence base • Submit government analysis (such as forecasting models) to external expert scrutiny • Provide open access to information – leading to more informed citizens and pressure groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage better collaboration across internal analytical services (e.g. researchers, statisticians and economists) • Co-locate policy makers and internal analysts • Integrate analytical staff at all stages of the policy development process • Link R&D strategies to departmental business plans • Cast external researchers more as partners than as contractors • Second more university staff into government • Train staff in evidence use
Source: Abstracted from PIU 2000, Bullock et al 2001, DCDASG 2002	

(fig 2)

Author: Nutley, S., Davies, H. and Walter, I.

Date: 2002

Type of Publication: Working Paper

Publisher: ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy Making and Practice: Working Paper 9

Available online at: <http://www.evidencenetwork.org/Documents/wp9b.pdf>

14. Omamo, S.W. (2004) Bridging research, policy and practice in African Agriculture

Against a backdrop of a stylised context of policy making in Africa, the paper presents a comprehensive review and assessment of the literature on the role and impact of research in policy processes. Six major schools of thought are identified: the rational model; pragmatism under bounded rationality; innovation diffusion; knowledge management; impact assessment; and evidence-based-practice. The rational model – with its underlying metaphor of a “policy cycle” comprising problem definition and agenda setting, formal decision making, policy implementation, evaluation, and then back to problem definition and agenda setting, and so on – is criticized as too simplistic and unrealistic. Yet, as the author points out, it remains the dominant framework guiding attempts to bridge gaps between researchers and policy makers. Each of the other five schools relaxes certain assumptions embedded within the rational model. For example wholly rational policy makers, procedural certainty, well-defined research questions, well-defined user groups, well-defined channels of communication. In so doing, they achieve greater realism but at the cost of clarity and tractability. A unified portable framework representing all policy processes and capturing all possible choices and tradeoffs faced in bridging research, policy, and practice does not currently exist and is unlikely ever to emerge. Its absence is a logical outcome of the context-specificity and social embeddedness of knowledge. A fundamental shift in focus from a “researcher-as-disseminator” paradigm to a “practitioner-as-learner” paradigm is suggested by the literature. It concludes with the issue of how to promote “evidence-readiness” among inherently conservative and pragmatic policy makers and practitioners and “user-readiness” among inherently abstraction-oriented researchers.

(Partially edited abstract from article)

Author: Omamo, S.W.

Date: 2004

Type of Publication: Discussion paper

Publisher: International Food Policy Research Institute; Development Strategy and Governance Division, DSGD Discussion paper No. 10

Available online at: <http://www.ifpri.org/divs/dsgd/dp/papers/dsgdp10.pdf>

15. Pawson, R. (2001) Evidence Based Policy: 1. In Search of a Method

Evaluation research is tortured by time constraints. The policy cycle revolves quicker than the research cycle, with the result that ‘real time’ evaluations often have little influence on policy making. As a result, the quest for Evidence Based Policy (EBP) has turned increasingly to systematic reviews of the results of previous inquiries in the relevant policy domain. However, this shifting of the temporal frame for evaluation is in itself no guarantee of success. Evidence, whether new or old, never speaks for itself. Accordingly, there is debate about the best strategy of marshalling bygone research results into the policy process. This paper joins the imbroglio by examining the logic of the two main strategies of systematic review, namely ‘meta-analysis’ and ‘narrative review’. Whilst they are often presented as diametrically opposed perspectives, this paper argues that they share common limitations in their understanding of how to provide a template for impending policy decisions. This review provides the background for Part II of the paper which considers the merits of a new model for EBP, namely ‘realist synthesis’.

(Abstract taken from article)

Author: Pawson, R.

Date: 2001

Type of Publication: working paper

Publisher: ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice - Working Paper 3

Available online at: <http://www.evidencenetwork.org/Documents/wp3.pdf>

16. Rondinelli, D. (1993) Development projects as policy experiments: An adaptive approach to development administration

Rondinelli suggests that the policy process can be seen as a sort of social experiment. The policy process is less a matter of prediction, and more a matter of trial and error. Actors need to be able to readjust and adapt to unforeseen circumstances as the process develops. To address complexity and uncertainty of development policies, Rondinelli argues that ‘success requires flexibility in planning and design, opportunity to adjust plans as projects progress, and continuous redesign during implementation’. This requires that formulation and implementation are more closely integrated in order to reduce the impact of uncertainties and unknowns. Policymakers can try different types of projects, including:

- Experimental projects: that investigate possible courses of action are useful when uncertainty exists about the problems, feasible solutions, and the effects of different interventions).
- Pilot projects: ‘that test alternatives and identify conditions under which interventions are more or less effective’ are useful ‘when the problem or objective of a policy is well defined or when much is already known about the effects of small-scale experiments’. Pilot projects are often used to test results of experimental projects in other contexts. They often require strong evaluation and feedback mechanisms.
- Demonstration projects: can be useful ‘to exhibit the effectiveness and to increase the acceptability of new methods, techniques and forms of social interaction on a broader scale.’
- Replication, diffusion or production projects: involve widespread replication after sufficient is knowledge obtained in order to ‘test full-scale production technology and to organise an effective delivery system for dissemination results or distributing outputs.’ Some experimental and pilot projects should not lead to full-scale replication if they are found to be useful only in specific conditions or ineffective.

Author: Rondinelli, D.

Date: 1993

Type of Publication: book

Publisher: Routledge (London)

Available online at: not available online

17. Shaxson, L. (2005) Is your evidence robust enough? Questions for policy makers and practitioners

This article examines the reasons evidence for policy is needed. ‘Evidence is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for any decision-making process’. It discusses where evidence is needed in the policy-making process, and the nature of the evidence base for strategy and policy. Working relationships between policy makers and their advisers are key: as policy makers come from a variety of backgrounds, developing a common language helps set discussions about the robustness of the evidence base on a sound footing. The article identifies five components of evidence robustness (from a policy-making lens); credibility, generalisability, reliability, objectivity and rootedness or authenticity. These characteristics are disseminated and applied to the processes of policy making.

Credibility: This relates to the processes of analysing and synthesising information in quantitative literature. Credible evidence relies on a strong and clear line of argument, tried and tested analytical methods, analytical rigour throughout the processes of data collection and analysis, and on clear presentation of the conclusions.

Generalisability (or transferability): This refers to the way in which we make inferences and therefore the ease with which it would be possible to take the evidence which has been collected for a specific purpose and use it in a different context, or to answer a different question. In some cases this will refer primarily to sampling techniques, however in others it will refer to the broader framing of the issue and the policy question. It is particularly applicable when pilot studies precede a wider roll-out

Reliability: This relates to whether or not we can depend on the evidence for monitoring, evaluation or impact assessments – planning for the lessons learned approach.

Objectivity: Questioning the bias in the evidence base to deepen or understanding of how it conditions our interpretation of the evidence for policy.

Rootedness (or authenticity): This implies more than context, process, bias and the quality of information. Rather, it is about understanding the nuance of the evidence, exploring assumptions with an open mind, encouraging others to question the status quo, and thinking about who uses what evidence for what purpose.

(based on article's abstract)

Author: Shaxson, L.

Date: 2005

Type of Publication: Journal article

Publisher: Policy Press - Evidence and Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.101-111.

Available online at:

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/ep/2005/00000001/00000001/art00006>

18. Solesbury, W. (2001) Evidence based policy: Whence it came and where it's going

'At present, evidence-based policy seems to be principally a British commitment'.

'What works?' has become a buzz word in political spheres, and practitioners are showing a greater interest in demonstrating the efficacy of particular practices. The author examines the reasons for the recent upsurge in interest in evidence-based policy and practice in the UK. The entrance of a Labour government in 1997 with a pragmatic and anti-ideological stance is highlighted as a central cause.

What counts as evidence?

Research findings, be it academic or otherwise, is but one method in generating evidence (or knowledge); 'Evidence is more plural than research'. Knowledge is also formed by experience, shared norms, values, ideas however not all of this knowledge has equal validity. The extent to which the difference knowledge is relevant, representative and reliable is centrally important.

Knowledge as power?

Policy making is not apolitical, nor is it solely based on evidence or research findings; 'Securing and retaining power is a necessary condition for the achievement of policy objectives.' There is therefore, 'a close relationship between evidence (or knowledge) and power in which evidence may be used both to strengthen power and influence.'

The paper concludes that although the evidence-based approach to policy and practice offers the research community major new opportunities, 'it would be wise to remain modest in its claim to improve the conduct of public affairs.'

Author: Solesbury, W.

Date: 2001

Type of Publication: working paper

Publisher: ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice – Working Paper 1

Available online at: <http://www.evidencenetwork.co.uk/Documents/wp1.pdf>

19. Sutton, R. (1999) The Policy Process: An Overview

The paper offers an introduction to analysis of the policy process. It identifies and describes theoretical approaches in political science, sociology, anthropology, international relations and management. It then reviews five cross-cutting themes: (a) the dichotomy between policy-making and implementation; (b) the management of change; (c) the role of interest groups in the policy process; (d) ownership of the policy process; and (e) the narrowing of policy alternatives. The paper concludes with a 21-point check-list of 'what makes policy happen'. A glossary of key terms is also provided.

The key argument of the paper is that a 'linear model' of policy-making, characterised by objective analysis of options and separation of policy from implementation, is inadequate. Instead, policy and policy implementation are best understood as a 'chaos of purposes and accidents'. A combination of concepts and tools from different disciplines can be deployed to put some order into the chaos, including policy narratives, policy communities, discourse analysis, regime theory, change management, and the role of street-level bureaucrats in implementation.

Author: Sutton, R.

Date: 1999

Type of Publication: working paper

Publisher: Overseas Development Institute – Working Paper 118

Available online at: http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/working_papers/wp118.pdf

20. Taylor, M. (2004) Bridging research and policy: A UK Perspective

Using UK domestic policy Taylor presents five interconnecting practical rules for turning good research into good policy.

1. *Understand what the problem is before attempting to present a solution.* Giving the example of Government policy on gambling, Taylor shows how the government failed to explain the problem to the public that gambling revenues posed to the UK economy. It appeared that the Government was simply regulating an unregulated sector and therefore potential popular support for new legislation on gambling rules was lost.
2. *Appreciate the vital importance of the political context.* Taylor notes this may be an obvious point, nonetheless an important one to mention. For research to impact upon policy it needs to hold political currency.
3. *Finding the right combination between persistence and opportunism.* Once research findings have been presented and initially discussed, the enthusiasm may wane along with the funding! Successful campaigns are those which do not get forgotten, where research findings are adapted time and time again and presented from new perspectives to changing government officials. Successful policy makers are those who have 'the opportunism to recognise that arguments can be adapted to take advantage of that political zeitgeist.'
4. *Understand the process.* Not just the process of how research is made into policy and not just the process of how those policy documents are written but also understanding what happens after that. The process of the idea going to the politicians, the process of how it turns into policy advice and finally the process by which it goes from policy advice at the centre out to those people who need to implement it at street level.
5. *Be strategic.* 'Policy making is a competitive business.' Pushing for the adoption of new research is not an easy venture; there will always be opponents who disagree with the analysis, oppose the objectives or who try to manipulate the research. These are common challenges which will only be overcome by a strategic approach.

Author: Taylor, M.

Date: 2004

Type of Publication: Paper

Publisher: Development Studies Association Annual Conference and Journal of International Development 17 (6), August 2005

Available online at: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/110568893/ABSTRACT>

21. Thomas, J.W. and Grindle, M.S. (1990) After the Decision: Implementing policy reforms in Developing Countries

Implicit in many reform proposals is a model of the policy process that is roughly linear: a proposed reform gets on the agenda for government action, a decision is made on the proposal, and the new policy or institutional arrangement is implemented, either successfully or unsuccessfully. This article presents an alternative, interactive model of implementation that focuses on the conflict for development, and the resources that policy makers and managers are likely to require to sustain a reform in the face of such reactions. Central to the analysis is the assertion that characteristics of the reform being implemented will largely determine the kind of conflict it engenders, where such reaction is likely to become manifest, and what resources are needed for sustainability. The analysis suggests a framework for the strategic management of reform initiatives.

(Summary from article)

Author: Thomas, J.W. and Grindle, M.S.

Date: 1990

Type of Publication: Journal article

Publisher: World Development Vol. 18, No. 8, pp1163-1181.

Available online at: Not available online

22. Upshur, R., Van Den Kerkhof, E. and Goef, V. (2001) Meaning and Measurement: an inclusive model of evidence in health care

This article argues that evidence-based approaches are assuming an increased significance in many health-care fields. The core ideas of evidence-based health care derive from clinical epidemiology and general internal medicine. Despite arising from a discipline primarily concerned with quantitative measurement, the definition is increasingly found to be too limited. There is an increasing need for a more inclusive definition, which recognises the diverse disciplines and skills in health care and the variety of contexts in which evidence is used. As of yet the contribution of the social sciences, particularly qualitative methodology, has received scant attention. The concept of evidence has yet to be analysed systematically; what counts as evidence may vary across disciplines. It argues that given the level of heterogeneity, the assumption that there is a univocal notion of evidence may be problematic. Therefore the authors put forward a model of evidence that describes four distinct but related types of evidence: qualitative-personal; qualitative-general; quantitative-general and quantitative-personal. It goes on to discuss the rationale for these distinctions and their implications. The model serves to legitimise evidence from qualitative studies and places it on an equal footing with other forms of research, thereby increasing the range of admissible evidence in health-care decision-making. If the Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) is to become more accepted and better integrated into health care then the concept of evidence will have to be robust enough to resonate with the wider health care community.

(Paraphrased from the article)

Author: Upshur, R., Van Den Kerkhof, E. and Goef, V.

Date: 2001

Type of Publication: Journal article

Publisher: Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 91-96.

Available online at:

<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/doi/10.1046/j.1365-2753.2001.00279.x> (only available with charge)

23. Young, K., Ashby, D., Boaz, A. and Grayson, L. (2002) Social science and the Evidence-based Policy Movement

There is a growing interest in 'evidence-based policy making' in the UK. However, there remains some confusion about what evidence-based policy making actually means. This paper outlines some of the models used to understand how evidence is thought to shape or inform policy in order to explore the assumptions underlying 'evidence-based policy making'. By way of example, it considers the process of evidence seeking and in particular the systematic review as a presumed 'gold standard' of the EBP movement. It highlights some opportunities and challenges represented in this approach for policy research. The final part of the paper outlines some questions of capacity that need to be addressed if the social sciences are to make more effective contribution to policy debate in Britain.

Author: Young, K., Ashby, D., Boaz, A. and Grayson, L.

Date: 2002

Type of Publication: Journal article

Publisher: Social Policy and Society Vol. 1, pp. 215-224

Available online at: Not available on line free of charge