

POLITICAL LIFE AND INTERVENTION LOGIC:

RELEARNING OLD LESSONS?

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ABSTRACT

Intervention logic (IVL) is an analytical technique being developed and used in New Zealand and elsewhere in an attempt to improve government's ability to produce desired policy outcomes. This article raises questions about the political viability of this latest tool of mainstream policy analysis, and argues that improved public policymaking depends less on the use of techniques drawn from a long linear-rational tradition, which are taught because they can be taught, and more on the development of individual capacities and institutional processes that are in keeping with democratic norms and values.

INTRODUCTION

As is well documented, New Zealand was a pacesetter in the governmental reformist movement that later became known as New Public Management (NPM) (see Boston et al. 1996; Scott 2001; Schick 1996, 2001). Some of the main rationales for the changes were the desire to produce results-oriented rather than process-oriented public agencies, to free managers to manage, and to allow the political executive to concentrate its efforts on strategic policy direction rather than day-to-day portfolio management. A control apparatus was developed progressively to ensure that any enhanced managerial autonomy would be exercised with the fullest possible accountability.

Late in 2001 the center-left coalition government brought down a report identifying some major weaknesses of the reforms (Review of the Centre 2002). The report focused on the need to put the public service back together again, to overcome the loss of focus on the big picture that fragmentation can cause. Such fragmentation was said to be apparent in a proliferation of agencies and of ministerial portfolios, with an excessive number of votes, and in some areas by an over-emphasis on vertical accountabilities at the expense of whole-of-government approaches.

The report advocated a more joined-up government and stronger central control. To these ends it suggested several new ways of working, including interagency circuit-breaker teams to solve previously intractable problems in service delivery by drawing on front-line knowledge and creativity, with central technical support. Purchase agreements (between ministers and chief executives) would be replaced by output plans; there would be enhanced monitoring of organizational performance; up to ten super networks would be established to better integrate policy, delivery, and capacity building in the state sector; and a careful process of structural consolidation would address the numbers of crown entities and small agencies, the effectiveness of policy/operations splits, and ministerial concerns about performance or alignment.

Closely related to these changes are moves away from a preoccupation with the managerial production of outputs to a longer term and better-integrated commitment to the achievement of policy outcomes. Public servants are now to be required to manage for outcomes rather than for outputs. The artificially constructed outputs/outcomes bifurcation has misrepresented the interconnectedness of politics and management. It has often created perverse incentives and reverse effects -- notably, the tendency to regard outputs as ends in themselves (painting bull's-eyes around bullet holes). And it has fudged as much as clarified ministerial and managerial accountability. New Zealand's Public Finance Act 1989—one of the three statutory pillars of the reforms -- has arguably turned out to be the most formal prescription for bureaucratic goal displacement ever designed, contrary to espoused reformist intentions.

The treasury and the State Services Commission (the central agency responsible for public service development and the appointment of departmental chief executives) have jointly been devising formal means by which desired policy outcomes can be better achieved.¹ These include a technique -- formally dubbed intervention logic or IVL -- which is similar to those being applied in other countries, including Canada and the United States. IVL is the latest in a long line of techniques derived from the linear-rational model of mainstream policy analysis, as taught in many graduate schools of public policy.

However, should the quest for better public policymaking necessarily depend upon the application of more systematic and sophisticated analytical techniques? In a nutshell, the problem is that such approaches will more often than not be defeated by uncertainty and political constraints and imperatives. So, improvement in public policymaking may depend less on analysts' ability to make such techniques work effectively, and more on governmental capacity to find effective connections between the analytical and the political domains of public policymaking.

IVL AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTIFYING ASSUMPTIONS AND JUDGING RISK

IVL is essentially about encouraging and enabling policy analysts in the bureaucracy to think more rigorously about policy implementation. The trick is to think ahead to identify, in a logical way, the components of the causal chain that lead from policy formulation and the initial commitment of strategic and tactical policy resources to the stage where clear evidence is available about policy success or failure. IVL aims to bring to the surface and critically examine the assumptions that underpin policy and program action. As Baehler (2003, 6) says, "Revealing assumptions about relevant social, environmental, economic, legal or behavioral prerequisites to success is the shortest route to unearthing the risks embedded in any given policy proposal."

An example from New Zealand is provided in the appendix, where it depicts IVL as it is now being applied in corrections policy (Bakker and Adams 2003).

The example shows how IVL is concerned with encouraging and enabling disciplined thinking about the links between policy means and policy outcomes. Its underlying message is implicitly cautionary; that is, there is many a slip between cup and lip, and it behooves those working in a policy field to identify the assumptions that underpin each step of the causal chain and at the same time to think carefully about the (policy and political) risks that are inherent in those assumptions.

As an intellectual exercise this is unexceptionable, and modern policy agencies are willing to pay good money for university graduates to engage in this sort of analysis. It is even possible that it might have a beneficial effect on the quest (in this particular case) for safer communities. On the other hand, this example also illustrates the crucial difference between analytical abstraction and political action. One doesn't have to draw a long bow to suggest that any of the assumptions that are identified might turn out to be misplaced. For example, the first assumption -- that effective programs based on international best practice about what works in reducing re-offending can be developed and implemented successfully in New Zealand -- begs virtually the entire policy outcomes question. The literature on problems of policy transfer attests to this (for example, Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). Also, can international best practice be easily identified? And what if the second-order assumption doesn't hold -- that police clearance rates and judicial sentencing practices will continue at the present rate, or increase? The identified risk is that clearance rates decrease so reconviction data does not accurately reflect re-offending. Presumably, if this assumption does not hold, and if the risky consequence eventuates, then a significant change must be made to the instrumentally rational causal chain between the initial output and the desired end outcome.

The case also begs perennial questions about the interconnectedness of public policy, the inevitability of interorganizational turf battles, and the need for strategic cooperation among different agencies with different and often conflicting primary missions. The very things that cannot be controlled by a corrections agency are as likely to affect the quest for an end outcome like safer communities as are those that can be. But the more an agency tries to identify assumptions and risks accruing from the activities of other organizations over which it has little if any influence, the more contingent is its own IVL analysis. On the other hand, the more it confines its analysis to those contingencies which it can directly influence itself, the sooner will its own IVL be overtaken by external events and circumstance. New Zealand's innovative circuit-breaker teams and super networks are structural attempts to reduce

such uncertainty and enhance strategic control, but their positive impact on underlying dilemmas like this is likely to be only marginal.

Further, what if several of the assumptions turn out to be false, and several of the risky consequences eventuate? And so on. Analysts can continue to work in their intellectual ivory tower of analytical abstraction while policymakers are forced to respond pragmatically to shifting and changing circumstance. The dilemma is that if an IVL strategy has to be modified often and decisively as real outcomes unfold -- if, in other words, the strategy itself has little effect on what actually happens in a changing and complex policy environment -- then the net political return on analytical investment is low. While IVL may continue to be undertaken it will not be able to hold the real attention of policymakers who are required to march to the beat of a different, inherently political, drum. There is also the difference between knowing what might happen and being able to do something to stop it from happening, or being able to adapt accordingly if it does happen (that is, adopt a Plan B approach). In the first instance, an analyst might be able to predict that some future factor or eventuality might constitute an obstacle to the achievement of some desired policy outcome. But given the political context, the analyst might not be able to act on that knowledge. Edward Banfield (1980, 12-13) touched on this situation in one of his critiques of policy analysis in general and implementation analysis in particular. Recounting prominent policy analyst Alain Enthoven's argument that he may have offered different advice to U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in 1967 had he (Enthoven) known that the army would respond negatively to his original recommendation for a thin-veil ABM defense system, Banfield asked, however, "Could a policy scientist have told the secretary that the Army would have its way no matter what he (the secretary) might decide?" This is the realm of the inherently undiscussable (Argyris, 1980), and any attempts by policy analysts to render it openly discussable will either create high employment risk for the analyst, or will lead to more reactive and clandestine coping strategies by political players.

In applying IVL to the American/British decision to invade Iraq in 2003, Baehler (2003, 6-7) offers thoughtfully crafted models of pro-war and anti-war logic, and shows how "the policy analyst's distinctive contribution to the decision-making process is in the modeling of competing outcome chains . . . and the probing of assumptions and risks." Linking the output of a military attack on Iraq to the desired end outcome of "reduced terrorism activity and greater global security," Baehler carefully unpacks the assumptions underpinning a series of intermediate outcomes, such as "new democratic, possibly federalist regime established" (in Iraq), and "new Iraqi regime proves stable, Iraqi people see benefits." The assumptions and risks underpinning and attendant upon each intermediate outcome are also clearly identified. For example, the assumption of "pent-up demand for liberty, democracy, and development among citizens of repressive Arab regimes" carries the risk that "demand for religious fundamentalism and/or vengeance dominates." And so on.

Again, this mode of reasoning seems unexceptionable and highly desirable, and Baehler provides a very cogent explication of IVL in a compelling context. But the example also illustrates how the prescribed analysis is itself based on a larger underlying assumption; namely, that it will be able to carry the day politically, or is even relevant to the decision to go to war. IVL cannot necessarily illuminate the dark recesses of political motivation, not only where hidden agendas need to be rationalized by publicly acceptable justifications, but where ultimate motivation depends far less on logical reasoning and much more on tacit beliefs and convictions, and where the relationship between decisions and evidence is contrary to that presupposed by a formally rational model of action. As in Banfield's example, one cannot assume any logical relationship between analysis and action. It might be stretching credibility to imagine that in the Iraq case the George W Bush administration would start with some sort of motivational blank slate and carefully commit to a rigorous pro- and anti-war analysis of the sort that is recommended here, before deciding.

Of course, it may be countered that IVL could be applied in exactly the same manner if the administration's real aim were, for example, to gain control of Iraqi oil. That is certainly so, but unless the real end outcome is publicly stated policy analysts will find themselves working in challenging ethical territory, which is itself highly politically charged. One need look no further than the controversies in America, Britain, and Australia over the ways in which intelligence advice was used or misused to publicly justify claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. In such circumstances policy analysts (like intelligence analysts) could perceive a moral choice between complicity in politically dishonest policymaking or action aimed at subverting it (whether openly or covertly).

The compelling question is whether such a case is atypical or not, and to what extent it is true that power usually trumps truth. The challenge for IVL, as with policy analysis generally, is to be able to connect such analysis to the complex, untidy, and usually opaque domain of political motivation. It's no mean challenge. Having a Plan B up one's analytical sleeve when Plan A is not working makes good sense—again, on the face of it. But IVL, which purports to be able to enhance the logical component of public policymaking, finds itself caught in its own logical, and practical, trap. Plan B is by definition different from Plan A, so it must therefore embody different assumptions, with different risks, even as it responds to the false assumptions and the realized risks of Plan A. But if circumstances are such that the assumptions and risks of Plan B prevail in practice, then Plan C is called for, which will in turn embody yet another configuration of assumptions and risks. And so on, ad infinitum. What analytical capacity is needed to be able to identify all these assumptions and risks in some form of ultimate regression? And even were this possible intellectually, analytical capacity will be superseded by the political necessity to act, inevitably in a boundedly rational way. Paralysis by analysis is a condition that politicians seldom relish. In Herbert Simon's imagery, in satisficing they are constrained to look not for the sharpest needle in the haystack, but for one that is sharp enough.

Finally, a narrowly instrumentalist view of public policymaking obscures underlying ideological issues, which are expressed not through mainstream policy analysis but through political action or inaction. For example, the above application of IVL to New Zealand's corrections policy is based on one unidentified macro-assumption -- that safer communities can in fact be fostered through very high rates of imprisonment. (New Zealand has the second highest rate of imprisonment, behind the United States, among the countries whose rate it officially monitors: the U.S., England, Wales, Scotland, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland.) While the imprisonment of some people is obviously necessary in pursuit of safer communities, the incarceration of many may, in the longer run, be counter-productive. There's no need here to examine arguments about the extent to which imprisonment serves to reproduce a criminal class (see, for example, Reiman 2001). Suffice it to say that public desire to maintain high rates of imprisonment (often with stiffer sentences) can certainly be interpreted ideologically, and in a way that raises real doubts as to whether most people actually prefer safer communities as an end outcome of penal policy.ⁱⁱ If most people prefer high rates of imprisonment that is what the political system will tend to deliver, regardless of end outcomes.

THE GENERIC ISSUE

IVL has emerged from the technocratic workshop of governmental engineering. Ironically, this same source gave the New Zealand government the outputs/outcomes split in the first place. Many of the instruments used in policy analysis over the years have been drawn from it -- like IVL's former incarnation, implementation analysis, along with cost-benefit analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, and so on.

The term intervention logic suggests that it embodies a more systematic and coherent analytical approach than policymakers have hitherto been able or willing to adopt, in the search for the causal knowledge needed to achieve better policy outcomes. This technocratic view is ideological rather than scientific to the extent that it regards the descriptor better as unproblematic. But better for whom? Policy evaluation is inherently political since criteria of policy success or failure can only be politically determined (just as problem definition is an ineluctably political exercise).

Proponents of IVL and other analytical techniques cannot embrace this political reality without being required to acknowledge a problem with their own logic. So the technocratic quest dies hard. More than twenty years ago, for example, two Australian academics (both economists) lamented the fact that "many Australian government programs and projects have failed to achieve their objectives because of implementation problems" (Webb and McMaster, 1980, 9). Among those problems they identified several relating to the political decision-making process; namely, hasty introduction of new programs, sudden modifications to existing programs, failure to specify program objectives, the imposition of resource cutbacks on existing programs, and the short life of governments. Each of these so-called problems can just as readily be seen as a political virtue. The public may often require governments to do things on short notice, including introducing new programs, modifying existing ones, and cutting back resources for others. And, as already noted, C.E. Lindblom's (1959) seminal insights in "The

Science of Muddling Through” showed very clearly why the lack of specific policy or program objectives may be essential in the crucial political task of building coalitional support for policies which can be supported by many, but for quite different reasons. Finally, the short life span of a government may be a problem only for those voters who support it. To others it’s a solution. Governmental policymaking comprises different mixtures of technical and political dimensions. Technical mind-sets threaten the efficacy of public policy to the extent that they are blind to, or unwilling to recognize, the political dimensions. Conversely, political might is not always right, and should be tempered by competent analytical inquiry as much as possible. The compelling question is whether the policy analysis industry, both in its academic and practical endeavors to improve public policymaking, is too inclined to seek technical fixes that can usually be readily taught and earnestly applied, are seemingly rational and logical in their inner structure, but that are often curiously at odds with the dynamics of the political and institutional contexts in which they must be applied.

The rationalist path to policy outcomes is paved with the slippery cobblestones of political risk. While IVL is clearly an instrument that focuses on policy risk, it has little if anything to say explicitly about the political risk involved in public policymaking and associated blame-shifting strategies played out between politicians and the people—usually public employees—to whom they seek to transfer blame rather than credit (Hood 2001, 2002). It is one thing to think rigorously about the risks that attend false assumptions at each step along the path to end outcomes, but it is another to be able to anticipate and prescribe who should bear the costs of these risks and/or how blame should be apportioned if and when things go wrong. This is not to suggest that IVL should try to do this; it is only to say that risk and blame games are likely to be crucial in determining the behavior of those engaged in the pursuit of the outcomes. Unless IVL is able to build these factors into its own design, it will be disconnected from the realities of the crucial politico-bureaucratic nexus.

IVL is by its nature technocratic, as it implies that technicians (policy analysts) ought to have a stronger influence in policymaking processes, since it is highly unlikely that elected politicians will be the ones who engage in this sort of formal analysis. Practitioners of IVL cannot have it both ways. They cannot commit to the achievement of end outcomes if outcomes do not in fact have endpoints, as they seldom do, and they cannot elide the bureaucratic inevitability of procedural rules, which are tightened when quests for end outcomes produce undesirable consequences, as they often do. This is especially so when policy analysts enjoy sufficient entrepreneurial power to make disastrous mistakes that boomerang on elected politicians.

Paradoxically, if exponents of IVL try to build into their models factors that are functions of contestable political judgment rather than of dispassionate technical calculation, their models will self-destruct. If they do not do so, their models will often be less helpful than they might wish to believe.

IVL IN NEW ZEALAND AND CANADA: MORE OR LESS INSTRUMENTAL

Packaged with the titled warning that it is not a tool kit, the Canadian version of IVL does not try to be heroically rationalistic, arguing instead that “[t]he central idea is that good performance measurement is an exercise in storytelling. A well developed performance framework allows you to tell a convincing story, backed by credible evidence, about the value added by your program to some particular segment of Canadian society” (Schacter, 2002, 1). In other words, this approach is based on an understanding of policymaking and implementation as an exercise in rhetoric as much as ratiocination. But this does not mean empty rhetoric. As Schacter suggests, storytelling has to be persuasive, and persuasiveness is a function of credible -- and contestable -- evidence. It is not likely to be a function of conclusive evidence. The Canadian approach, at least on the face of it, seems to be in sympathy with the popular critique by Peters and Waterman (1982, 29-54) of what they saw as an overcommitment on the part of American business to decision-making rationality, and their call for more pathfinding and implementation capacities, which are more aesthetic, intuitive, and idiosyncratic. The New Zealand version seems more firmly instrumental. (This difference may reflect the fact that state sector reform in New Zealand in the 1980s and early '90s was far more technocratically applied, relying heavily on new institutional economic and management theory than it was in Canada, where the reforms have been much more gradual and pragmatic.) It is a powerful tool that can inform many areas of management decision making and planning. Essentially a restatement of the traditional model of formal rationality, it reaffirms that a clearly defined outcome is one of the essential inputs into an

intervention logic, while a poorly defined outcome is, at best, not useful, and at worst, misleading. Armed with such clarity, public-sector executives and managers will be better able, through a top-down rather than a bottom-up approach, to link agency outputs with those desired end outcomes. IVL's proponents also issue similar cautions to those often given by advocates of earlier rational systems. Practitioners are enjoined to keep it simple, to be patient, but nothing is said about the tendency of these sorts of injunctions to actually subvert the political integrity of the technique itself. The author recalls Edward Banfield pointing out in a Harvard University lecture how all of Alain Enthoven's (1975) "Ten Practical Principles for Policy and Program Analysis" were inherently subversive of systems analysis itself. For example, good analysis is the servant of judgment, not a substitute for it; keep it simple; it is better to be roughly right than exactly wrong; and don't overemphasize the quantitative aspects and don't ignore nonquantifiable factors that may be of decisive importance. Judgment, not analysis, is always decisive; simplicity shades into simple-mindedness and irrelevance; being roughly right is all that is possible in most policy domains in any case; and the tendency for quantitative data to be valued more highly than qualitative data is inescapable in policy analysis founded on positivist assumptions.

A developmental version of New Zealand IVL posits that effective management relies on understanding the results chain, the link between inputs, the outputs of business activity, and outcomes, and understanding how external factors beyond an agency's control affect outcomes. Understanding this link underpins an agency's ability to identify the causes of changes in indicators, respond appropriately to that change, and plan how to work to improve results. Further, a results-driven organization must develop and validate an evidence-based model of how activity drives results: this is its intervention logic. Presumably, management will be ineffective if it cannot understand the results chain, and an organization cannot be results-driven unless it develops its intervention logic. There is a similar catch in the Canadian model, one that it alludes to but proceeds largely to ignore. It rightly cautions that, "for any given program, different assumptions about ultimate outcomes imply different logic models and, therefore, different sets of performance indicators. Reaching agreement on the high-level outcomes to which a program is supposed to contribute is not only the most fundamental step to developing a performance measurement framework, but is often also the most difficult step" (Schacter, 2002, 14). If by fundamental is meant a *sine qua non* of IVL, and if this requirement is the most difficult to achieve, then we should be under no illusion about the limited utility and applicability of formal IVL.

At best, it will be more effective for some types of programs than for others. The example used in the Canadian model is the program to reduce the numbers of people who suffer health problems from smoking. In a policy area such as health it is very desirable and highly feasible to generate and use quantitative indicators, even though it is infinitely harder for bureaucratic interventions in whatever form to actually change people's behavior in ways that protect and preserve their own health (Wildavsky 1979). New Zealand's Ministry of Health is one of the eight agencies pilot testing the development of IVL, and in recent years it has made great progress in generating important data on longevity, the quality of life, and key factors associated with avoidable death, disease, and injury for major sociodemographic and disease-oriented groups. So counting matters, and counting is important. It is much more problematic, however, for another departmental partner in this exercise, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. This is primarily a social work agency in which the success of IVL, meaning less child abuse (how much less?), will depend partly upon the department's ability not only to know to what is happening in the privacy of people's homes, but also to resist the bureaucratic temptation to generate artifactual information about what is happening.

Social science laboriously tries to determine causal relationships in a complex, uncertain, and rapidly changing context -- the context of virtually all public policymaking and implementation. But the achievable is bound to fall far short of the desirable, simply because the world is complex, uncertain, and rapidly changing. Anything approaching conclusive causal knowledge in the broad field of social policy is extremely limited, and is likely to remain so. For example, do we know what the relationship is, if there is one, between unemployment and crime? Is there any scientific consensus about this, let alone a political one? Even the monetarists' firm belief that central bank independence is a necessary condition for keeping inflation at low levels can be challenged as spurious on the basis of the evidence. It seems that the political power of financial markets (that is, individuals and corporations

with large amounts of money to exchange and invest) is the cause of both institutional independence and low inflation (Posen, 1995).

In policy analysis it may be less helpful to know what the causal relationships are among a range of variables than it is to know why analysts with different ideological persuasions can analyze the same issue and come up with different, often conflicting, causal interpretations, and prescriptions for action. Policy analysis, including IVL, may worthily seek to know what is true, but real politics is driven much more by beliefs and commitments -- all intensely partisan -- than by conclusive dispassionate knowledge. IVL will paradoxically be an effectively enduring tool of public policymaking only to the extent that it can serve the former rather than the latter -- which is to say, probably not much.

REALISTS, RATIONALISTS, AND OSTRICHES

The intractable conflict between scientific and political values and norms is inherent in virtually all formal policy analysis, and over the years has provided the fulcrum for much theoretical reflection. Advocates can generally be located in one of three main groups: those who perceive public policymaking as essentially an exercise in power and politics, those who see it mainly as an intellectual endeavor to be improved by better theoretical knowledge and logical analysis, and those who try to resolve the basic differences between the two by overlooking them.

The first school, the realist, sees the world of governmental policymaking as a political world -- untidy, uncertain, and even irrational (in the conventional sense), and not readily amenable to improvement by analytical techniques, if amenable at all. The second school, the rationalist, displays a strong technocratic mentality and is impatient with political processes, which are viewed as impediments to the search for the one best way. Their techniques are often applied in a politically illiterate way, rendering them useless, sooner rather than later. Zero-based budgeting comes to mind as an example. The rationalists ruled virtually unchallenged in New Zealand during the period of radical economic and social policy reform in the 1980s and early '90s. Their appeal to what they believed to be a coherent and compelling body of economic theory as the source of solutions to the country's problems was for several years politically dominant (Kelsey, 1995; Gregory, 1998).

The third school, the ostriches, is strongly attracted to the latest nostrums -- for example, cost-benefit analysis, zero-based budgeting, PPBS, MBO, TQM -- as if these techniques indeed offered some new way out of old policymaking conundrums [See Melese et. al. elsewhere in this issue, ed.]. They invariably acknowledge aspects of political reality that undermine the integrity of rational techniques, but having done so they then proceed to speak and act as if this were not really a problem. Many cost-benefit analysts have been guilty of this inconsistency.

IVL holds out hope today, for both rationalists and ostriches alike, and it will be instructive to look back, say five years from now, to see if -- unlike its predecessors -- it has been able to withstand the assaults of political imperatives on its own logic.

WHAT TO DO THEN? THE BROADER ISSUE

Policy analysis developed exponentially in the years after the Second World War not only because it was able to draw upon and adapt analytical technologies developed for weapons systems during that conflict, but also because it appealed as a means of ensuring that technocratic reason and logic would supplant the sorts of destructive ideological passions that had previously beset the world. This is not to say that mainstream policy analysis is not itself a form of ideology (Fay 1975; Kramer 1975; Tribe 1972), which in disguising underlying political and social conflicts serves essentially as an instrument of the status quo as well as a source of ready employment for hordes of university graduates. We need not accept Charles de Gaulle's comment that he'd lived a long political life and had yet to see one social problem solved, to seriously doubt the vaunted problem-solving capacity of policy analysis.ⁱⁱⁱ Nor do we have to subscribe to the view held by Giulio Andreotti, seven-time prime minister of Italy, that most problems go away if you wait long enough. Most could probably agree, however, that the record of mainstream policy analysis is a very mixed one. Perhaps its impact on policy processes and outcomes has, on balance, been detrimental rather than beneficial.

Systematic thinking about how better to produce intended policy outcomes and reliable evidence to help monitor and evaluate policy effectiveness are always desirable. In Lindblom's (1977, 259) words, "analysis is difficult, in short supply, and of an inadequate level of competence. Although that

undercuts a faith that men can solve social problems by the intellectual design of institutions and policies, it also leads people to prize highly what capacities for analysis society possesses, like a person in a desert who prizes the shade of any single tree he finds." Nevertheless, if the question is how best to improve public policymaking, then it may be better to look for answers beyond the techniques propagated by mainstream policy analysis. Rather than focusing on the development of smarter techniques, the more productive challenge is to think about ways of improving political and policy judgment.

The policy analysis enterprise seeks a hybrid balance between the tenets of detached and scientific investigation on one hand, and democratic norms and values on the other. The two are often antithetical in practice. What has been called the democratic deficit may have increased as a result of the growing impact of policy analysis on public policymaking, since policy analysis is by nature exclusionary. Power and influence accrue to those who are skilled in using its techniques. These policy experts, a small minority of the total polity, also aspire to a more formalized professional status -- after all, they have the educational credentials -- which will hardly alleviate their elitist tendencies. To the extent that its theories and techniques increasingly dominate the public space in which citizens could otherwise bring to policy debate the full and wide variety of their experiences and practical experience, then policymaking may be impoverished rather than enriched. The crucial thing is to be able to know at what point and under what circumstances formal methodology becomes a liability rather than an asset.

Public executives and managers who are most enamored of IVL will probably be those least likely to have a sense of its fallibility. And those who understand its shortcomings may find that IVL does not necessarily better equip them in their quest for more effective policy outcomes. Not only IVL as a technique, but the entire strategy of managing for outcomes could inhibit rather than enhance the development of the type of qualities that from time immemorial have characterized prudent and effective governance. Good public managers and administrators are those who are able to work effectively by other means -- with good judgment, experience, intuition, insight, commitment, prudence, and (rare commodity though it is) wisdom. Whereas IVL, as a technology, can be taught, it is far less easy to teach these sorts of skills and virtues, which depend on wider background knowledge and understanding. So what can most readily be taught in graduate schools of public policy and/or management is what is taught.

This gives rise to a strong schooling or training approach to public management education. Ideas which actually challenge the dominant policy analysis paradigm tend to be squeezed out, since graduate schools of management are reluctant to challenge the philosophical and ideological integrity of the techniques they impart to thousands of students whose careers (if not public policymaking itself) are enhanced by their acquisition. The ideas of theorists like Lindblom or Sir Geoffrey Vickers gain far less traction in graduate schools of public policy, because each has profoundly understood the impact of political and social contexts upon policy analysis techniques based on linear-rational assumptions. Both have mounted powerful challenges to the sine qua non of linear-rational techniques (now central to IVL)—the notion that good policymaking is that which achieves clearly specified objectives or end outcomes. Lindblom has cogently argued that the rationality of public policymaking has less to do with policy outcomes and more to do with the task of political coalition building, in which people who desire disparate end outcomes can nevertheless agree on collective action (or at least be sufficiently indifferent to it when it is undertaken by others). Advocates of IVL are unlikely to concur with his seminal insight that "[i]n an important sense . . . it is not irrational for an administrator to defend a policy as good without being able to specify what it is good for" (1959, 84).

Vickers (1965) -- who espoused the virtues of systems thinking while warning that human systems are different (1983)—insisted that public policymaking is not about achieving goals but about norm setting and modification, over time. In his words, "I use the word norm not as equivalent to goal but in sharp distinction. Lawmakers and policymakers are concerned not with goals to be attained once for all [sic] but with courses; relations to be attained and maintained (or to be escaped and eluded); an ongoing state dependent on continuous adjustment through time; and the same is true of my private aspirations. Goals are terminal points, which may be reached by various routes. Courses are directions which need no terminal point to define them" (1987, 40-41).

Such interpretations of public policymaking not only challenge the orthodox rational model, but also imply the need for qualities among policymakers that are seen by rationalists as weaknesses rather

than strengths. If, for example, effective public management actually rests on the capacity to judge and appreciate the immeasurable more than on the ability to calculate the measurable, then why is there such a strong tendency in graduate schools to co-opt the word rigor as a synonym for quantification? Not just graduate schools, but also citizens in general have an interest in answers to questions about the sort of people, with what kinds of minds, are needed in government. The rigor/relevance dilemma referred to twenty years ago by Donald Schön (1983, 42) remains instructive:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing “messes” incapable of technical solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society, while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern. Shall the practitioner stay on the high, hard ground where he [sic] can practice rigorously, as he understands rigor, but where he is constrained to deal with problems of relatively little social importance? Or shall he descend to the swamp where he can engage the most important and challenging problems if he is willing to forsake technical rigor?

Needed are people in government who can effectively occupy Schön’s high ground, but plenty more are needed who are effective operators in the swampy marshlands and -- even more importantly -- who understand the differences between the two. Max Weber’s observation that in a modern rationalized society, fate is the consequence of man’s actions contrary to his intentions, has never been more apt. IVL is a very small part of a long and vigorous scientific tradition that has aspired to render the social and physical worlds more predictable and controllable. But as Giddens (2003, 43) observes, “things are not turning out that way—we live in . . . an erratic, runaway world [in which a pressing need is to] get used to living with uncertainty and to coping with situations where we don’t even know what we don’t know.” Increasingly, it would seem that life is what happens to people (including policy analysts) while they’re making plans for it.

Rather than more techniques from the same technocratic stable, which may diminish rather than increase analytical capacity to respond effectively to changing and unpredictable circumstances, we need institutional processes and individual capacities that, as Yankelovich (1991, 244) puts it, help us “make democracy work in a complex world. . . . Whatever lip service elites may give to the ‘common sense’ of the public, in practice they shape their views through interaction with other elites. By and large, they are oblivious to the views of the public, except by reading opinion polls or soliciting the views of cabdrivers and secretaries. For its part, the public reacts by growing more cynical, more resentful, and ever more removed from participation in decision making.” Needed are public servants who are committed less to the application of analytical techniques in bureaucratic ivory towers than to getting about, listening to, and learning from citizens’ experiences; who are sensitive to the dangers of regarding the computer screen as the only useful window on the world outside; who embrace political interaction; and who are both comfortable and effective in complex, conflict-ridden, uncertain, and transformational policymaking contexts.

Yet, even as IVL claims the attention of policy analysts, a new catch phrase is now on the lips of many of them -- evidence-based policy. If by this they mean evidence that is objectively solid and scientific, as distinct from lesser evidence of the experiential, anecdotal, or partisan varieties, then we may assume they are rationalists or ostriches aspiring to ascend to Schön’s analytical high ground. In the meantime, realists toiling in the swampy lowlands will not be holding their breath.

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NOTES

- ⁱ. The New Zealand version of intervention logic is available at <http://io.ssc.govt.nz/pathfinder>
- ⁱⁱ. A referendum during the 1999 general election asked New Zealand voters the question, "Should there be a reform of our justice system placing greater emphasis on the needs of victims, providing restitution and compensation for them, and imposing minimum sentences and hard labor for all serious violent offences?" More than 90 percent of voters responded in the affirmative.
- ⁱⁱⁱ. As Edward Banfield (1974, 274) observed of the American political style, "[b]elieving that any problem can be solved if only we try hard enough, we do not hesitate to attempt what we do not have the least idea of how to do and what, in some instances, reason and experience both tell us cannot be done. Not recognizing any bounds to what is feasible, we are not reconciled to -- indeed, we do not even perceive -- the necessity, so frequently arising, of choosing the least objectionable among courses of action that are all very unsatisfactory." In the post-WW II years the policy analysis industry has helped spawn similar expectations in other Western countries, including New Zealand, to which it has exported its techniques.

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