

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

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

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>