



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

# The Nexus between Research, Policy and Practice

Gabriele Bammer

National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, ANU  
Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, Harvard University

# Overview

- Some key issues
- Some theory
- Some examples
- Where next?

## Some key issues

- Research, policy and practice have different aims and interests
- Bringing them closer together involves adaptation, compromise and new ways of working
- Most pressure has been on research to change, but we need to be careful not to lose the fundamentals that research contributes

# Interests

| Research                                     | Policy | Practice |
|----------------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| knowledge –<br>“impose order on<br>disorder” |        |          |
| peer review                                  |        |          |
| upholding “truth”                            |        |          |

# Interests

| Research                                     | Policy                 | Practice |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|
| knowledge –<br>“impose order on<br>disorder” | framework              |          |
| peer review                                  | political survival     |          |
| upholding “truth”                            | upholding<br>democracy |          |

# Interests

| Research                                     | Policy                 | Practice                   |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| knowledge –<br>“impose order on<br>disorder” | framework              | client                     |
| peer review                                  | political survival     | organisational<br>survival |
| upholding “truth”                            | upholding<br>democracy | upholding sector           |

# Frustrations

- Critique is essential to research, but often unwelcome in policy and practice
- Timelines are often incompatible
- Research that is (or seems) esoteric and divorced from the 'real world'
- Policy that is driven by ideology or political expediency, rather than the best evidence
- Practice that is driven by ideology, convention or lack of imagination, rather than the best evidence
- Research arrogance towards policy and practice

## Some theory...1

Lomas: “two communities” and “linkage and exchange” solution, which involves bringing researchers and policy makers together to work on research projects that are policy relevant. The focus is on mutual exchange and the joint creation of new knowledge, with the expectation that the relevance and use of research will increase if the processes of research and policy decision-making are linked from beginning to end.

(Extrapolate to practice too).

## Some theory...2

### Gibson (building on Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith)

- primary point of division and difference is not between researchers and policy makers, but between advocacy coalitions.
- advocacy coalitions use research to further their policy objectives and they accept or reject data based on how it aligns with their core values and beliefs.
- advocacy coalitions are made up of people from a variety of public and private organisations, including policy makers, researchers, non-government and service agency representatives, community members affected by the issue of concern and so on.

## Some theory...3

### Gibson (building on Derry)

- Policy makers reject data that does not coincide with policy they are unwilling to change and change policy that does not coincide with data they are unwilling to reject.
- This tension is resolved in different ways depending on the nature of the policy problem and contingent factors in the wider policy-making environment, particularly the extent to which:

## Some theory...4

Gibson (building on Derry) cont...

- the policy-making organisation is unequivocally responsible for the policy problem, either in terms of legislative requirements or precedent established by prior action
- the policy-making organisation has the capacity and power to effect change in the problem
- it is possible to measure the policy-making organisation's performance in relation to the policy problem

## Some theory...5

Gibson (building on Derry) cont...

- performance information and other data relevant to the problem are available for public scrutiny and debate
- there is a cost (political or economic) for policy failure

This conceptualisation brings structures and responsibilities of policy making organisations to centre ground.

## Some theory...6

### Gibson (building on Foucault)

- Power and knowledge are not separable – the exercise of power is perpetually creating knowledge and knowledge constantly induces effects of power. Power is usefully seen as a productive network. It is key then to understand:
  - the specific practices that policy aims to influence eg of individuals, groups, professionals

## Some theory...7

Gibson (building on Foucault) ... cont

- the discourse within which the policy is cast and moulded, as this defines and legitimates the problem in a way that enables attention by government
- the technology for “governing at a distance” in Australia. This is now the preferred mode of governance in modern liberal democracies because it shifts responsibility for government to individuals and communities

# Some examples...1

Value in researchers, policy makers and practitioners working together (Lomas)

- response to HIV/AIDS
- development of supervised injecting room
- Victorian trials of buprenorphine

## Some examples...2

### Advocacy coalitions (Gibson)

- introduction of rapid detoxification with naltrexone
- harm minimisation versus zero tolerance

## Some examples...3

Immutable policy meets irrefutable evidence (Gibson)

- heroin prescribing in Australia (leverage of \$500M)
- introduction of methadone maintenance treatment

## Some examples...4

### Competing rationalities (Gibson)

- equality between illicit drug users and other patient groups in treatment delivery and costing (eg take-aways, co-payments, etc)

## Where next?

More work on theory/case studies to develop effective methods of interaction, especially on research/practice nexus

Broaden recognition of 'simple' aids – common language, trust, empathic listening

Development of new roles eg boundary spanner, knowledge broker

Protect role of research in being critical as well as supplying evidence-base

Whose role is it to integrate the broad range of perspectives?

Improving decision making and practice under uncertainty