

**There's More to Policy Than Alignment:
or
*Cultivating Capacity, Brokering Insight, and
Fostering Appropriate Expectations in Results-
Driven and Loosely-coupled Governance
Environments***

***The Future of Policy Capacity in
Canada***

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Introduction

- **The program restructuring by governments of the early 1990s almost seems a distant memory...**
 - Renewed interest and reinvestment in policy capacity
 - Performance regimes create focus on implementation
 - Greater awareness of horizontal quality of issues
 - Re-emerging of evidence-informed policy movement
 - Continuous increase in think tanks, centres, and consultants
 - The internet dramatically increases access to external work
- **A positive story, but we also hear**
 - Less demand for genuine policy analysis
 - Governments tend to be more controlling of information
 - Ministers and deputy ministers lament lack of good policy advice
 - Funding remains a big issue for many think tanks and centres



Overview of Discussion Paper

1. The Paradox of Policy Analysis: Alignment and Innovation
2. Another Paradox: Re-Investment in Policy Research or Investment at Risk?
3. Perspectives to Animate Strategic Dialogue
4. Capturing the Policy Research Topography: Some Frameworks to Consider
5. Conclusion: Some Suggestions to Consider (and Debate)



1. The Paradox of Policy Analysis: Alignment and Innovation

- **Analysts and Observers: Bottom-Up, Outside Looking-In**
 - Unease about the quality of analysis supplied
 - Governments are more directed about options considered
 - Policy work is to be “aligned” with top government priorities
 - Buttressed by performance regimes and “deliverables”
 - Reliance on a few “go to” staff – “rare talent” lost or outside
 - Lean policy units and little time to address complex policy issues
- **Ministers and Executives: Top-Down, Forward-Looking**
 - Deputy ministers are looking for high-quality policy advice
 - Much interesting work and insight occurs in different disciplines
 - Executives respond to ST demands but anticipate LT directions in the context of fluid, rapidly-changing & uncertain environments
 - Perplexity about state of knowledge advice on existing programs and emerging horizontal issues, and lack of contextualization



2. Another Paradox: Re-Investment in Policy Research or Investment at Risk?

- **Exemplar for Policy-Relevant Research?**
 - Following Program Review, a re-investment in PRI (1997)
 - Statistics Canada, Canada Research Chairs, council funding
 - SSHRC (as KC): Trends, MCRIIs, SKCs, CURAs, Metroplis, etc.
 - More applied policy research at universities and communications
 - Increase in think tanks and consulting firms doing policy work
- **Thinness of Distributed Policy Expertise**
 - How does Canada compare the US or European capabilities?
 - Foundations rarely support applied policy research projects
 - Government commitment to multi-year policy research tenuous
 - Support for PRI and CRC initiatives has waned
 - More think tanks, research centres and policy schools ≠ capacity
 - Heavy reliance on consultants → can serve to reduce capacity
 - Attenuated ability of gov't policy units to digest and shape work

3. Perspectives to Frame and Animate Strategic Dialogue

- A key problem when engaging in these discussions is inappropriate expectations and lack of precise language
- Here are several concepts the paper introduces:
 - Loose-coupling and serendipity
 - Shifting needs of policy-makers
 - Exploration vs. exploitation
 - Beyond contestability in policy analysis
 - Non-alignment and creativity
 - The importance of capacity and “slack”
 - Are networks a panacea?
- Policy analysis & research can be seen as informational prospecting and inherently risky investments, potentially yielding future insight, building of earlier investments



The Central Implication to Consider

- Rather than focus on perfecting “spot markets” and fostering more work for exploitation, forward-looking policy-makers and top officials should find ways to
 - increase scanning,
 - broaden networks,
 - generate or protect organizational slack, and
 - create requisite capacity
- ...to address emerging policy challenges in parallel with more “aligned” advice and research in support of current and emerging decisions.

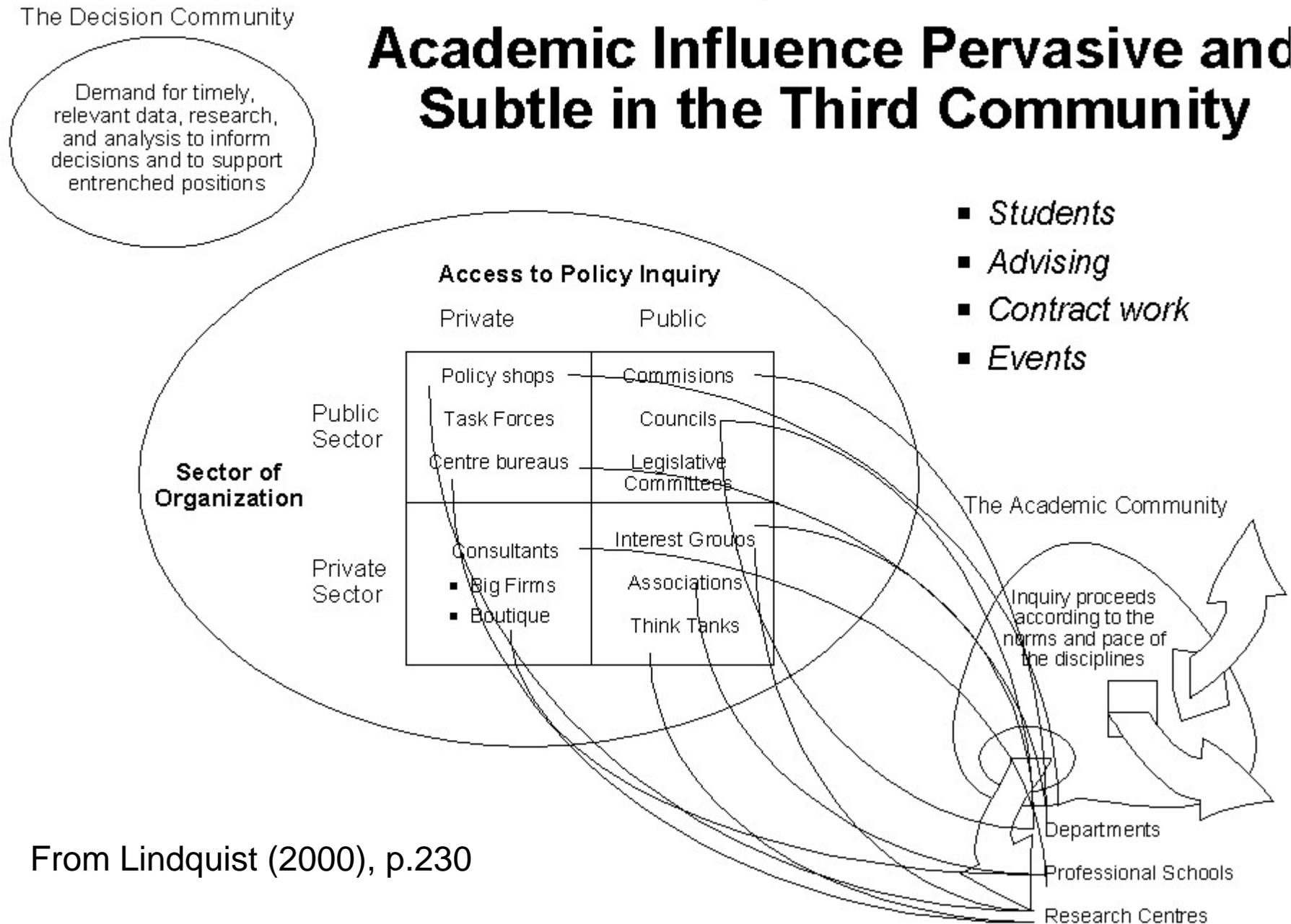


4. Capturing the Policy Research Topography: Some Frameworks

- How can we link the ideas about the many intersections between research, analysis and policy-making with the complexity of distributed capabilities inside and outside governments?
- There is a significant literature on research utilization and the knowledge-into-policy process
- Here are three examples of frameworks to consider....

Figure 1

Academic Influence Pervasive and Subtle in the Third Community



From Lindquist (2000), p.230

Figure 2
CHSFR Evidence-Based
Decision Making Map
 (Adapted from Canadian
 Health Services Research
 Foundation 2000)

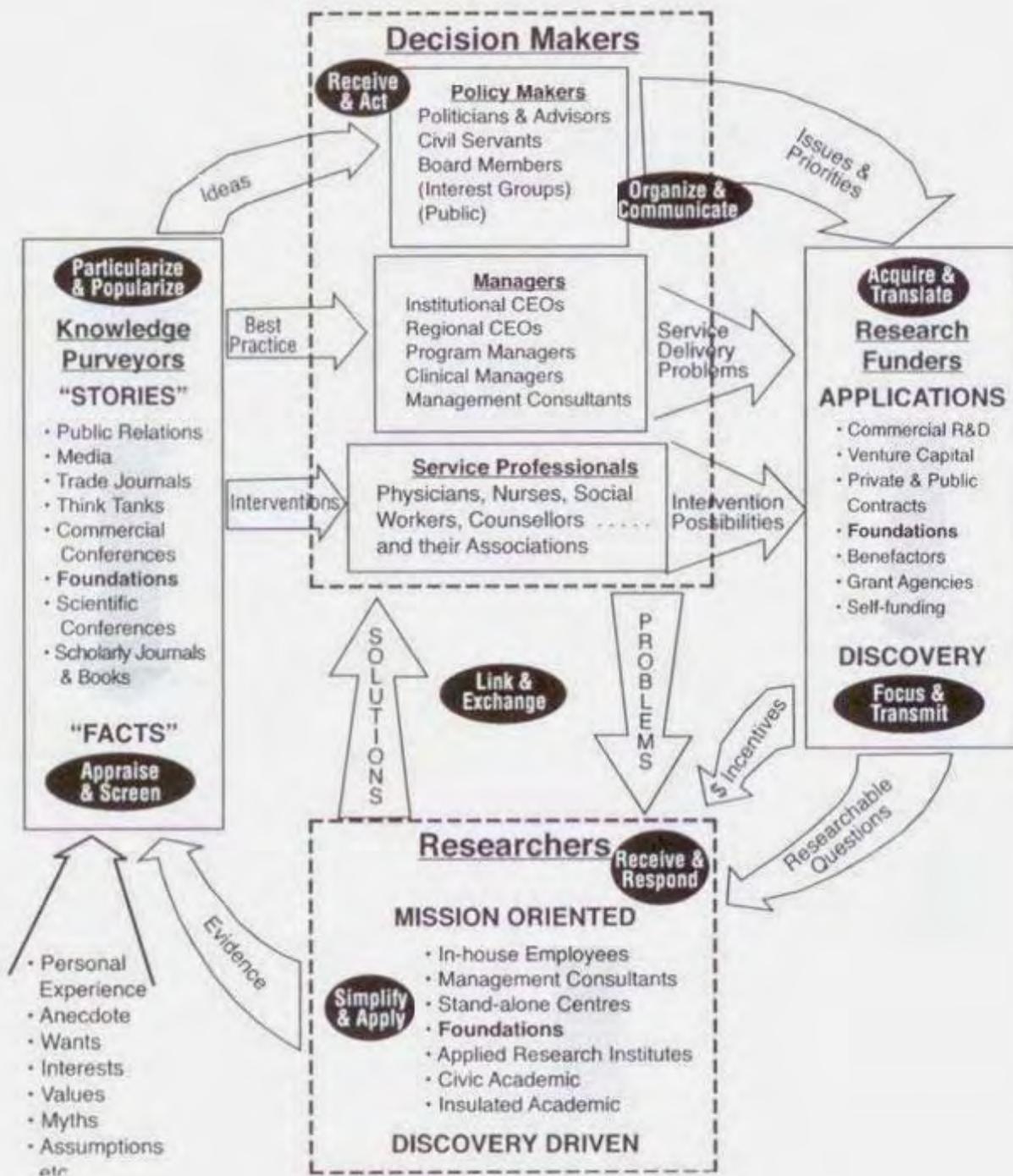
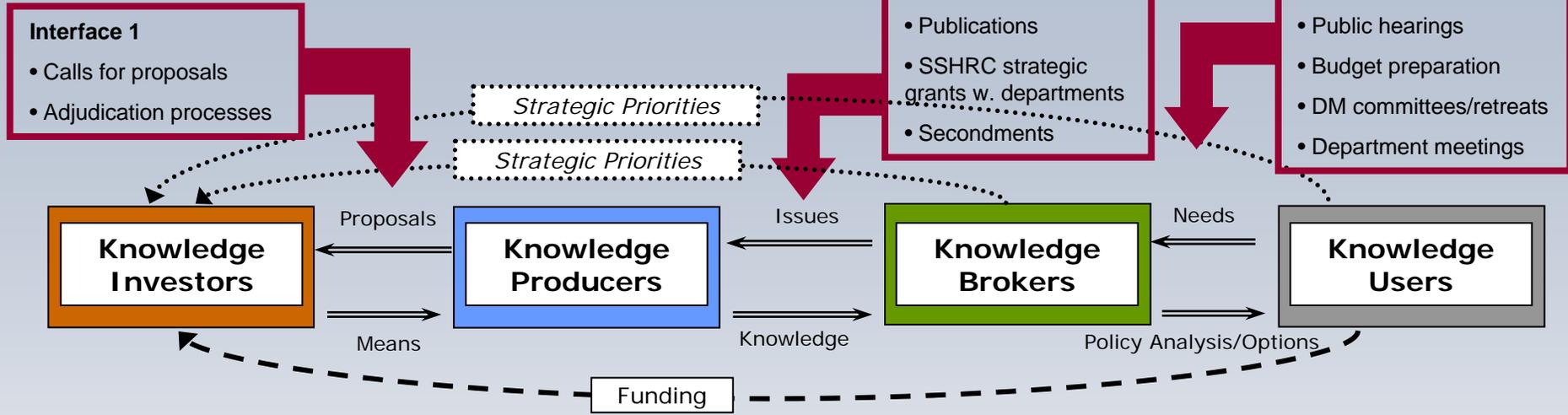


Figure 3 – The Research/Policy Web: Investment, Brokerage, Deliberation



P R O D U C T S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants Contracts Contributions Core Funding Priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concepts Data Identify trends Analysis Empirical evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problems/issues Synthesis Interpretation Recommendations Studies/events Policy frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic policy direction Policy design Citizen engagement Budget Legislation 	
	Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental bases Granting agencies (e.g. SSHRC, CIHR, CFI) Foundations Budget allocations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department policy research branches Statistics Canada Federal intermediaries Provincial intermediaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department policy research branches (federal/provincial) Research partnership (e.g. Metropolis) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliament Cabinet/Ministers Senior government officials Policy designers
	External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private foundations Private donations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University Scholars Univ. Research Centres Think Tanks International orgs. (e.g. OECD, ILO, UN) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media NGOs/Advocates Think Tanks Private consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other governments NGOS/Advocates General public

A synthesis and adaptation of three figures from Manson Singer (2007)

Assessments of These Frameworks

- The frameworks do not capture very well “the weather systems, prevailing winds and currents, or tidal action at work among the institutional islands”:
 - the fluid, serendipitous and loosely-coupled linkages
 - how enlightenment affects perceptions of actors over time
 - the shifting needs of policy-makers
 - how different decision regimes constrain & foster information use
 - the parallel processes of exploration and exploitation
 - the competition in analysis and research...and from “noise”
 - the extent of capacity and slack required, and role of networks
- Funding policy research is better understood as “venture capital” for firms, where few “investments” succeed – we need to look at such investment as a portfolio strategy
- Assessing such complexity cannot be done in aggregate: better to approach at the “meso” or “policy network” level



Conclusion: Some Suggestions to Consider (and Debate)

- Granting councils, foundations, think tanks, and universities are doing better with resources at hand...
 - Will changes in *Income Tax Act* have the desired effect?
 - Increase in brokerage, but is this sufficient in scope and level?
- Remains a need for more exchange and exploration among policy-makers and researchers...
 - This is best done at the sector or policy community level
 - Include more actors in “transition-style” government scanning, including foundations and philanthropists
 - Emphasize exploration, but will lead to exploitation opportunities
- Federal and provincial DMs have convening power and considerable incentive to do so



Some More Suggestions to Consider (and Discuss)

- There are many problem-specific research partnerships
 - These should be enumerated even if difficult to do so
 - They not be confused with exploration activities
 - Getting expectations in order about yields from partnerships
- Increasing “receptor” capacity
 - Creating dedicated bureaucratic units for this purpose
 - Providing more staff with time to scan, explore, and interact

Some More Suggestions to Consider (and Discuss)

- Key traps for government to avoid...
 - Don't institutionalize such brokerage around narrow issues
 - Don't think universities are good at bridging disciplinary divides
 - Don't think that exploration events for groups is a "free good"
- Loosely-coupled environment does not mean avoiding monitoring or performance – but with right expectations

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