20. How?

One of the functions of the discipline of I2S is to provide options for answering the question '*How is integrated research support provided, by whom and when?*', along with information on the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.[1] Staying with the focus on government policy making, the task is to help teams move beyond the two common positions Peter Shergold articulated (lack of interest in policy and narrow prescriptions for policy) to a better appreciation of the range of possibilities for providing integrated research support for Shergold's 'beguiling' art. Let me be clear that I am not advocating any particular position for researchers here. On the contrary, this section aims to illustrate that integrative applied research teams need to be aware of the options and to choose the most suitable for their circumstances. Furthermore, none of the options is perfect, with each having different benefits and costs.

Let us concentrate on three classes of methods for provision of integrated research support, showing how they are linked to the theories in Box 19.1. They are communication, advocacy and engagement. I then outline a particular form of engagement that is aimed at providing fresh thinking on complex real-world problems.

Before moving to these, it is also worth considering a different perspective provided by Brendan Gibson[2] through his development of a matrix between the 'irrefutability' of the evidence and the 'immutability' of policy (Figure 20.1). Changed, or new, policy is most likely when the evidence for change is strong and the political forces maintaining the existing policy are weak. Changed policy is least likely when the evidence is weak and the political forces maintaining the existing policy are strong. When the evidence for change is strong, and the political forces maintaining the existing policy are also strong, the stage is set for confrontation. This analysis is useful for developing tactics when seeking to amplify the research voice, especially when the evidence is strong.

		Irrefutability of the evidence	
		High	Low
Immutability of the policy	High	Confrontation	Change very unlikely
	Low	Change likely	No pressure for change

Figure 20.1 Likelihood of Research Influencing Policy Change

Source: Adapted from Gibson (2003a, p. 25).

---

1   The focus here is on how to provide research support. It is not about how to undertake a calculated assessment of options for producing change as a prelude to deciding whom to target or about how to assess the value of the research for policy and practice decisions. These are also important, but will need to be developed at a later date.

2   Gibson (2003a; 2003b).

Gibson[3] went on to explore the considerations that influence policymakers in such circumstances and posited five indicators of their likely responsiveness to research.

1. Responsibility—'The extent to which the policy-making organisation is unequivocally responsible for the policy problem, either in terms of legislative requirements or precedent established by prior action'; the more responsible they are, the more likely they are to act.

2. Capacity—'The extent to which the policy-making organisation has the capacity and power to effect change in the problem.'

3. Performance—'The extent to which it is possible to measure the policy-making organisation's performance in relation to the policy problem.'

4. '"Theatre of justification"—The extent to which performance information and other data relevant to the problem are available for public scrutiny and debate.' In other words, the more the public can see and is interested in whether or not research results are being taken into account, the more likely policymakers are to be responsive to research.

5. 'Vulnerability to the consequences of error—The extent to which there is a cost (political or economic) for policy failure. Research responsiveness will increase as these costs increase.'

Gibson[4] also pointed out that it is simplistic to think of research being *translated* into policy, as if it were a process of converting words from one language to another. Instead, he argued that the process is more accurately thought of as *transformation*, with the policy process absorbing and reconstituting the research to meet its own goals.

Communication

Communication focuses on describing clearly the integrated research findings, their limitations and their applicability to the policy problem.[5] The value of ensuring that policy makers and practitioners have the correct facts on which to make decisions should not be underestimated. Making accurate information easy to access when needed is an important aspect of communication.[6] This may

---

3   Gibson (2003a, p. 26).
4   Gibson (2003a; 2003b).
5   It is worth noting that the researchers may not be at all certain about the applicability to the policy problem; in such cases, this uncertainty is part of what would be communicated.
6   In my interactions with policy makers and practitioners during the feasibility research for diamorphine prescription, I was struck by how often they were misinformed. Early in the feasibility research, websites were still uncommon and our information was not available online until 1995. While we mailed out reports

entail such techniques as providing succinct summaries, professional use of the media or giving individual briefings to policy makers. Although much has been written about how to do this,[7] the insights are scattered through the published and grey literatures and are not compiled in an accessible form.

There are also important gaps. One is about how best to convey unknowns and to deal with the tension between policy makers who are thought to want clear answers and researchers who can rarely provide them. Another is that, although much of the literature on communication seems to be premised on the technical-rational approach to policy making, little consideration seems to have been given to differentiating between the stages of the policy cycle to figure out when researcher input is likely to be most effective, who should be targeted or who should do the communicating. Much of what is currently available treats communication narrowly and ignores such considerations.

Communication is often thought of as information 'pushed out' by the researchers, but policy makers also seek information. The challenge for them is that they generally cannot easily identify the best sources or find information tailored to their needs. In a few instances, this has led to the development of brokerage organisations, like Australia's Sax Institute,[8] which match researchers to the questions the policy makers want addressed.

The considerations here are relevant when communication by itself is the method for supporting policy and practice change. Communication also underpins advocacy and engagement, but for these strategies additional factors come into play.

Advocacy

The second class of methods—advocacy—is tied to the aspect of policy making that involves responding to pressure from different interest groups.[9] Although it is unpalatable to many researchers, it can be helpful to consider the integrated research evidence as another 'interest' that those making decisions or planning action need to take into consideration. As Peter Shergold pointed out, it is rare that research evidence is all that is needed in the government policy change

---

and newsletters to people we thought needed them, websites have an advantage in that they can be accessed when required, whereas hardcopy has to be filed and retrieved. It is also hard now to easily gauge how good our coverage (that is, the people we sent information to) was.

7   For example: Brownson et al. (2006); Edwards (2004); Heyman (2000).

8   See <http://www.saxinstitute.org.au/> (accessed 27 October 2011).

9   There is no clear line differentiating communication and advocacy. In general communication is more passive and less politically engaged.

process, and this is also true for policy and practice change in the other arenas. Indeed the research evidence often competes with other forces, including vested financial interests, moral arguments, community pressure and political deals.

Advocacy therefore plays out in two different ways in the provision of integrated research support. One is to boost the power of the research voice in general. The other is to lobby for a particular policy or practice outcome. Amplifying the research voice involves ensuring that research evidence gets due consideration in the decisions about policy or action, and is not swamped by all the competing interests. Lobbying for a particular outcome involves putting pressure on policy makers and/or practitioners to increase the chances of a particular change occurring.[10] The distinction is not particularly clear-cut, because for most researchers an outcome in line with the evidence is the key indicator that the research voice has been properly heard. This is particularly so when evidence for (or against) a particular policy or action is overwhelming.

In taking an advocacy position there are a number of decisions that integrative applied research teams must make. These include interrelated considerations about how they will operate, the framing of the issue and engagement with opponents. Teams may also be drawn into advocacy by others and have to decide how to respond. Let us take each of these in turn.

There are several options for undertaking advocacy, especially who is targeted, how and when. For example, researchers may direct their efforts privately at a few policy makers, seek to gain widespread public support through the media or maintain a low profile and work through established lobby or other advocacy groups. They may have an ongoing program of activity or may wait for a window of opportunity to open.

In addition to the types of good communication described in the previous section, effective advocacy requires an emotional engagement with the politics of the problem. This is the critical task for the framing. Shaping a clear and powerful message usually requires demanding decisions about whether and to what extent unknowns are downplayed and whether any evidence that contradicts the main thrust of the research findings is buried.

Decisions also have to be made about whether and how to engage with opponents of the research findings. Effective advocacy often involves analysis of the strategies that will be used by opponents and figuring out how to counteract them. Finally, an advocacy role is not always initiated by the researchers. Interest groups may approach researchers to join their cause. It is also common

---

10   An example is the efforts by some public health researchers to change government policies in order to reduce the availability of tobacco products; see, for instance, Chapman (2007).

for interest groups to use research results without consulting the researchers involved. In such instances researchers can unwittingly be caught up in an advocacy process and must decide how they will react.[11]

An overarching decision concerns the maintenance of impartiality. This is relevant to the conduct of the research, to general advocacy for research versus other forces that influence policy, and to seeking particular outcomes based on specific findings. The integrative applied research team has to figure out whether it wants to preserve a position of impartiality and how this can be done.[12] Strategies include continuing a respectful relationship with all those who have legitimate interests,[13] including opponents, and being upfront about contradictory evidence and unknowns.

Remaining impartial should not be seen as ruling out: a) support by the integrative applied research team for finding least-worst solutions, or b) strong and effective advocacy for a reasoned solution that takes imperfection into account. Advocating for a balanced and rational approach does not involve shrugging one's shoulders or backing down in the face of strong opposition. On the contrary, it involves becoming tougher and more creative.

Regardless of the style of advocacy employed, the process is inevitably political, which is at the heart of both its strengths and its weaknesses. The major strength is that advocacy may well be more effective in influencing change than straight factual communication. The dominant weakness is that vested interests challenged by the research findings will almost always strike back and researchers may be poorly equipped to deal with personal attacks, denigration of their research and other tactics that may be used against them. Even if they maintain an impartial stance, their neutrality and integrity, along with that of their organisations, are likely to be impugned. If not dealt with effectively this may have long-term repercussions for the career of the researcher and the viability of the organisation.

---

11 For example, they are likely to be invited to comment by the media and must then decide whether they will do so and what they will say.

12 While I personally think impartiality is essential, it is not always possible, as researchers have strong feelings about some topics. (I leave aside here longstanding debates about objectivity.) More important than impartiality is integrity—in other words, that integrative applied research teams are honest about their position(s) on a topic and act in a way that is consistent. It is also worth noting that impartiality and conscious attempts at maintaining a balanced position can be undermined by unconscious cognitive processes like confirmation bias, which entails seeking or interpreting evidence in ways that are consistent with expectations or hypotheses even when there is no motivation to do so in terms of supporting existing beliefs (Nickerson 1998).

13 There are also those whose interests are not legitimate, such as organised crime syndicates dealing illegal drugs. (Even though researchers would not seek to accommodate their interests, it is worth understanding how they might react to a policy change.) In the diamorphine trial feasibility research, I tried hard to maintain a respectful relationship with everyone who had a legitimate view on the issue—a measure of success was that evidence we produced was used (appropriately) by those supporting and opposing a trial.

Despite these difficulties and costs, advocacy should not be dismissed as a strategy. It can be argued that researchers have an obligation to add their voices to considerations about complex real-world problems and how society will deal with them.

Engagement

The focus of engagement is on problem solving by researchers and policy makers working together. This approach also seems to be largely premised on the technical-rational framework, although engagement can also lay the groundwork for a rapid, effective response when a window of opportunity opens. It can be useful to differentiate engagement initiated by policy makers from that initiated by researchers. In either case, however, the policy maker is generally the more powerful partner.

Engagement initiated by policy makers can range from commissioning researchers to investigate specific issues (with the policy makers and researchers working together on the research design and interpretation of the results) to developing 'insider-confidant' relationships, where selected researchers become trusted advisors, with a direct channel of communication. Such engagement can be partisan or non-partisan. An example of a partisan approach is that shadow ministers in opposition parties may seek out researchers to help develop new policy platforms to take to upcoming elections, and, if successful, the new government may continue to seek advice on implementing that policy.[14] An example of non-partisan engagement is when researchers are invited to join committees providing policy advice and when those committees continue to function across successive governments.[15]

Researcher-initiated engagement generally seeks to interest policy makers in the design of integrative applied research projects to ensure that the questions being addressed have policy relevance. The researchers may seek ongoing involvement by inviting policy makers to be on advisory committees which provide input into the conduct of the research and the analysis and interpretation of the findings, as well as the way in which the findings will be disseminated. The hope is often that this will give the completed research an advantage in influencing policy.

---

14   A clear example where this occurred in Australia was when a Labor government was elected in 1972 after 23 years in opposition. A number of researchers were drawn on to help formulate policy during the final years in opposition and to help implement it once the party attained government. Two prominent instances were the development of a universal healthcare policy by John Deeble and Dick Scotton (Scotton 2000) and Pat Troy's involvement in urban and regional policy development (see Uren 1994).

15   For example, this has been the case for those serving on the Australian National Council on Drugs (see membership at <http://www.ancd.org.au/members/members-draft.html>).

The advantages of engagement include a potential increase in the relevance of the integrated research to the policy processes and privileged access of policy makers and researchers to each other. The disadvantages often lie in the practicalities. Unlike researchers, whose topics of investigation are usually constrained, policy makers, especially those who are senior, are usually responding to a wide range of issues. For them, working closely with a different research group on each issue is impractical. They may deputise more junior staff to act on their behalf, making the process less valuable for the researchers. Engagement is often also time-consuming, detracting from the core tasks of each group. There can be particular frustrations for researchers when policy priorities are altered and their investigations become insignificant, or when a key policy maker moves to another job, so that building the professional relationship has to start afresh with someone new. For policy makers, frustrations can arise when researchers are not responsive to windows of opportunity, when research and policy cycles are out of kilter or when the view taken by researchers is too narrow and ignores issues policy makers know are important. Researchers can also be tainted by partisanship, so that while they may be effective when one political party is in power, they may become irrelevant when the political situation changes.

A different consideration is that integrated research can sometimes play a valuable role by taking into account views that the policy makers would have trouble consulting about directly for political reasons. These could include the perspectives of powerful opponents of government policy or groups participating in illegal activity. Similarly the integrated research may provide a forum for considering unknowns in a way that may not otherwise be politically feasible. For example, once a policy decision has been made, the policy focus is on implementation and there is little consideration of unintended consequences. Integrative applied research teams can, however, study such effects through, for example, modelling and early evaluation of the implementation, and can help the policy makers modify the implementation if necessary.

Fresh Thinking on Complex Real-World Problems

In dealing with complex real-world problems there are times when a fresh approach is necessary. This occurs when, for instance, incremental change to established policy and practice can no longer deal effectively with the current manifestations of the problem or when it is not clear what change to implement when a window of opportunity opens. For example, in new forms of crime such as terrorism, cybercrime, people trafficking and identity theft, lawbreakers may be located far away from the scene of the offence. Consequently they

constitute a major challenge for established policing processes, which rely on the criminal and the crime scene being in close geographical proximity. Dealing with these offences often also requires a level of training that is not included in conventional policing programs—for example, dealing with cybercrime requires a high level of familiarity and skill with information technology. The costs of dealing with these illegal activities are also high, straining limited government budgets. Further, because the public fears crime, government expenditure may be diverted from education and community services to meet demands for extra police, even though in the long run this may exacerbate crime problems. This requires rethinking how policing is undertaken.[16]

How do we recognise that problems are becoming intractable, requiring innovation in policy and practice? How can fresh thinking be generated? In this area I have been greatly influenced by a method called 'Executive Sessions' conceived by Richard Darman and developed and implemented by Mark Moore and Frank Hartmann at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.[17] A brief review of this method is provided in Box 20.1.

Box 20.1 Executive Sessions as a Method for Providing Fresh Thinking on Complex Real-world Problems

As Moore and Hartmann describe:[a]

> The process of an Executive Session is designed to…allow academics and practitioners to work on that particular set of public problems that are important, and for which current solutions do not exist [and]…to work on these problems in a way that not only increases the chance that a 'value creating' solution will be found, but also creates conditions favorable to widespread implementation and continued learning.

A group of some 20 practitioners,[b] five academics and three–four people with expertise in allied areas,[c] holds about six two-day meetings over a period of three years or so to combine their expertise to grapple energetically with the problem.

---

16   Such issues (and more) were addressed in the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety run by the Program on Criminal Justice Policy and Management at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University from 2008 to 2010. See <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/criminaljustice/executive_sessions/policing.htm> (accessed 15 February 2012). I was fortunate to be an observer at those meetings.

17   Hough (2002); Moore and Hartmann (1999).

Between 1984 and 2009, Harvard University hosted 17 Executive Sessions, many in the criminal justice area.[d] Detailed analysis of these events is ongoing, but there are a number of factors that seem to be required for them to be successful in generating and implementing new ideas. One is the convening power of the host institution, which determines whether innovative, influential thinkers can be attracted as participants. Other elements of success include

- melding together the real-world experience of the practitioners and the theoretical and empirical insights of the academics
- organising the process so that ideas gel over the series of meetings
- involving a mix of participants with different value positions and using those differences as a source of creativity.

The success of Executive Sessions therefore relies on senior practitioners and researchers who have a wealth of experience, both practical and academic, upon which to draw. During the Executive Session, researchers and practitioners will ideally work together to document and further develop new insights, as well as to undertake empirical research that may shed light on the ideas. The aim is to involve practitioners who are powerful enough that they are in a position to implement the new approaches in their organisations and to influence more general uptake throughout their arena.

a. Moore and Hartmann (1999).

b. Here the term practitioners is used to include policy makers.

c. For example, in the Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety, these people included a mayor and a journalist, who had an interest in the policing challenges, but could hold up an outsider's mirror.

d. They were America's Juvenile Justice System (1984), Policing (1985–93, including Drugs and Community Policing, 1990–91), State and Local Prosecutors (1987–90), Making the System Work for Poor Children (1988–90), Working Group of State Drug Control Executives (1992), New Paradigms for Child Protective Services (1994–97), Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America (1997–2000), Medical Error and Patient Safety (1998–2000), Public Sector Performance Management (1998–2000), Public Defense (1999–2001), Future of Philanthropy (1999–2002), Domestic Preparedness (1999–2003), American Indian Constitutional Reform (2001–03), Future of Public Service (2002), Faith-Based and Community Approaches to Urban Revitalization (2002–03), Human Rights Commissions and Criminal Justice (2006–08), Policing and Public Safety (2008–10).

Tasks for the I2S Development Drive

Identify and catalogue the full range of methods that have been used for providing integrated research support for policy and practice change, as well as their conceptual bases and case examples of their application. Update and improve existing compilations. This includes taking a broad view of communication (such as effectiveness at different stages of the policy cycle), identifying and assessing the value of brokering agencies, and developing rules of thumb for when methods of generating fresh thinking on complex problems are likely to be useful.

Who is Involved in the Provision of Integrated Research Support?

The discussion to date has largely been on the 'how' side of the provision of integrated research support, so let us now move to a brief consideration of 'who'. On the research side, team leaders or other senior researchers will generally be responsible for the provision of integrated research support.[18]

It is also useful to consider 'who' is involved on the policy and practice sides. Part of the rationale for I2S is that many researchers do not think about the specifics of their implementation role, especially who would most benefit from being supported by the integrated research. Important aspects of the choices to be made about policy makers include differentiating between politicians and public servants, government and opposition, as well as players who are currently powerful and those tipped as up-and-comers. While more specificity in targeting integrated research seems to warrant attention, the unpredictability of political processes, where key players may change quickly and unexpectedly, must also be factored in.

The integrative applied research team also needs to be aware that there may be groups with which they do not want to be associated. For example, they may not want to be linked to one specific political party or particular interest groups.

When Does Provision of Integrated Research Support Occur?

It is also useful to consider this question from both the researcher and the policy maker perspectives. From the researcher perspective, communication and advocacy occur when there is a solid body of research evidence that warrants implementation. In other words, they usually occur at the end of the research process.[19] Engagement occurs throughout the research process.

From the policy maker perspective, 'when' is dictated by the political process. Governments generally have a broad program of changes they are seeking to implement in their term of office. Public servants may be charged with developing suitable options from which choices can be made or with implementing an option the government has already decided on. Public servants, ministers

---

18   Many research organisations have become quite sophisticated about using the media to communicate their results and this experience is also relevant for integrative applied research. Such communication is not usually confined to senior people, but can be undertaken by researchers at any level.

19   Although, as in the diamorphine prescription feasibility research, communication can occur throughout if the research itself is of particular public interest or concern.

and their advisers will seek research input at times appropriate to their work schedules. And, unlike a research work program that is relatively amenable to forward planning, the schedules of policy makers are often disrupted by political exigencies. Consequently, research input that is urgent one day may be irrelevant the next. 'When' is therefore much less predictable from the policy maker perspective. This mismatch and the potential waste of researcher time are sources of frustration for both sides.

Task for the I2S Development Drive
Collect case examples of implementation of different options for who undertook the provision of integrated research support for policy and practice change and when in the research process this occurred. Take into account the options for policy and practice recipients and the timing issues that are relevant for them.