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THE POLICY CAPACITY OF GOVERNMENT

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A WORD FROM CCMD

There is a widespread perception that the policy capacity of governments has eroded since the mid-1970s. Shifts in the sources of policy advice and the increase in policy advocacy coming from the private sector present a significant challenge to those charged with adopting and implementing “good” public policy. Factors such as the globalization of the economy, fiscal restraint, the need to manage cross-cutting policy issues, and increased public consultation and concern with citizens’ rights have affected the way policy is made in government.

The following paper, by one of the leading international scholars of public policy and administration, was prepared as a research study for the Task Force on Strengthening the Policy of the Federal Government led by Ivan Fellegi and Ole Ingstrup. Guy Peters is Maurice Falk Professor of American Government at the University of Pittsburgh, a Senior Fellow of CCMD, and a leader in CCMD’s international governance research program. In the present study, Dr. Peters discusses what is meant by “good” policy and offers a thorough assessment of the many factors currently affecting the ability of governments to develop wise and effective policies that can be implemented successfully and reach their goals. He observes that at a time when there is a pressing need for governments to make departures from the status quo and to consider longer-term, strategic choices, a number of conflicting factors in the environment tend to inhibit them from doing so. Of particular importance is the way in which

knowledge is made available and utilized in the formulation of policy, a subject explored in depth in this paper.

In his analysis of the process of policy making, Dr. Peters examines the relationship of line departments to central agencies in the development of government policy and discusses the changing role of senior public servants, as more emphasis is given to managerial as opposed to policy responsibilities. He concludes with a **warning** that the ability of governments to **deal** with the increasing **complexity** of policy issues has been threatened by a **decline** in the importance attached to the public service's policy role and the loss of a generation of trained policy analysts from government.

The issues examined in this paper are of central importance to governments and public servants, and to sound public policy. CCMD is grateful to Dr. Peters for this substantial contribution to its *Governance* series and to its ongoing research program.

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1

INTRODUCTION

The **purpose** of this essay is to develop an understanding of the policy capacity of contemporary governments. There is a strong sense within a number of governments that they are no longer as capable of formulating, implementing and evaluating policy as they were **during** the heyday of government **during** the 1960s and 1970s: the sense is that from the **mid-1970s** onward, the policy capabilities of governments have eroded. Some observers suggest that this declining policy capacity has been the result of a more ideological and politicized style of making policy (Aucoin 1988; Savoie 1994). Others argue that this declining capacity **reflects** the **increasingly difficult** fiscal position of government and the **lack** of funds for policy initiatives (Brown 1988; Lightman and Irving 1991). Still others believe that the **ironic** combination of public **scepticism** and public consultation has made policy making more difficult, with the latitude of governments for autonomous action substantially reduced.

Whatever the reasons **may** be, the perception that the policy capacity of government has been seriously eroded presents a **significant** challenge to a public sector that seeks to adopt and implement “good” public policy. Indeed, according to **many** veteran observers, several of the factors that have eroded the policy capacity of governments make the capacity to deal analytically with policies **all** the more important.] If there are limited **financial resources**, then policy analysis should be employed to enable governments to make more sophisticated and effective **choices** among

alternative uses. Similarly, if there is an increased amount of policy advocacy coming from the private sector, then government will require more information and better analysis to sort through the conflicting private sector sources.

The numerous shifts in the sources of policy advice have tended to devalue the role of senior public servants as policy advisors. In addition to the changing role definitions of the senior public service, the internal resources available for career officials to fulfil their role as policy advisors also appear to have diminished significantly. There has been a “lost generation” of young policy analysts who have not been hired by government in most industrialized democracies. Finally, some observers (Lewis 1991) have argued that the declining morale, and declining real rewards (Hood and Peters 1994; Peters and Hood 1995) of being in the public service have driven some of the more capable individuals away from government careers. It is difficult to quantify the extent of this malaise in the public sector, but there is a good deal of anecdotal evidence about its existence (Peters 1991; Manion 1991). Thus, even if there were the demand for a stronger policy role for the public service, it is not entirely clear that the necessary personnel resources still exist within the bureaucracy in most industrialized democracies.

A final general consideration about the policy capacity of government is the increasing importance of the horizontal dimension of government policy. The practice in almost all governments is for policies to emerge from the “stovepipes” that link functional experts at all levels of government with interest groups and with other advocates within the policy area (Atkinson and Coleman 1992; Coleman and Skogstad 1990). That isolation of policy issues and the separation of one set of programs from others no longer appear adequate for effective governance, and there are growing concerns about coordinating policies (Boston 1992; Aucoin and Bakvis 1993). Policy-making capacity, therefore, increasingly implies being able to work across the conventional functional definitions of policies (Jobert 1985; Freeman 1985) and being able to make strategic and redistributive choices among programs.

With the need to coordinate programs come special demands for building analytic capacity. To make decisions that assist in the coordination

of programs requires an ability to **evaluate** the relative merits of a number of different contributions to the dominant goals of government and then to make choices among those possible contributions that would produce the most desirable and **efficient** mix. **Such** calculations are important as guides for action, and they are also important for justifying the **decisions** to individuals and **organizations** which lose **resources** as a result of these choices. **Furthermore**, this application of systematic policy analysis **may** be especially important for assuring that a coordinating **decision constitutes** an effective policy choice rather than merely a lowest **common** denominator choice (Scharpf 1989) that makes everyone happy.

II

EXTERNAL CONDITIONS

We **can** begin by looking at the factors external to the policy process that appear to have eroded the policy-making capacity of government in industrialized democracies. **One** aspect of this apparent **demise** of effective governance is the **emergence** of some external factors that minimize the capacity of government to govern. This would probably be as true of the governments that appeared successful in the past as it is of governments that have remained ineffective. Governments **will** either have to recognize and live with their relative impotence, or they **will** have to think **about** using very different instruments to **accomplish** their tasks (Dunsire 1993).

The **first** of these factors is the phenomenon of globalization (Savoie 1995; Held and McGraw 1993). While this has become something of a cliché, like all clichés there is a certain amount of truth in it. Few if **any** policies and programs **can** be thought to be totally domestic, and as a **consequence** a government **can exercise** control **over** only a subset of the sources of influence in the policy **area** (Hutton 1993). Not only are other governments involved in **many** policies, but non-governmental **organiza-**tions and the amorphous international **market** also have a strong influence on the success or failure of a policy (Hurrell 1994). If governments are to be successful policy makers, they **will** need to adopt instruments that permit greater flexibility, speed and sensitivity in responding to external **environ-**mental factors.²

The globalization of policy is associated with another important change in the external environment, the increasing importance of “cross-cutting issues” in government and of managing “horizontal government.” The point here is that policy issues are becoming more **difficult** to **contain** within the boundaries of conventional ministerial structures. This inability to **contain** issues is to some degree a **function** of globalization, as when concern about international economic competitiveness influences domestic **policies** such as social policy and **education** (Johnson, McBride and Smith 1994). In addition, client groups **such** as the elderly, women, persons with **disabilities**, and First Nations people often perceive government in terms of large clusters of issues and services, rather than as individual ministries, and would **like** to have more holistic services made available to them (Schaan 1994; Considine 1992). Governments have **never** been **very** good at managing policy horizontally, and as the demands from these groups and the pressures from globalization become more **significant**, they appear increasingly impotent to produce effective policy coordination.

A third external **factor** that has exacerbated the impact of the **first** two is the continuing fiscal restraint affecting the **Canadian** government and virtually **all** other governments in developed **democracies**.³ The simple **fact** is that governments no longer enjoy the luxury of spending large amounts of money on new and innovative programs; they are being **forced** to **find** more cost-effective **means** for reaching existing policy goals, or even to reduce spending on those programs. **Thus**, while at **one** time governments **could** throw money at a whole range of problems, they now must be more **selective** in their issues and must attempt to **reach** their goals through less expensive **means**. Governments must **also** be certain that they are not funding redundant programs, or programs that do not appear to be reaching their goals.

The **financial** restraints also place pressures on government to design programs properly at the outset. Unfortunately, **many** problems confronting governments are not so well **defined** or understood that a program **can** be designed correctly *a priori*. *The* alternative would be to use more **experimental** methods — that is, to attempt to **find** workable programs by trial and error. There are a number of instances in which governments have been willing to experiment and to **announce** from the outset that they are not sure

about the program, but hope to learn (Passe11 1993). The idea advanced by Donald Campbell (1988) and other scholars (Majone and Wildavsky 1978) is that of the “**experimenting society**” in which there is a willingness to take chances and also to use multiple programs in order to **reach** goals, even though that strategy **may** generate short-term **inefficiencies**.⁴

A fourth factor is the increasing politicization of policy and of **governance**. Governing has always been political, by definition, but the **scope** of influence for more manifestly political **considerations** and actors appears to have been increasing in almost **all** developed democracies (Meyer 1985; Stahlberg 1987). Associated with this trend has been the tendency of policy makers to rely more on political and ideological criteria and less on analytic criteria when justifying policy **decisions**. With politicization has come a **decline** in the importance of analytic units in government and their **replacement** by a greater concern with public relations and “environmental scanning” as forms of policy **advice** (Hollander and Prince 1993, 196-7). **Thus**, political **advice** has come to replace the more quantitative techniques usually identified as policy analysis, and even the sources of more “**scientific**” analysis that have survived tend to be more politicized (Fischer 1991).

A **fifth** factor, associated with the increased politicization of governing as well as fiscal restraint, is the changing definition of the role of civil servants. The emerging definition is of public servants as managers, as opposed to policy advisors or even policy makers. The “new public management” (Pollitt 1990; Hood 1991) now popular in government argues, in a fashion reminiscent of the old politics/administration dichotomy, that the job of public servants is to implement **decisions** made by their political masters. Further, the importing of **private** sector management techniques into government (Pollitt 1995) has emphasized that the real task for the public service is to get on with implementing policy and running **organizations**, rather than worry too **much about** what **policies** those organizations should be pursuing.

Finally, public participation is now greater and it is more **difficult** for governments to make **decisions** autonomously and then implement them. The prevailing ethos is that government must be more consultative and more interested in service to clients. In addition, there has been increasing political mobilization **around** issues of rights, and those issues are less

subject to bargaining than are issues based on economic wants (Aronowitz 1992). This participatory ethos is complemented by a growing availability of information which makes it harder for government to **disguise its choices** from the **public**.⁵ While it is difficult to argue with these participatory values on normative grounds, the populism that has been engendered **does** have practical **consequences**. They **definitely** make it more difficult for the public sector to **reach** the demanding redistributive **decisions** that are often necessary to govern effectively.

III

WHAT IS GOOD POLICY?

Governments want to be able to make “good policy,” but it is not clear what is meant by that deceptively simple phrase. It certainly **cannot** refer to the specific goals of a policy, given that there **will** inevitably be political and ideological disagreements **about** what is right for government to do. At the most minimal level, good policy is a policy that **can** be implemented successfully. Implementation is certainly important, but assuming this as a criterion tends to assign “feasibility” too great a weight among **all** the possible criteria that should be applied (Majone 1975; Elmore 1979; Linder and Peters 1989). At a second level, a good policy is a policy that actually reaches the goals set for it. **Again**, however, this **may** be a **very** minimal definition if it implies that only limited goals and **incremental** solutions are likely to be **accepted** in order to produce the perception of success.

If we move beyond these rather minimal definitions of good policy, we should begin to **conceptualize** the **capacity** of government to make more **significant** departures from the status quo and to make those changes successfully. For example, good policy making (from that perspective) would involve selecting the options in Table 1 that would drive government to make longer-term, strategic policy **choices**. This more radical pattern would be in **contrast** to the short-range, process-oriented, **incremental** solutions that are often characteristic of government, especially **governments** that are **faced** with external **constraints** and substantial internal political pressures.

Table 1

Dichotomies of Public Policy			
Synoptic	vs.	Incremental	
Long-term	vs.	Short-term	
Proactive	vs.	Reactive	
Cross-cutting	vs.	Sectoral	
Strategic	vs.	“Firefighting”	
Substance	vs.	Process	

The above characterization assumes that the real needs of government and society are best satisfied by making substantial moves away from the status quo. If we are thinking **about** the policy capacity of government, then simply making incremental **choices** requires little capacity, whereas more substantial departures require **much** more. The **selection** of more radical responses would, in turn, require the development of “policy indicators” (MacRae 1985) that would be sufficient to trigger more extreme **reactions** by government, in **contrast** to the more modest, incremental responses that are required when the **basic** structure of public policy is acceptable (Weaver 1989). The problem is that there are relatively few “policy indicators” available, so that governments must rely upon judgment and partial **indicators** rather than on the more powerful indicators. This is perhaps another instance in which social constructionism, that is, the capacity to generate a perception of **crisis**, may be crucial for manipulating the policy process (Lipsky and Smith 1989).

IV

THE POLICY CAPACITY OF GOVERNMENT

The idea of the policy capacity of government is difficult to conceptualize. Does it include the implementation (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Freudenberg and Gramling 1994) capacity of the system, or should it be concerned only with formulating clever and potentially effective policies? Also, does it include the political capacity of the system to respond to changing demands from interest groups and the mass public, or does it assume that government should be more autonomous? In the broadest sense a concept of policy capacity would include all the above factors, but for the purposes of this paper we will concentrate attention on two aspects of policy making.

The first of these dimensions is largely procedural; it assesses the capacity of the policy-making system to translate the wishes of the public, as expressed in elections, into public policy. Richard Rose (1974) referred to this as “the problem of party government.” He set out eight conditions necessary for government to be able to do this. The first three of these conditions deal primarily with the electoral connection between government and the people, and will not be considered here. However, the remaining five points will be discussed in terms of the capacity of both political leaders and civil servants to make the structures of government produce policy of the type they desire.

The second approach to the quality of policy **decisions is** more substantive; it attempts to assess the utilization of knowledge within the policy-making process (Torgerson 1986). The examination of this second approach to quality in policy **will** be discussed to some extent in process **terms** and **will focus** attention on stages of the policy process. We **will** attempt to identify the stages in the conventional linear model of the policy process (Jones 1984; Peters 1995) at which policy analytic techniques are the most applicable and at which knowledge, if utilized effectively, **can** have **the** greatest impact on the shape of public policy. Further, the points at which policy analysis is **not** applicable to solving problems **will** be identified (House and Schull 1988), as well as some of the features of those problems to which it is applicable. Although it is **difficult** for governments to refuse to **confront** problems, they should be careful if they have the **luxury** of choosing their issues.

V

THE PROCESS OF POLICY MAKING: POLICY CAPACITY AS THE ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS

The question of quality relates **first** to how the process of policy making is **structured** to produce more or less effective outcomes. Rose identifies a number of barriers to the efforts of the would-be policy maker to **bring into effect** a specific vision of a policy (Table 2). In general, these barriers are a **function** of the skills and **resources** available to a policy maker, and of the **resistance** to new policy that **may** arise within organizations that have become accustomed to existing policy regimens. The policy capacity of government **seen** in these terms is the ability of actors to overcome those barriers and to manipulate the process in order to produce desired **outcomes**. These barriers are usually thought of as limits on the capacity of political leaders, but they are also potentially impediments to active policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon 1987) within the public **service**.⁶

The first of these criteria, or potential impediments to success, is the **command** of **sufficient** expertise to be able to make adequate **decisions**. We will be dealing with access to information and analysis in detail below, but at this point we should note the extent to which the political process **may** advantage or disadvantage certain elements of the governing elite. **One** of the most important factors here is the recruitment of those **elites**. Few ministers have **any real experience** in the substance of the **policies** for

Table 2

Criteria for Party Government	
1.	Ministers must have sufficient knowledge of the policy of their department to participate effectively in decisions
2.	Ministers must be in sufficient numbers to control the activities of their department
3.	Ministers must have the skills necessary to manage a large complex organization
4.	Ministers must have the time available to manage their organization and make policy
5.	The departments of government must be sufficiently coordinated to produce effective action.
Source: Adapted from Rose (1974)	

which they are responsible (Blonde1 1985), and that certainly appears to **be** true in Canada (Sutherland 1991). There are some comparative **examples** of countries in which ministers are recruited for their **technocratic** abilities (Blonde1 1988). In Westminster systems, however, ministers tend to **be** selected for political reasons and other factors not usually associated with their **capacity to manage specific**⁷ portfolios (Wilson 1994). This, in **turn**, means that the ministers are either dependent upon their civil servants or they bring in advisors who are personally committed **to them and/or** to the **party**. The **evidence**, however, is that senior civil servants are tending to spend less time in **any one** ministry (Carroll 1991) **and hence may not** be able to supply as **much** of the needed policy expertise as **was the case** several **decades ago**.

The need for leaders to have specific policy expertise to **manage** their own department **can conflict** with the (now) commonly articulated demands for enhanced coordination among government departments and programs. If ministers (and their public servants) are selected for their **command** of **particular** bodies of substantive information, they are less likely to be able to visualize the needs and priorities of other departments and to coordinate effectively with programs from other departments. **Thus**, as is so often the case in government and politics, there is a trade-off between two important values, with a need to balance the two or make conscious **choices** that maximize **one** or the other. Ministers who **focus** exclusively on **understanding** and advocating the programs of their own department run the risk of undermining the effectiveness of the government as a whole.

The second and third of the relevant criteria advanced by Rose are that the ministers (or civil servants) must have the skills **necessary** to **manage** organizations effectively as well as the time to **devote** to performing the policy and managerial tasks. Not only should policy makers have some substantive knowledge of the **policies** for which they are responsible, they should also have the skills required to put them into **effect**. In other words, they must be capable of managing large, **complex** organizations. Further, the elites must have **sufficient** time to **manage** an organization and to put the desired programs into **effect**.

Once again, Westminster political systems seem to rate rather poorly on the criteria for managing organizations. Ministers tend to have political rather than managerial **experience** and find the management of their **departments** **difficult**. For senior public servants, the increasing **complexity** and (frequently) increasing size of government departments makes management **difficult**, even though they are selected for their managerial skills. In addition, the demands of cabinet government — cabinet responsibilities, cabinet committees, parliamentary and constituency duties — make the life of a minister extremely taxing. Public servants may have somewhat more time, yet this is a limited resource in view of the responsibilities they face.

The last of the criteria advanced by Rose is that all the parts of the system work in harmony to implement the policy. **One** of the tasks of leadership becomes that of creating agreement and **unity** within the **organization**, a task that then involves creating **cooperation** and some

common purpose between the political and **career** parts of government. In the contemporary environment this **also** requires the **capacity** to **promote cooperation across** the range of organizations that have an **interest** in the policy **area**. Governments **rarely march** to the **same** drummer, given the number of different interests and constituencies **involved**.⁸ Still, to be effective, the number of **overt conflicts** must be minimized and there must be enhanced coordination and harmonization.

The management of horizontal government represents a major challenge for leaders seeking to push their programs and **policies** through the political system. Government departments do not naturally want to move in **any single** direction, but rather **may** prefer to govern their own segments of the world without **reference** to the other policy **sectors**. Reforms **such** as consolidation of cabinet departments and the use of various budgetary techniques are **all** intended to **enhance** coordination, but have **difficulty** in overcoming the strength of the stovepipes that **dominate** most government policy. These techniques **may** be no substitute for firm leadership from the top of government requiring greater coordination.

VI

THE SUBSTANCE OF POLICY: USING KNOWLEDGE TO SOLVE POLICY PROBLEMS

The question of how knowledge is utilized within the policy process is central to the capacity of government to govern effectively. We **can evaluate** policy making **along** a variety of dimensions, but **one** of the most important is the utilization of knowledge **and** the capacity to generate and apply policy **advice** effectively in order to make policies “better.” Governments have **any** number of people who **can** and do **provide advice about** the political implications of a policy. As noted, it appears that these political **considerations** increasingly **dominate** policy, to the detriment of governmental capacity to make and implement policies that **meet** the objective needs of society. These problems are especially evident when **such** policies require an extensive time period in which to prove effective.

Elinor Chelimsky (a senior official responsible for evaluation in the US. General Accounting Office) notes the following:

What then are the mismatches that continue to prevent research from supporting **decision** needs appropriately? I see at least three: (i) when political requirements are so overwhelming that information simply **will** not be sought; (ii) when information is sought, but contextual or **resource constraints** impede researchers from actually producing the information needed for **decision**; and (iii) when the

“state of the art” research problems allow only inconclusive answers to decision-makers’ questions. (199 1,226)

This assessment of knowledge utilization and availability is far from encouraging, but it does point to the multiple problems encountered in attempting to provide usable information for decision makers.

The political context of decisions is a paramount concern. The development of scientific and social scientific information as a basis for decisions is a more difficult task than predicting the political coalitions affecting a policy decision. There is, however, a growing mismatch between the focus on short-term political consequences and the nature of the policy problems with which governments are confronted. The more technical forms of knowledge are increasingly important as governments are called upon to legislate in policy areas with a significant scientific content, to cope with social problems about which there is no agreed-upon methodology for producing the intended social changes,⁹ and to make decisions that have significant long-term consequences.

As we approach the question of the capacity of governments to utilize knowledge in policy we will attempt to answer the traditional five questions addressed by journalists as they write an account of an event: who, what, when, where and why. However, we will answer these questions in a somewhat different order than the conventional one, beginning with “What?” In the context of policy making by government and the capacity to make good policy, the issue of what sort of information is needed, whether it exists, and what to do if it does not exist is in some ways the most difficult and most crucial of these questions. Governmental capacity is often seriously constrained by the unavailability of the right information, so that one element necessary to building capacity is to address those issues.

WHAT? WHAT DO GOVERNMENTS NEED TO KNOW TO MAKE GOOD POLICY?

Contemporary governments operate in an environment which is increasingly rich in information. The development of “information highways” and other technical breakthroughs appear to make all the information that

any government could need readily accessible to it. At **one** level that is **true**, and there is to some extent an overload of information. **One** of the more **difficult** tasks in which governments must engage is that of sorting through the mountains of data, **evidence**, and **advice** that flows in every time there is a policy to be made. **Much** of this information is biased and is being used as a tool to influence the decision. Still, it is information that, with careful evaluation and sorting, could improve the quality of the decisions made.

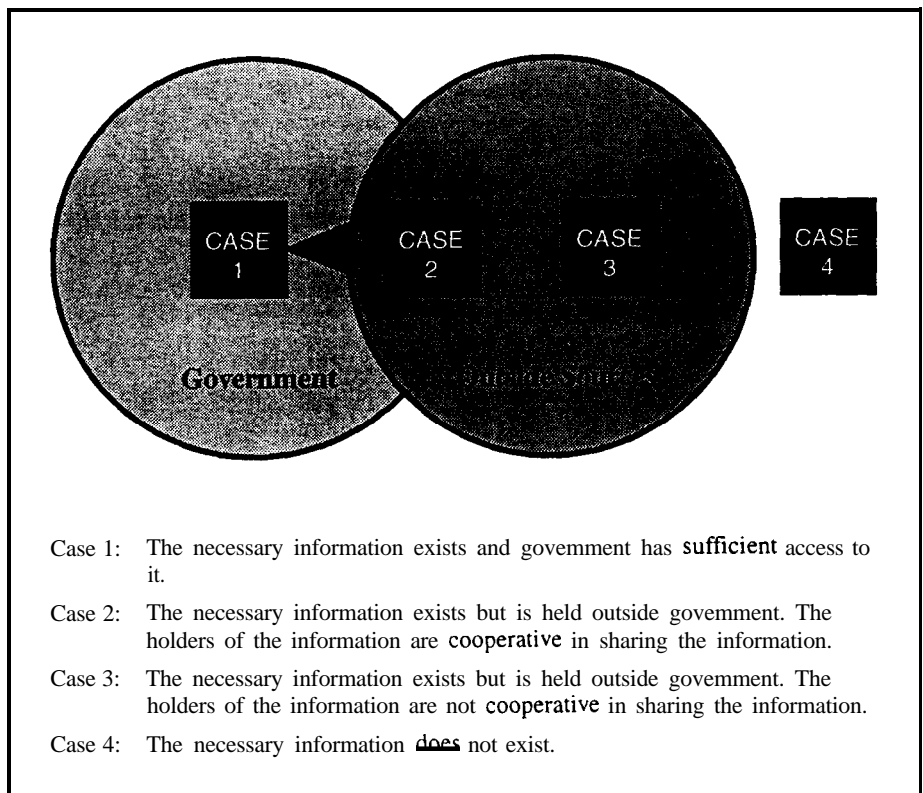
On the other hand, there are **any** number of issues with which governments must deal that are “**ill structured**” (Dunn 1988) **and about** which there is no agreement as to what information is actually relevant to a decision. Unfortunately, governments are not always absolved of the requirement to act, even when their informational **resources** and the **probability** of making good policy is limited. Therefore, **one** of the important but often underrated policy-making **capacities** of government is the **capacity** to deal with uncertainty and with risk. **Decision** makers and citizens usually want a sure thing, but often are **faced** with decisions that are little more than sophisticated gambling (Dror 1983).

There are still other issues **about** which there is a **shortage** of information, especially information that is available to governments in a readily usable **form**. Governments therefore must get into the business of **mandating** information, or bargaining with **private** sector actors in order to **acquire** the information they require. Possessing adequate information **provides** government with the **capacity** to act more autonomously and probably more precisely as well. It also places governments in a more equal position vis-à-vis **private** sector actors who **may** want to retain their monopoly of information as a **means** of exerting their power **over** a particular **area** of the economy or **society**.¹⁰

Figure 1 describes a set of possible situations in which governments **may** find themselves in **terms** of the availability of knowledge for making policy decisions. The most **comfortable** position for a government is obviously in Case 1 in which there is adequate information available and government has easy access to that information. This situation is to be expected in policy **areas** that have been a part of the **concerns** of government for some time **and** in which there is relatively little disagreement **about** cause and **effect** relationships, and therefore little disagreement **about**

the forms of intervention that may be required. Decisions in a policy area such as this can be described as “programmed” (Peters and Barker 1993, 16). Although most people working in government would not think that their policy fits into this category, some areas do — at least at the level of more *technical* decision making. (Of course, the *political* ramifications of those decisions may still be pronounced and therefore certainly not programmed.)

Figure 1
Relationship of Knowledge to Government



At the other extreme, policy questions that **fall** into Case 4 are the most troubling for government. Not **only does** government not possess adequate information on which to base decisions, but that information **does not**, in **fact**, exist at **all**. In this case governments **must** make decisions by “inspiration” rather than through the easier programmed manner. If this is a “one-off” problem, then government **can** attempt either to dodge the **decision** or to **find** some incremental move from existing **policies** and programs that **can** at least address the issue. The incremental response (Hayes 1992) has the advantage of doing *something* but not appearing to engage in **bold** new adventures which **may** invite political **repercussions**.

If, however, it appears that government **will** be **faced** with the problem for some period of time, then other responses **may** be necessary to increase the policy **capacity** of government. **One** possible response is “**knowledge mandating**,” or “**technology mandating**,” to **develop** solutions for the problem (Rudig 1994). An example of this occurred in the United States under the *Clean Air Act* of 1972. This act required attaining improvements in emissions from automobiles that were far in excess of the existing **technology** (Jones 1975), **yet** advisors to Congress argued in favour of passing the standards into **law**, in essence requiring the automobile **manu-facturers** to **develop** the technology to **meet** these standards. In the end this strategy worked, with **emission** standards exceeding the mandates within the period specified. **Similar** strategies have been advanced for “encouraging” the automobile makers to **meet** gasoline mileage standards.

This mandating **can** be **successful** in some policy **areas**, but **may** not be so in others in which the information and **technology** requirements are **less** obvious than in the case of air pollution. **While** the **reduction** in automobile emissions was a simple engineering application, for **many** social problems knowledge mandating **may** not be so easy. Governments are **confronted** with the paradox of the “Moon and the Ghetto” (Nelson 1978): they have been **very** successful at doing seemingly impossible tasks **like** putting a man on the moon or **completing** massive public works projects, but they have not been at all successful in solving the **human problems** so **clearly** seen in the ghettos of large **cities**. The **difference**, of course, is that the former **problems** are simple engineering writ large, while there are no **formulae** as **yet available** for solving the latter set of problems.

The response Of governments to policies for which there are no **clear answers** and inadequate information may be conceptualized in another way — as “fuzzy gambling” (Dror 1983). This idea comes from the mathematical concept of fuzzy sets, or sets for which the parameters are not fully known (Treadwell 1995). For example, probabilities of the occurrence of certain events constitute the basis for risk assessment crucial to **making** regulatory decisions. In the case of nuclear power plants, **there are not as yet sufficient** data to provide good probability estimates of accidents. **Therefore, any** existing regulations are to some extent **gambling on** a very large societal **scale**. Although less dramatic, other policy issues **may** have some of the **same** indeterminate qualities. ¹¹

Ravetz describes the **same** problems as being those of “usable ignorance.” He argues that most policy problems **can** be characterized as **ones** in which “**facts** are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high, decisions urgent and where no single **one** of these dimensions **can be** managed in isolation from the rest” (1987, 99). If that characterization is correct, and **many** people in government would think that it is **all** too **familiar**, then policy making by inspiration is **all** too necessary. **Again, the difficulty** lies in convincing the public and other policy makers that **experimentation** and inspiration are necessary, if not really desirable, in the **best** of **all** worlds.

The other two cases of Figure 1 present different types of problems for government. In Case 3, the **private** sector has the information required for government to make good decisions but is withholding **it**. **This may** be a wilful attempt to minimize the **capacity** of government to **regulate**, or it **may** be simply that government has not thought **to ask for the data it really** needs. For example, in the **first energy crisis, the government of the** United States found that it did not have **any** reliable information **about** the amount of gasoline and other petroleum **products on hand in the country**. The **oil companies certainly** knew themselves what **their** stocks were, but did not want to share the data with government (or **with their competitors**). Subsequent legislation has required data to be **shared with the Department** of Energy, albeit denied to competitors.

Even if the information is available (Case 2), **it may not** reside at the most **appropriate** places within the **complex environment** of modern **government**. Increasingly, public policy **problems** are “cross-cutting,” so

that actions of **one** department or organization affect the programs of others. Coordination among departments has always been a problem for government, but has become a more prominent concern in **recent** years (Boston 1992), and that is as true for the possession and **utilization** of necessary information as it is for **any** other aspect of governing. **Again**, the tendency of organizations not to share information **freely may be purely a function** of ignorance **about** the needs of other organizations, or it **may** be a more conscious **choice about** using information as **one** more weapon in **bureaucratic struggles over policy and** influence (Stinchcombe 1990; Tullock 1965).

The importance of **controlling** information was ver-y **clear** in the continuing **bureaucratic** wars between the Central Intelligence **Agency** (CIA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States. Both were supposed to control espionage, but federal **laws confined** the CIA to operations outside the United States while the **FBI** was given domestic surveillance responsibilities (Riebling 1994). To do the job properly required effective coordination and blending of the two sources of information, but that almost **never** happened. Both organizations held on to their information to use in their **battles** with **each** other and with their **Congressional** committees.

WHO? THE HOLDERS AND CREATORS OF INFORMATION FOR POLICY MAKING

Public policy is a game that almost **any** number **can** play. **One** of the important **capacities** of government in making policy is the ability to sift through the numerous sources of information, solicited and **unsolicited**, that are **available** to them. They must then **decide** which definitions of the problem and which suggestions **about** solutions are most valuable. **Governments** have rarely had a **monopoly over** information relevant for **policies**, even in policy **areas such** as defence which have been subject to greater secrecy and government domination.¹² As we **will point out** in more detail below, the policy **capacity** of governments **may** be enhanced by promoting **controversy and conflict in advice** rather than the uniformity and agreement

that has characterized most governments **over** the past several **decades**. While agreement is **comfortable** and reassuring, it unfortunately is **unlikely** to produce the best **policies** (Janis 1982; t'Hart 1990).

Sources of Information within Government

Governments are a major source of their own information and analysis. When we talk **about** the policy capacity of government we are usually thinking of this internal source. Do government organizations have the capacity to **collect**, process, and present information to **decision** makers in a manner that **will** improve the quality of the public decisions made? In most countries this capacity appears to have eroded in the face of ideological leaders who have believed that they knew the answers to policy questions without extensive policy analysis. Further, as there have been pressures on public expenditure, the analytic capacity of **agencies** has been more expendable than have the programs that deliver services to the public.

When thinking **about** the holders of knowledge within government it is **common** to assume that the major actors **will** be the analytic units that exist in departments and **agencies**, or perhaps within the central **agencies**. While that is to some degree true, these organizations run the risk of marginalizing themselves by being merely analytical and by thinking only **about** formulation. Organizations do not always *make* policy at pre-announced times and through predetermined methods. Rather, policy often arises **out** of decisions that must be made **about** implementation (Lipsky 1980; Majone 1989), or **about** how to get a **piece** of legislation through Parliament. Therefore, the isolation of analytic units and their **lack** of familiarity with implementation and other aspects of the department's activities **may** simply make them appear "academic," in the pejorative sense of that term.

The **reduction** of the analytic capacity in government has not, however, been uniform **across** government. There has been a tendency for line departments and **agencies** to lose their capacity while central **agencies** retain or **enhance** theirs. The **same** logic that has **driven** general **reductions** in analytic capacity has tended to **enhance** the capacity of central **agencies** to impose their wills on the line departments, especially **about** budgets

(Clark 1994), and their **desire** to do so. Central **agencies** have been given the responsibility for controlling spending and driving down the size of the public sector and their analytic capacity is an essential **component** of that task.

Furthermore, in the United States and to a lesser extent in other **countries**, there has been an increase in analytic capacity associated with “regulatory review,” or the use of **devices such as cost-benefit** analysis to assess the **likely** impacts of regulations (Novak 1993). The return to “rationality” in regulation (**McGarity** 1991) **can** be thought of as an increase in the policy capacity of government, but it **can** also **function** as a barrier to that capacity. The question that arises is whether the analytic capacity is being used to produce a superior **decision**, or whether it is used as a **means** merely to **block** action and generate reasons for not engaging in more rapid action. The **current** advocacy of regulatory analysis by Republican **critics** of “big government,” for example, largely **reflects a desire** to slow or **kill** implementation rather than improve the content of regulations. It also tends to privilege certain types of **costs** and benefits (largely economic) as opposed to others (Schwartz 1985).

Private Sector Sources of Information and How to Tap Them

The **private** sector is also a major source of information for **government**, but governments must be **structured** to receive it and must also develop **procedures** for receiving and evaluating that information. Further, they must be cognizant of the different sources of information and the different ways in which it **may** have to be used in the policy process.

One way in which to **conceptualize** the availability of information for policy making from **private** sector actors is as a set of “epistemic communities” (Haas 1990), “technical communities” (**MacRae** 1987), or “policy networks” (Knoke and Laumann 1987; Rhodes and Marsh 1992).¹³ That is, **each policy area** will be populated by a number of **interest groups**, think tanks, university institutes and departments, and a host of other sources of information and advocacy. These information and organizational structures **will vary** in the extent to which there is a common set of definitions of the

problems and of the possible solutions to those problems. **This** set of factors will **be** in part a **function** of the knowledge intensity of the issues involved (Leeuw 1991). Some of these, **such** as nuclear power or **complex environmental** issues, have high thresholds of entry while others, **such** as education policy, appear **much** more open.

The participants in a policy network will be attempting to shape both the definition of the problem and the solutions (Rochefort and Cobb 1994; Schon and Rein 1994). Issues do not come to the public sector already **defined** and associated with particular government organizations that should resolve them. Rather, problem definition is a crucial part of the policy process and **can** often predetermine the outcome of the process if a **particular interest** is able to dominate. **One** of the classic cases of this is the way in which drug policy has been designed in **many** societies — that is, as a problem of **enforcement** rather than as a problem of education or social assistance.

Sabatier (1988; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993) has conceptualized the policy process as a learning process, with the various members of the policy networks vying to control the policy, using information as the major weapon for that **competition**. The members assume that policy **decisions** must come **about** through the use of ideas and information to persuade **decision** makers of the appropriateness of a position. Even if the **decision** **does not conform** with the *a priori* preferences of **one** or another of the actors, there **can** still be a **decision**, provided that **decision** **does not** go against fundamental values. If the **differences** are only in the derivatives from **core** ideas, then agreement **can** still be reached.

There are limits to the extent to which government **can** effectively utilize **private** sector policy analysis. Boston (1994), for example, points to the limits of contracting **out** policy analysis. Outside organizations do not have the commitment to solving problems that governments must have, nor do they have the continuing responsibility to the public. **Hence** they may be willing to give **advice** that is **clever** and/or fits with their particular perception of good policy, but then **can** simply walk away from **any** negative **consequences**. Further, in Westminster systems, norms **about** secrecy **may** prevent outside organizations from being effective participants in the policy process (Jarman and Kouzmin 1993).

The above **comments about the role of private** sector sources of information are not intended to deny the value of those sources. There is simply too **much** information being created by non-governmental sources to permit government to ignore them (see **Davidson** 1988). The sources of data and **advice** are not uniform, however, and thought needs to be given to the differential roles of universities, “think tanks” (whether tied to parties or **interest** groups or not), research **arms** of **interest** groups and trade associations, and a host of other sources. **All** of these sources **can** have value, so the principal point must be to tap all of them without becoming tied to **any one**, especially **one** with a particular ideological or **interest** group **connection**.

Contending Sources of Information

If we assume that good policy results from contending ideas and sources of information, then it is important for government to be able to structure those multiple sources in ways that **promote** effective policy making and learning. The Anglo-American tradition in epistemology and in law is that truth emerges from a **contest** (Sartori 1969; Kelman 1992) rather than from excessive **conformity**. The literature on organizational learning also points to the necessity to balance agreement and **conflict** in order to produce the best learning environment (Leeuw, Rist and Sonnichsen 1994). In particular, **Crossan, Lane** and Hildebrand (1991) argue that two variables — the degree of agreement on values and the extent of **preconceptions about the facts** of an issue and the processes — are crucial to explaining successful learning within **organizations**.¹⁴

In the scheme proposed by **Crossan et al.**, the best learning occurs when there is agreement on values but little **preconception** of the processes of **causation** occurring in the policy **area**. On the other hand, they argue that agreement on both values and **facts** will produce “group think” and a failure to consider a wide range of possible solutions to the problem at hand. Similarly, **differences** both in values and in models of **causation** lead to “contentious learning,” or perhaps no learning at all. Finally, when there is agreement on processes but not on values, then there is “**politicized**

learning” in which debates **over** the **basic** purposes of programs tend to prevent **any** real progress on addressing the issues underlying the policy.

The task for government in attempting to **enhance** its policy capacity is to try to make as **much** disparate information available as possible, within the **context** of broad agreement on goals. While it **may** be assumed that by virtue of being part of the **same** government the agreement on goals should be understood, that **may** not be the case. The problems of coordination, cross-cutting issues, and commitment to departmental and sub-departmental goals make **such** agreement difficult. Likewise, it **may** be difficult to generate a sufficiently wide range of ideas **about** policy when sources of information tend to be associated with the **same** organizational and **professional** barriers as those that differentiate goals (Michael 1993).

WHEN? IDENTIFYING TEMPORAL TARGETS FOR INFLUENCE

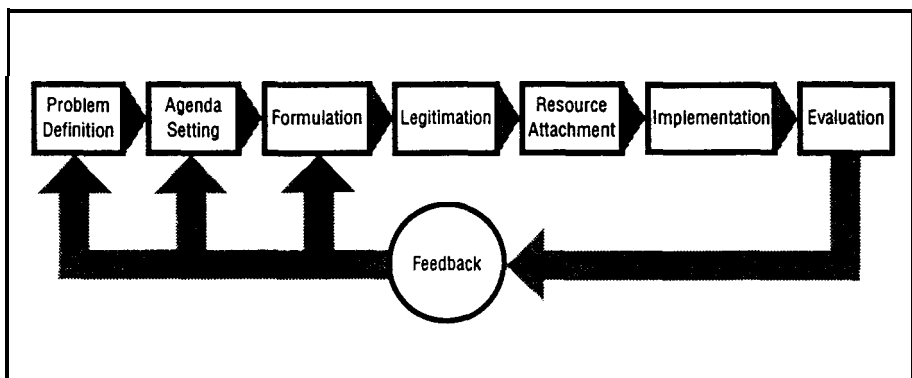
If policy capacity in government is to be enhanced and knowledge use improved, **choices will** have to be made **about** when and where to intervene. By **when** we are referring not so **much** to chronological time as to the stage of the policy process at which information and analytic capacity are most likely to be influential and are also most likely to alter the outcomes of the process for citizens. While it is conventional to think of analysis occurring primarily at the stage of formulation, there are a number of other points at which analysis and knowledge **can** be applied with good **effect**, and at these points there is frequently a greater need to apply these **resources** than is often understood.

It has become conventional in discussions of the policy process, **especially** when undertaken from a political science perspective, to think **about** a linear policy process beginning with problem identification and agenda setting and going through to evaluation and feedback (see Figure 2). That feedback then **can** be conceptualized as initiating another round of policy making, albeit under altered circumstances because of the previous cycle (Hogwood and Peters 1983; Starkie 1984). While this model of the process has a number of weaknesses if assumed to be identical to the “real” policy

process in government (Nakamura 1987; Sabatier 1991; deHaven-Smith 1988) it nonetheless is a **useful heuristic device** for looking at what must happen for policy to be made. It can also serve as a guide for the would-be policy maker concerning where to intervene in the process.

At the initial stage of the policy process, policy analysis is more useful than sometimes thought to be in terms of shaping and **defining** the nature of the problems being addressed. Problems do not come to government neatly **labelled** and ready to be **acted** upon by a clearly identifiable organization. Rather, most **policies** have to be created, or “framed,” through a social and political process (Best 1995; Schneider and Ingram 1993) and greater analytic **capacity** should be applied at this **early** stage of the process than is usually the case. Although problem definition is in some ways an **exercise** of political and organizational power (Dery 1984; Miller and Holstein 1993), it also **can** involve the **exercise** of analytic power, *even* if it is in the direct service of those political forces. For example, governments often do not know the **true** dimensions of problems such as drugs, spousal and **child** abuse, homelessness (Hopper 1991) or **AIDS** (Root-Bernstein 1993; Day and Klein 1989) when they **first** burst onto the policy **scene**.

Figure 2
Linear Model of the Policy Process



The Stage Of **formulating** responses to policy problems **and** those issues that are on an active **agenda**¹⁵ of government is **one** of the **usual** places at which **one expects** policy analysis to be employed, **and one** locus at which the policy capacity of government is most important. **Governments** attempt to develop an **efficient** and effective **means** of solving the problems that they **have** decided are worthy of public attention. The difficulty is to make this stage of the process **open** to analysis and to the **input** of **career** public servants. Increasingly, formulation **decisions** — especially if they are to be more than **incremental** adjustments — are political and ideological and **may** require (or even permit) a minimum of analytical **input**.

If the **logic** of competing sources of information and analysis is taken seriously, then at the legitimation stage there **may** be a need for independent sources of analysis for the legislature. In most parliamentary regimes there has been some attempt to develop more capable and independent **legisla-**tures (Norton 1993; Olson 1992). Legislatures have built this capacity through separate analytical bodies, more adequately funded and staffed auditing bodies, and enhanced staffing for legislative committees. While legislatures still have less access to information and less analytic capacity than cabinets and ministers, in **many** cases they now have some alternative to simply accepting the information and analysis offered to them by the bureaucracy.

The stage of legitimation also **may** be the most important for **resolving** horizontal issues in government. Cabinet and Parliament are the locales at which horizontal issues must be resolved, given the difficulty of getting individual departments and ministers to give up their own influence **over** some aspects of horizontal issues. Further, if analysis is indeed a **significant** force in resolving these horizontal issues, then the application of those techniques becomes essential. There will be difficulty, however, in **interject-**ing analysis into settings that are already highly **charged politically** and are also dependent upon other forms of analysis, as **noted above by** Chelimsky.

Implementation is often considered to **be the** stage of **the** policy process least amenable to the **input** of analysis and **also the** aspect of **the** process that appears least directly related to the “policy capacity” Of government. **Implementation** frequently is considered **to be simply** the **basic** work of administering a program, a management **rather than** a policy question. **That**

is an obvious overstatement of the position, yet the case must be made for the place of implementation studies (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Goggin 1987) in the analysis of policy capacity. There appear to be several relevant points about the role of implementation in building policy capacity. First, implementation suggests another way of thinking about the problem of horizontal government. One way to resolve horizontal policy issues is to press for their resolution from the centre of government, but the other way would be to have service delivery coordinated in the field, through implementation. Service providers in the field would have to be empowered, and encouraged, from the centre if this form of coordination is to occur, but it is another means of addressing certain types of horizontal issues.

Another way in which implementation feeds into the policy capacity of governments, other than the obvious one — the necessity of having a program delivered — is in the initial design of the program. We argued previously that feasibility concerns can have an excessive influence over policy, but the opposite problem, that feasibility and implementation will be ignored by the centre when it is designing programs, can also arise. In federal systems this might involve ignoring the necessity of taking the needs and capacities of the provinces (states) into account. Any attempt to create a program without adequate concern for its implementation is unlikely to produce effective policies.

WHERE? IDENTIFYING INSTITUTIONAL TARGETS FOR INFLUENCE

In addition to identifying the points in the process that are most amenable to intervention, it is important to consider the differential capacity of various institutions to utilize information effectively. As has been implied, it is customary, and usually correct, to view the public bureaucracy as the most capable organization for generating and using information. Further, other government institutions (Parliament, for example) tend to be working at a severe disadvantage when attempting to make use of information, given that they often lack the time, skills and/or organizational supports needed to process information for policy decisions.

Legislatures, despite attempts to **enhance** their capacity to gather **and** analyze information, still tend to work at a disadvantage. Even political **executives** tend to rely upon their public service colleagues rather **than** develop alternative sources of information. This is not to **say** that the information from the public service is wrong or biased, but only that independent **checks may** be desirable.

The Role of the Senior Civil Service

Added to the general waning of policy capacity in the system is the sense that senior **civil** servants have become less capable of influencing the course of policy decisions. This diminished influence, in turn, **can** be taken to some extent to **constitute** an erosion of the policy capacity of government in itself. That is, if senior public servants are not being used to **channel** the ideas and information from their department upward to **ministers**, some of the capacity of the system to make good decisions has **been** eliminated. This is not to **say** that **career officials** in cabinet departments are the only, or even necessarily the best, source of **advice** and **ideas** for policy makers. They are, however, **one** major source, and for some policy **areas** in which the public sector tends to have a virtual **monopoly, they may** well be the most important **resource**.

The changes in the policy roles of senior public servants, whether real or assumed, **can** be attributed to several **factors**. **One is, as** noted previously, the fundamental change in the nature of **governance**. **Ideology and** political allegiance appear to have become more important for **gaining** influence **over** policy than is the **command** of the relevant information that might be needed for **making** "good policy." **The creation** Of **politically** appointed officials to "shadow" top **career officials** in Canada **and elsewhere** is **one** indication of this change (Plasse 1992). **Associated with the** politicization of policy has been the spread of the **ideology of managerialism** in the public sector and with it an emphasis **on the managerial role, as opposed** to the **policy advisor role**, of senior public servants in **industrialized** democracies (Pollitt 1990; Massey 1993).

Further, given that **much** of the task of policy **advice** has been assumed by non-career appointees, the **career** public servants are often left in the role of “brokers,” attempting to **create** coalitions **around** their department’s policies rather than directly influencing the contents of those policies (Aucoin 1988). In the good old days of policy making there was a greater emphasis on strategic **decision** making and an orientation toward long-term **policy**.¹⁶ It **can** be argued, then, that there has been a fundamental role reversal in the manner in which policy is made. According to the traditional model, senior public servants were the source of policy **advice** and it was they who funnelled ideas from the department upward to ministers. The ministers (and **any** political staff they had) then managed those ideas and created the necessary coalitions to have them adopted. It now appears that the policies are settled at the political level and **much** of the brokerage is being performed by the civil service (Campbell 1988).

Even though the senior civil service **may** have been somewhat disempowered by **recent** political changes, the public bureaucracy still has a major role to play in making policy and in applying information to the construction of that policy. If we remember that the majority of **decisions** in government are not made by legislatures or even by senior public servants, then the importance of other levels of the public bureaucracy becomes evident. In particular, the process of writing **secondary** legislation is a crucial and often overlooked aspect of policy that involves the direct application of data and information. Most legislation **coming** from parliaments or other legislatures tends to emerge as broad enabling **acts**, with the details being **filled** in by the bureaucracy (Kerwin 1994; Bryner 1987). Often that process of **coming** up with “regulations” requires using **advice** and knowledge in order to make appropriate **decisions**.

Policy Analysis in Legislatures

Policy analysis has found a less **comfortable** place in legislative bodies, especially those in parliamentary regimes. Parliaments have tended to rely on their cabinets (and therefore the civil service) for analysis. If, however, parliaments do want to have an independent source of analysis and policy **capacity**, they must develop some mechanisms for this **activity**. The **basic**

need is to create “counterbureaucracies” **that can compete** with the **the bureaucracy** in providing advice. **These organizations, internal to parliaments, can be** designed to **provide a different, perhaps sceptical,** view of the **policy proposals** being advanced from cabinets and ministers.

Those counterbureaucracies can be **created** either for Parliament as a whole or for parts of Parliament, for **example by** expanding the **powers** of committees and their staffs. As is often the case, either of these **strategies will** encounter some difficulties. An organisation that **provides** analysis to the legislature as a whole **can provide** broader **advice** to parliaments **but** runs the risk of being too broad and therefore unable to **focus** enough analytic power on **any** particular issue to be able to compete with the bureaucracy. On the other hand, dividing the analytic **capacity** among a number of different committees **runs** the risk of **merely** replicating **the** stovepipes that have dominated **policy** making, usually not in an entirely **beneficial** manner. **Thus,** analysis needs to **be** focused **yet** capable of working horizontally.

WHY? THE USES OF POLICY ANALYSIS

The final **consideration** concerning the application of analysis and knowledge is *why* the analysis is applied to a **particular** question. The instrumentalist assumption would be that the **purpose** is **indeed** to make the **policy** better, and that the analysis is involved in the **creation** of the **policy decision**. In this view, analysis and **advice** are at the service of **rational** **policy** makers who perceive their task to **be** that of **creating** the best possible solution to a clearly and objectively defined problem in society.

The alternative assumption is that the real use of **policy** analysis is really for the *ex post* justification of **decisions that have** been made for other reasons. In this view policy analysis is not a **fully** objective “science” but rather is more of an art, and is definitely more politicized than **one might expect** a more scientific enterprise to be (Wildavsky 1979). Policy analysis is simply employed after the **fact** to **provide** the rationalization of **decisions** that have been made for other, usually more **political, reasons**. Science is

not important **here**, and in fact **may** be an impediment to the **implementa-**tion of **policies** that are perceived to be necessary and desirable on other grounds.

The justification of decisions through policy analysis **may** have several relevant targets. At the **first level**, analysis **can** be utilized to justify **decisions** made by the bureaucracy and the political executive to the legislature. Even in parliamentary governments a Parliament **can exercise** some **inde-**pendent **scrutiny** of decisions, and therefore it is important for the executive to **provide** legislators with convincing justifications for its policy **choices**. In addition, governments must be able to justify their decisions to the public, whether the mass public or the more attentive and organized public in the for-m of **interest** groups. No amount of analysis is likely to satisfy a group which is losing some important **benefit** for its members, but it **does** make the **decision** appear less **arbitrary**. Further, the sense of rational **consideration** in itself **can** be important for making it appear that **govern-**ment is not simply making decisions to suit its own values and interests.

VII

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion has pointed to several major points necessary to build, or rebuild, greater policy capacity in government. The **first** is that the issues with which government must **contend** are becoming increasingly **difficult to manage**. Governments **cannot** determine what issues **will** be presented to them or in what **form** they **will** be presented, but they **can** develop the mechanisms for managing cross-cutting issues and making government work better in a horizontal manner. This management **may** involve either the construction of issues in a way that permits their being processed in a more integrated fashion or the development of institutional mechanisms to resolve **any conflicts**.

A second dominant change that tends to diminish the policy capacity of government is the general erosion of the public service. This has been true in several ways. First, the politicization of governing and the declining real rewards of participation by public servants has **caused many** senior **executives** to leave government and has reduced the influence of those who remain. Also, there have been several lost generations of younger public servants, especially trained policy analysts, who **could** supply ideas and analysis to **decision** makers. This further implies the loss of a potential cadre of future senior managers who would have been trained to think analytically **about** policy matters.

A third general **factor** has been the replacement of policy analysis with political **advice**. Even in cases where policy analysis still plays a role, it

tends to be **unidirectional** and driven by **political rather than analytical** values. If, indeed, better policies do **emerge from a contest over** values and an **open debate**, then the premature closing of the **policy process** to more diverse views is less likely to produce “good” policy. **This closure may come about** if only a restricted number of **views** are sought on **the** issues; it may also result from a process that involves only those **actors associated** with a particular stovepipe.

Fourth, the **increasing** variability and integration of policy issues requires more flexible and creative **forms** of intervention. **Thus**, to **build** the policy capacity of government **may** require the adoption of instruments that respond to a wider range of conditions on the **target** variable than do the policy instruments **developed** for a more stable world (Linder and Peters 1989a). The instruments with which governments intervene have a number of important economic, political and ethical **consequences**, and the capacity to intervene effectively **will** be significantly **related** to **successful policy** making.

Finally, the policy process and policies themselves must be **seen** as socially constructed rather than as naturally occurring sets of issues and solutions. The process of **defining** problems and placing them on the agenda of government is perhaps the most important manner in which organizations **contend** for power **over** policy. Further, the construction of issues in certain ways makes them more or less amenable to solutions, solutions that **lead** to greater coordination with other programs and make possible the application of knowledge. Building policy capacity therefore **may** require starting rather **early** in the policy process, **and** assuming that issues need to be framed before they **can** be solved.

In summary, there is **evidence** that the capacity of governments to make and implement policy has been diminishing **over** the **past several** years. **This** appears to contradict the perception that a number of reform efforts in **European** and **North American** governments **have** been extremely **successful**. These reforms have succeeded in reshaping the public sector itself, but in some ways have reduced the capacity of government **by eroding** the quality and confidence of the public service in **many systems**, **and** eliminating the ability of governments to respond to policy **problems** (as **opposed** to administrative problems) in creative ways. The public sector **may be** more **efficient**, and even that is not certain, but it almost certainly is not more effective.

NOTES

1. The nostalgia **about** the good old days **may** be overstated, but there is certainly some objective **difference** between then and now.
2. At the extreme are theorists (Luhmann 1990; in t'**Veld** 1991) who argued for "self-referential systems" in which society **will** always seek to avoid control and **will** be able to **evade** control. In **such** a model of the world policy becomes to some extent an impossibility, *or* at best the residual of largely individual **choices**.
3. The possible exception is Norway which has been running a budgetary surplus because of **oil** and gas revenues.
4. This is not only advocated by "impractical" academics. Franklin Delano Roosevelt practised **such** a strategy **during** the New Deal Era, and Bill Clinton has advocated experimentation for problems of job training for which there are few effective **models** of intervention.
5. Samuel Huntington (1974) argued that the increasing **complexity** of **govern-**ment programs, **combined** with the participatory ethos, would produce growing public disaffection. The public is generally more capable of **partici-**pating but the technical content of programs and their interconnections makes effective participation less likely.
6. For a general discussion of the role of the public service in making policy conceptualized in the **same** manner, see Peters (1985).
7. They are, however, frequently selected because of more general managerial and **executive** skills.

8. Even the military, which is thought to be somewhat better organized than the rest of government, frequently has its own internal **conflicts** and absence of coordination (Allard 1990; Ponting 1986, 98-99).
9. **Many older** social programs such as pensions have a simple model of **causation** and an effective methodology for delivery. **As** governments enter policy **areas** with more **complex** models of **causation**, for example, **family** policy or **addiction**, there is **substantial** disagreement **about** causes and modes of intervention. Even the methodology of **education** has become more **problematic**.
10. Analogous to Niskanen's (1971) models of **bureaucratic** bargaining, **private** sector actors **may bargain** with government, trading information for influence **over the decisions**.
11. Dror argues that "fuzzy **gambling**" is most **common** in foreign and defence policy issues where the behaviour of the adversary is **largely** an unknown.
12. The U.S. Department of Defense, for example, found it desirable to **create** **several** quasi-private "think tanks," **such** as the Rand Corporation, **specializing** in defence policy issues in order to have some independent views of the issues in this **area**.
13. There has been **considerable** debate **over the terms** to be used and the **conceptualizations** of these terms. In general, "community" implies greater agreement on problems and solutions than **does** the term "network."
14. For a not dissimilar typology of policy making, see Thompson and Tuden (1957).
15. It has become **conventional** to distinguish between the systemic agenda of all the issues that government has **accepted** as matters of public policy and the active institutional agendas that **include only** those issues under **consideration** at the time.
16. It is easy to romanticize **about** this period but it **does appear** that there was more of a strategic orientation in policy (see **Aberbach** and **Rockman** 1989). That was, of course, **facilitated** by the (relative) **availability** of funding for programs.

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