

# 21. Context?

The relevant question here is '*What circumstances might influence the provision of integrated research support for policy and practice change?*'. Again, this is examined in light of the pertinent big-picture background (in other words, overall context), authorisation, and organisational barriers and facilitators.

## Overall Context

A key issue is to examine the problem in relation to the arenas where action will be taken: government, business and civil society. This involves taking a broader view of how research can support policy and practice change than that dealt with under question two (*Which aspects of policy and practice are targeted by the provision of integrated research support?*). If we stay with government policy making, relevant circumstances may include

- the history of policy on the problem
- analysis of current policy, including levers for influencing the problem and key interest group stances
- political party platforms on the problem, as well as entrenched views among the party leadership
- political party openness to research, especially integrated research.<sup>1</sup>

For example, in our investigation into the feasibility of diamorphine prescription, we hired a political scientist to examine the following contextual issues: political party platforms on illicit drugs, the results of a range of Australian political inquiries into illicit drug use and the history of the current government policy.<sup>2</sup> The main conclusion was that while there was significant concern about illicit drugs, the situation was not 'ripe' for major political change; however, a trial was within the bounds of possibility.

Tasks for the I2S Development Drive
Collect case examples dealing with overall context for considering the government, business and civil society arenas.
Work with a range of social scientists to produce guides for how context can be taken into account.

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<sup>1</sup> Analysis of past political party experiences with integrated research, even on different problems, may be useful. Positive experiences may favourably dispose the party, while negative ones would have the opposite effect.

<sup>2</sup> Hartland (1991); Hartland et al. (1992).

## Authorisation

How does authorisation affect the provision of integrated research support for policy and practice change? This chapter considers such provision when the research is initiated and driven by the investigator. In Chapter 28, I examine how this may be different when the integrative applied research has come about at the behest of government policy makers, a business group or a civil society consortium.

Let us examine, in turn, funding and endorsement as the key sources of authorisation for provision of integrated research support. It is still relatively uncommon for funding to be provided specifically for the implementation of research findings (integrated or otherwise) when the research is investigator initiated and driven.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is becoming more usual for standard competitive funding to require impact and communication of the research results to be addressed as part of the funding application.<sup>4</sup>

When it comes to endorsement, there is a general expectation that the results of research initiated and driven by the investigator will be publicly available, but there is wide variation in the extent to which researchers promote their findings outside the academic domain. One important source of endorsement comes from the organisations that employ the researchers. Universities, for example, tend to look favourably on their employees seeking to support policy and practice change, even though formal recognition or reward for such activities tends to be limited. Advisory committees can also be important for endorsement, especially when members are selected because they are influential in policy or practice settings.

### **Task for the I2S Development Drive**

Gather case examples describing funding, endorsement and other forms of authorisation, along with any restrictions on providing integrated research support for policy and practice change.

<sup>3</sup> When research is initiated by government, business or civil society (see Chapter 28) there is more likely to be a focus on implementation.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in the guidelines for applicants for 2012 Discovery Projects, the Australian Research Council requested the following: 'Describe the expected outcomes and likely impact of the proposed research' and '[o]utline the plans for communicating research results, including scholarly and public communication and dissemination' (<[http://www.arc.gov.au/pdf/DP12\\_instructions.pdf](http://www.arc.gov.au/pdf/DP12_instructions.pdf)>, accessed 13 December 2011).

## Organisational Facilitators and Barriers

Facilitators and barriers to providing integrated research support can occur both in the research organisations undertaking the integrative applied research and in the target organisations, hence these will be dealt with in turn. In both cases organisational structure and culture are again important.

Relevant structures in research organisations include having a media office, employment of knowledge brokers and rewards for the provision of integrated research support. Media offices are common and have the explicit aim of helping researchers publicise their work. Targets can include the general community, public servants and advisers to politicians. Some organisations employ knowledge brokers to convey the research findings to selected target groups, which can be politicians, specific professional groups or particular community groups.<sup>5</sup> While outreach is not considered to be a primary activity in the formal academic reward system, as discussed above, being more widely known, seeing research have an impact and having outreach recognised in staff meetings and university newsletters all help promote such activities.

Cultural factors can also be influential. On one level, organisations may be more likely to work with some implementation arenas than others. Organisations undertaking public health and environmental research were, until recently, most likely to work with government and civil society groups, but reluctant to engage with business, for example. On another level, research organisations may favour some kinds of research support over others. For instance, some organisations encourage their staff to engage in public debate and have no problem with the expression of controversial views or criticism of government or other powerful players. Other institutions actively discourage this.

On the other side, policy and practice organisations also vary in how they seek out and respond to integrated research support. From the perspective of structure, some organisations have research arms that have been established to find relevant investigations and consider the application of the findings. Regardless of whether such structures exist, cultural differences will influence the extent to which integrated research is sought, with some constantly striving to improve their area of policy or practice, others only open to research that they commission and others still paying little attention to research at all. The extent to which integrated research has more sway than the perspectives of particular disciplines (such as economics) and stakeholders (such as business) is another cultural variable in organisations. Further, the orientation towards and openness to considering diverse unknowns comprehensively are also relevant. Finally, cultural factors also influence responses to various research approaches.

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of knowledge brokers can be found in Bammer et al. (2010a).

Thus, some may welcome engagement, while others will not. Some will build on research advocacy to help push through change,<sup>6</sup> whereas others may see it as an unwarranted intrusion.

**Task for the I2S Development Drive**

Compile case examples describing the diversity and impact of organisational barriers and facilitators, examining the policy and practice organisations as well as the research organisations.

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s feminist public servants encouraged feminists in broader society to keep publicly agitating for change, as this gave them leverage within government policy making in arguing that reforms were needed (Sawer 1990).

This text is taken from *Disciplining Interdisciplinarity: Integration and Implementation Sciences for Researching Complex Real-World Problems*, by Gabriele Bammer, published 2013 by ANU E Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.