



•SIGGINS MILLER

Applying theories of policy processes to evaluation

The example of evaluating
Australia's National Drug Strategy

David McDonald
Geraldine Cleary
Mary-Ellen Miller

Sally Hsueh-Chih Lai
Ian Siggins
Robert Bush

Australasian Evaluation Society Annual Conference
Canberra, 2-5 September 2009

1

Overview

- People evaluating policies and their implementation will benefit from applying a policy lens to their work
- Evaluators can use theories, frameworks and models of policy processes for
 - Understanding the nature of the evaluation/policy nexus
 - Providing an entry point to the evaluation, help set boundaries, and contribute to evaluation design
 - Maximising the likelihood that evaluation processes and products will be used, thus contributing to the development of sound social policy
- Applies particularly to large, complex social intervention

2

The starting point ...

- 'There is nothing as practical as a good theory' (Pawson 2003)

3

Models of the policy process

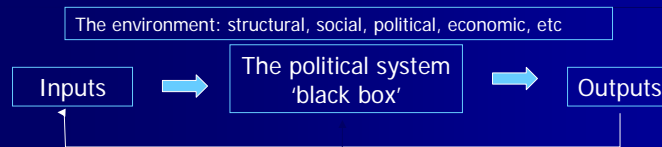
1. Systems model
2. Rational/comprehensive
3. Bounded rationality
4. Institutional rational choice
5. Incrementalism
6. Networks
7. Stages
8. 'Garbage-can'
9. Multiple streams
10. Advocacy coalition
11. Punctuated equilibrium

Systems model

Original 1960s model

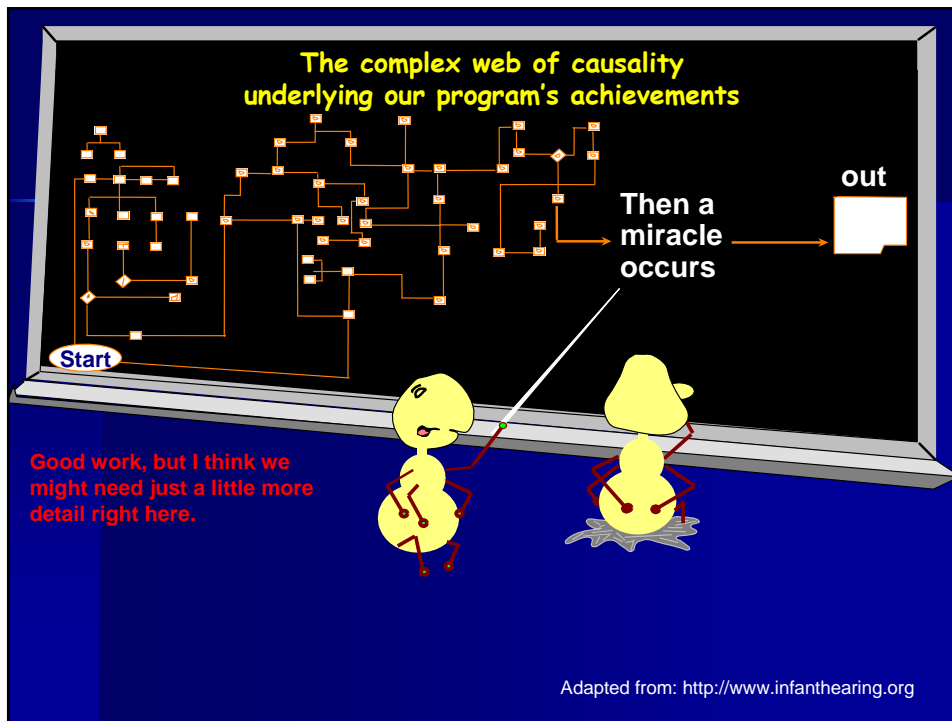
' A model of policy-making in which [the] public policy process is seen as the product of a system that processes inputs, such as issues, pressures, information, thereby producing outputs, such as laws, regulations, or other statements of policy.'

(Birkland 2005, p. 201)



But it doesn't help us to understand how policy is made inside the 'black box'

The complex web of causality underlying our program's achievements



Adapted from: <http://www.infanthearing.org>

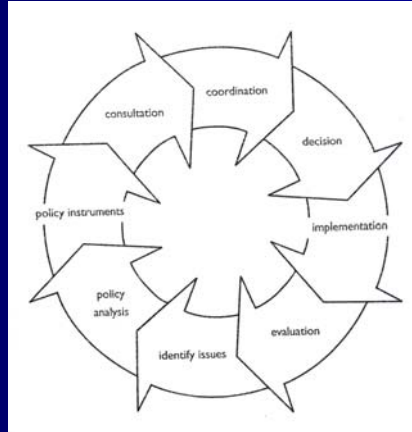
Rational/comprehensive model

- Assumes that policy decisions are made **rationally**, i.e. using reasoning, an intellectual approach rather than based on values or emotions
- The goal is to achieve maximum social gain
- All the options are thoroughly analysed and the best one selected

Bounded rationality model

- Policy-makers act as rationally as possible within the bounds (limits/constraints) of their capacities and resources
- Bounds include (especially) lack of time, too much or too little information, and people's capacity to process it

Stages heuristic



Source: Althaus,
Bridgman & Davis, 2007

Institutional rational choice

- 'Institutional rational choice is a family of frameworks focusing on how institutional rules alter the behaviour of intendedly rational individuals motivated by material self choice' (Sabatier 2007, p. 8)
- Rational individuals try to maximise their benefits and minimise their costs, but this can be distorted by the institutions within which they operate as the institutions have their own goals and preferred ways of operating

Incrementalism model

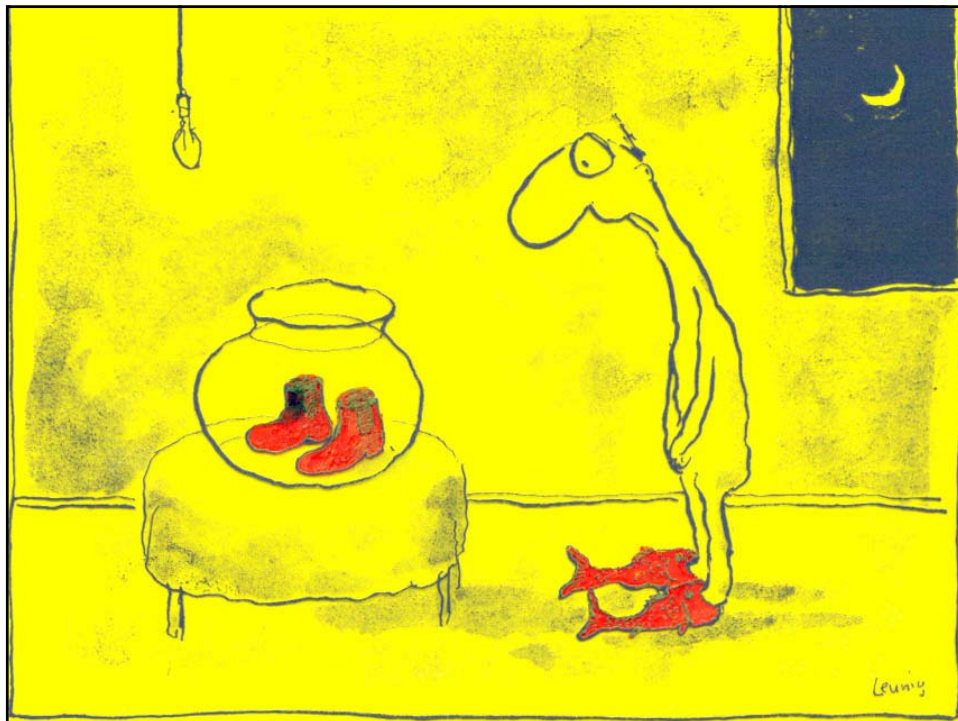
- Policy changes gradually, in small steps ('increments')
- Policy-makers build on their existing information including their knowledge of what worked (or failed) in the past, rather than re-analyse everything from the beginning as in the rational/comprehensive model

Multiple streams model

- Problems get on the agenda and solutions are found when three 'streams' combine:
 - The **politics** stream (incl. public opinion)
 - The **policy** stream (incl. solutions to the problem)
 - The **problem** stream (incl. the nature of the problem, degree to which it can be solved, how it came onto the agenda)
- The 3 streams usually run independently and nothing happens, but sometimes 2 or more combine creating a 'window of opportunity' for action

Advocacy coalitions model

- 'Interest groups are organised in policy communities within a policy domain' (Birkland 2001, p. 224)
- Various advocacy coalitions with shared values and beliefs form in a particular policy domain
- Policy brokers try to find solutions that satisfy the various advocacy coalitions through compromises
- The policy context combines stable aspects (e.g. culture, resources) and dynamic (changing) aspects (e.g. public opinion, policy decisions in other areas)



Australia's National Drug Strategy (NDS)

- Evaluating the 2004-2009 (fifth) phase of the NDS
- Drug Strategy Branch of DoHA contracted Siggins Miller to undertake the evaluation
- Supported by Evaluation Project Working Group
- Reported to Drug Strategy Branch
 - ➔ IGCD
 - ➔ MCDS
- Evaluation report release expected later this year

15

Features of Australia's National Drug Strategy

- Commenced 1985
- Mission: 'To improve health, social and economic outcomes by preventing the uptake of harmful drug use and reducing the harmful effects of licit and illicit drugs in Australian society' (harm minimisation)
- A partnership approach between:
 - the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments
 - the health, criminal justice and education sectors
 - the government, non-government and private sectors
- Addresses all psychoactive substances, both legal and illegal
- Objectives include: 'promote evidence-informed practice through research, monitoring drug-use trends, and developing workforce organisation and systems'

16

Using models of the policy process to inform evaluators' understanding of the NDS as a policy framework

- 1. Rational/comprehensive approach
 - Look for the evidence base underpinning policies and programs, and the quality of the policy analysis supporting decision-making
 - 'What is popular does not work, and what works is not popular'

17

Using models of the policy process: 2

- Bounded rationality model
 - Pressures to maintain a well-accepted Strategy
 - Policy advisers accessing and using research evidence
 - International pressures
 - Time, money, expertise

18

Using models of the policy process: 3

Incrementalism model

- The stability of the NDS over 25 years
- Resistance to pressures for change
 - From Parliamentary committees
 - From international interests

19

Using models of the policy process: 4

Multiple streams model

- A window of opportunity opened, leading to the creation of the NDS in 1985 as a radical new strategy:
 - convergence of problem awareness, political pressure for change and an understanding of the solutions available
- The 2007-09 shift in emphasis in drugs policy nationally from illicit drugs to alcohol, particularly binge drinking among young people.

20

Using models of the policy process: 5

Advocacy coalitions model

- To help understand the roles of pressure groups
 - both within the political and administrative arms of government and external to them
- To identify the policy brokers both within and outside government who negotiate with the advocacy groups
 - including policy people in central government agencies and in peak NGOs.

21

Conclusions

- Many models exist
- Some more useful than others in a given situation
- Combinations can be powerful

22

Viewing the evaluand through a policy models lens can ...

- Focus the evaluation
- Contribute to evaluation design
 - e.g. when creating logic models
- Interpret the findings

23

Viewing the evaluand through a policy models lens can contribute to evaluation utilisation ...

- Where the bounds on rationality are not too tight, then instrumental utilisation is a possibility
- 'The evidence speaks for itself'

24

In the more usual situation where significant barriers to instrumental utilisation exist ...

- Look for the **bounds on rationality** in the policy environment and tailor recommendations to fall within those bounds
- If **incrementalism** dominates, draft recommendations to avoid proposing sweeping policy changes
- If **advocacy coalitions** are powerful, evaluators can seek to collaborate with them to facilitate their understanding and acceptance of the recommendations; evaluators can serve as policy brokers
- Evaluators can draw together the **multiple streams** of policies, politics and problems, thus create windows of opportunity for change

25

Summary

- People evaluating policies and their implementation will benefit from applying a policy lens to their work
- Evaluators can use theories, frameworks and models of policy processes for
 - Understanding the nature of the evaluation/policy nexus
 - Providing an entry point to the evaluation, help set boundaries, and contribute to evaluation design
 - Maximising the likelihood that evaluation processes and products will be used, thus contributing to the development of sound social policies

26

References

- Althaus, C, Bridgman, P & Davis, G 2007, *The Australian policy handbook*, 4th edn, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, N.S.W.
- Birkland, TA 2005, *An introduction to the policy process: theories, concepts, and models of public policy making*, 2nd edn, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, N.Y.
- Green, J 2000, 'The role of theory in evidence-based health promotion practice', *Health Education Research*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 125-9.
- Howlett, M, Ramesh, M & Perl, A 2009, *Studying public policy: policy cycles and policy subsystems*, 3rd edn, Oxford University Press, Toronto.
- Kingdon, JW 2003, *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*, 2nd edn, Longman, New York.
- Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy 2004, *The National Drug Strategy: Australia's integrated framework 2004-2009*, Dept of Health and Ageing, Canberra.
- Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services 2007, *The winnable war on drugs: the impact of illicit drug use on families*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Parsons, W 1995, *Public policy: an introduction to the theory and practice of policy analysis*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot.
- Pawson, R 2003, 'Nothing as practical as a good theory', *Evaluation*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 471-90.
- Sabatier, PA (ed.) 2007, *Theories of the policy process*, 2nd edn, Westview, Boulder, Colo.

27

Presenter's contacts

David McDonald
Director, Social Research & Evaluation Pty Ltd
1004 Norton Road, Wamboin NSW 2620
Phone: (02) 6238 3706
Mobile: 0416 231 890
Fax: (02) 9475 4274
Email: david.mcdonald@socialresearch.com.au
Web: www.socialresearch.com.au

=====
Visiting Fellow
National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
Email: david.mcdonald@anu.edu.au

28

Dealing with complexity

- Policy theory can contribute to understanding and evaluating complex social interventions such as Australia's National Drug Strategy (NDS)

29

Policy evaluation reports rarely discuss policy processes

'Relatively few research and evaluation reports document fully the theoretical analysis underpinning the development of programmes and exactly how that analysis was translated into action.

'Even fewer provide a rationale for the selection of theoretical models.

'Greater transparency about these issues in publications would be of immediate relevance to practitioners, and also contribute to a more general understanding of the process of theory selection and utilization'

(Green 2000, p. 126)

Applies to both the evaluand's theory of action and to the underlying social science theory

30

Policy evaluation ... two meanings

- 'Analysis in and for the policy process'
- 'Analysis of the policy process: how problems are defined, agendas set, policy formulated, decisions made and policy evaluated and implemented'

(Parsons 1995)