Exploring the research/policy gap: are policy-makers interested in academic social research?

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Use of Social Science Research

- Evidence Based Policy movement – relevance of academic social research gained attention.

- Body of research from Europe, America and Canada focused on understanding the impact of social science research on policy and practice (e.g. Nutley, Landry, Weiss).

- Academics frequently argue that policy-makers ignore the research they produce, while policy-makers argue that often academic research is irrelevant to their needs.
Current study - ARC Linkage Grant

Three central questions:

- In what ways is social science research currently used within policy contexts?
- What conditions and circumstances support and hinder the use of social science research?
- Are there models for enhancing the policy-relevance and utilisation of social research knowledge?

We define “research” deliberately broadly, because one aim is to understand the relative authority accorded to different types of social research by policy-makers.
Nine Linkage Partners

- Productivity Commission
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Queensland Health
- Queensland Communities
- Queensland Dept of Employment
- Queensland Dept of Premier and Cabinet
- Victorian Dept of Planning and Community Development
- Victorian Dept of Education & Early Childhood Devt.
- Victorian Dept of Human Services

- Plus 12 other state and federal collaborating organisations across four jurisdictions.
ARC Linkage Project phases

- Phase 1: A targeted survey of Australian social scientists.
- Phase 2: A targeted survey of policy personnel.
- Phase 3: Follow up interviews with a selection of academic respondents.
- Phase 4: In-depth interviews with policy personnel.
Public Servant Survey

• To date 1410 responses across a range federal and state agencies (14 in total).

• Recruitment occurred through contact officers.

• Respondents A05 and above.

• Response rate – varies from agency to agency (product of survey administration procedures).
Academic research and policy-making

• Data indicates policy decision-makers are interested in academic social research.

• Diverse forms of use evident.

• Policy-makers not passive recipients of research – apply utility tests & organisational factors central.

• So what factors influence research use?
Measuring research use – Dependent Variable

Research use scale:

1. I receive university research that is relevant to my work.
2. I have read and understood the university research that I receive.
3. I have participated in meetings for discussion of university research.
4. I have cited university research studies in my own professional reports or documents.
5. I have adapted the findings of university research to provide information useful to policy decision-making.
6. I have made efforts to promote the adoption of university research studies.
7. University research results have influenced changes in policies developed by my unit.

• One way is to use the RU scale as a single item measure of research utilisation.
## Linear Regression model Research Utilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th>SE ( \beta )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Relevance of research for user</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Usability of academic research</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Policy work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme implementation work</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of info from state/local gov</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of info from federal gov, international org, uni researchers</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of info from interest grps, think tanks, professional associations, private consultants</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Linkage mechanisms</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Lack research skills</td>
<td>-0.09***</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Lack a research culture</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: External research partners</td>
<td>0.02***</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties accessing full text</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use research based on quantitative methods to inform decisions</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use research based on qualitative methods to inform decisions</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use research based on mixed methods to inform decisions</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use research based on program evaluation to inform decisions</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Use research based on lit review to inform decisions</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9: Use electronic bibliographic databases</td>
<td>0.23***</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No knowledge broker</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure if there’s a knowledge broker</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted ( R^2 )</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
* \( p < 0.05 \), ** \( p < 0.01 \), *** \( p < 0.001 \)
What seems to be important when it comes to the policy-use of academic research

- Linkages with external partners
- Culture that values research
- Individual skills
- Position and duties
- Access and means
- Translation & targeting
• Project website:

http://www.issr.uq.edu.au/EBP-home