



# Policy Skills and Social Policy

*By Judith Maxwell*

*Canadian Policy Research Networks*

*for*

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# A social transformation

- I plan to jump right into this discussion to talk about:
  - What has changed
  - How policy making has changed
  - Implications for policy skills
- My perspective is from policy research angle -- speaking as an idea peddler
- I will begin with three big policy shifts -- in goals, needs, and complexity



# Changing goals

- Canadian values and goals have changed in response to technology, economic forces, and changing demographics
- The new focus is on
  - a) supporting people to become self-reliant
  - b) building social and economic bridges across the major divides and life course transitions
  - c) healthy human development across the life course



# Changing needs

- The needs of middle class and vulnerable Canadians have altered. A new balance is required between income security and social services
- a) With two parents working, child care is an essential service -- at all income levels
- b) Low paid work raises the importance of affordable housing
- c) Ageing relatives need personal supports and companionship



# More complexity

- Policy issues are now “horizontal” -- crossing departmental (e.g. innovation), disciplinary, and jurisdictional boundaries
  - a) Federal government has many income instruments, few services
  - b) Provinces provide services and income
  - c) Municipalities provide soft services as well as the hard services of transport, housing etc
  - d) No one is taking ownership of affordable housing
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# How we make policy

- Policy communities have expanded -- there are more public, private, and non profit actors on every issue
- Decisions are made at inter-governmental tables or in highly centralized PMO's
- Information and ideas flow through multiple channels -- especially the Internet
  - Stakeholders/interest groups are well-organized
- And the Internet enables non profit actors to mobilize around an issue in new ways



# Policy skills

- Three types
  - Organizing the information base
  - Analytical skills
  - Influencing decisions



# Organizing the information

- Being clear on what is known and what is not known -- more "grey literature", less transparency
- Identifying the right "paradigm"
  - The different ways of conceiving the issues
  - Key insights come from convergence of disciplines
- Networking with the other players to bring the right skills to bear on the issue
- Tracking what governments are doing and what programs cost



# Analytical skills

- More focus on comparative analysis
- High demand for good synthesis (so many disciplines and silos)
- New longitudinal data
- Defining and measuring outcomes -- the biggest challenge ahead -- to support performance management, transparency
- Tracking value shifts



# Influencing decisions

- New arts of dissemination and knowledge transfer: the need for imagery/sound bites
  - The Internet is a key engine
  - The national media will be the last to participate
- Identify who needs to know
  - Recognizing that people change jobs often, so excellent contact can disappear overnight
- . . . and the best channel to reach those people



# Closing comments

- Making policy is far more complex than it used to be
- More players, more information, more paradigms, more disciplines
- Speed of change and short reaction times





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