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Things worth sharing in 2018

A major theme of the work done by the **Public Service Research Group** at UNSW Canberra is to not only undertake research but to use it to inform both policy making and implementation. As a consequence we often publish in non-academic forums, especially in The Mandarin and a blog called the Power to Persuade. This short booklet presents some of the key contributions we have made this year in order to highlight the range and scope of the things we do.



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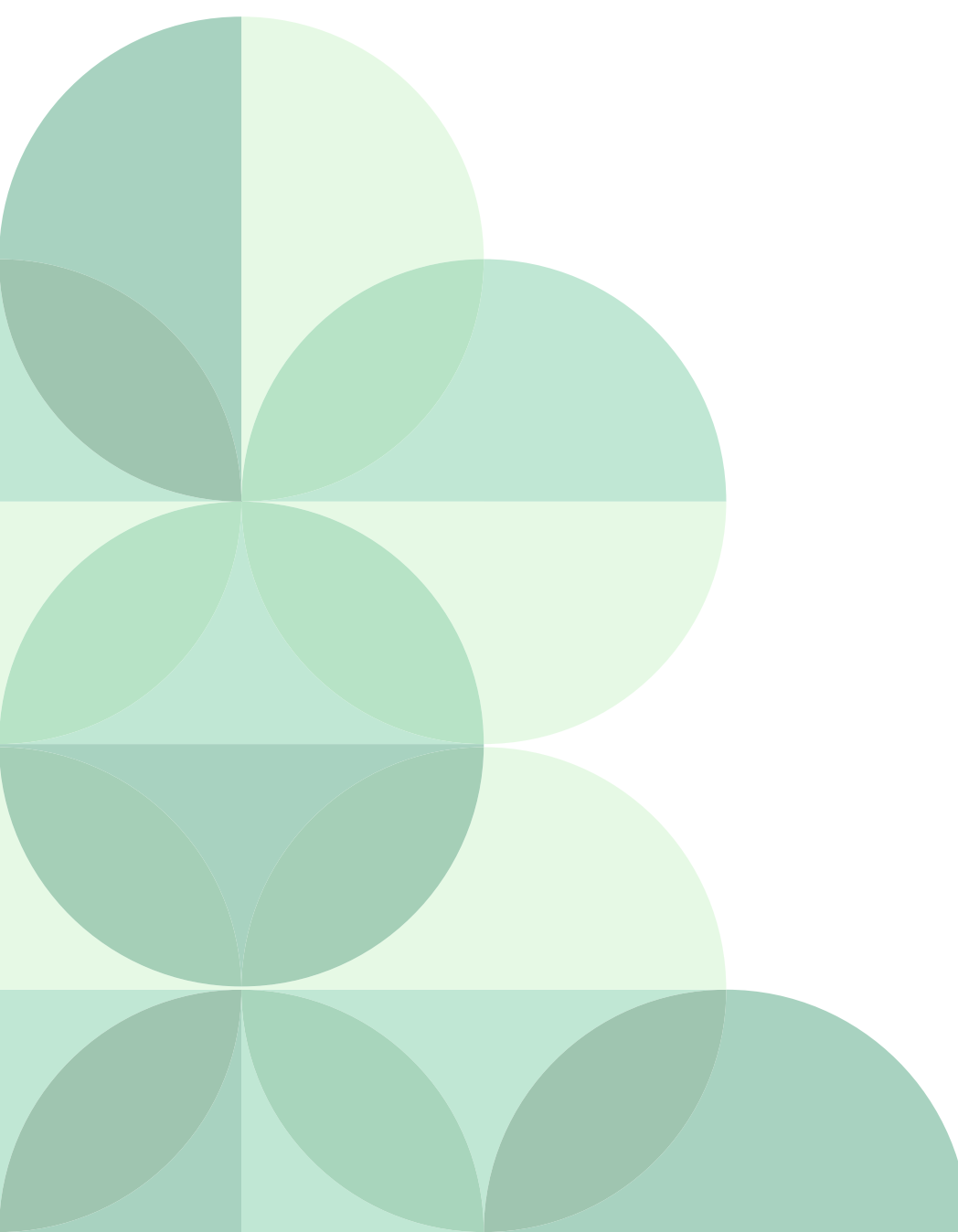


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'YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOT 'TIL IT'S GONE': THE IMPLICATIONS OF EXPANDING THE USE OF ROBOTS IN CARE SERVICES

Published online February 7, 2018

An ANZSOG-funded research project is exploring the increasing use of robots in care services to replace or complement the roles of humans. In this article, researchers Helen Dickinson, Nicole Carey, Catherine Smith and Gemma Carey explore some of the long-term implications for governments from the rise of robots.

The rise in number of citizens needing government-provided care services and advances in technology make it inevitable that robots will play a far greater role in care services, including services most of us will access at some point in our lives (e.g. education and health) and those that only a small proportion of the population will access (e.g. disability services or prison).

Since at least the 1970s, many countries have experienced significant changes in relation to care services. Groups needing care services are increasing in numbers, becoming older, have greater levels of disability and chronic illness and higher expectations about the quality of services that should be delivered. At the same time, care services are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit appropriate workforces.

Horizon-scanners and futurists have told us for some time that robots will play a larger part in our everyday lives and will replace some of us in our current jobs. For all the attention that these kinds of predictions have gained in the media, many of us have not seen quite the dramatic changes promised. However, a combination of forces including technological development, pressures for governments to contain costs and rising public expectations mean that we will likely see greater use of robots across many more facets of public services in the coming years. Our research examines the implications of this for the delivery of care services and the role that government should play in stewarding these innovations.

Robots are already here

Robots already have a number of applications in the provision of care services broadly defined. Applications include manual tasks such as transporting goods, meals, linens (e.g. Robocart), conducting surgery (e.g. ZEUS), dispensing medication (e.g. CONSYS), checking on residents of residential homes and sensing for fall hazards (e.g. SAM), providing rehabilitation (e.g. Hand of Hope), as learning tools in the classroom (e.g. NAO, Pepper), as a virtual assistant for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (Nadia) and also for social interaction (e.g. Zorobot, PARO, Mathilda).

Advancements in Artificial Intelligence mean that many new care applications will take on more advanced roles which aim to combine the execution of particular tasks along with social functions, where these technologies learn about individuals from previous interactions. One of the first tasks of our research project is to develop a typology of robots in care services that can provide a way of differentiating between these different technologies and their functions.

Can Machines Really Care?

Some of the developments in care robotics will undoubtedly drive efficiencies, improve some services and outcomes for those using these. However, others may bring unanticipated or unintended consequences. As MIT Professor Sherry Turkle argues, we need to consider the human value of different care activities and whether it maintains this value if it is carried out by a machine. There is a risk that if we do not suitably consider what tasks are being substituted by technology then we could inadvertently lose some of the

value in the delivery system.

As an example of these issues, the greatest recent expansion of applications in aged care is in the social domain, seeking to reduce social isolation. Robots such as Matilda are being used to engage people with dementia, through play, dancing, and making Skype calls to family members. Some of these robots have sensors so they can detect aspects of individuals' emotions and daily schedules and use this data to interact with people in a way that is perceived as consistent with the act of caring. Other robots, such as ElliQ, aim to serve monitoring, communication and well-being purposes, that aim to keep older people living independently for longer and as a means of maintaining engagement with their family and friends.

In these applications, we believe there is a need to investigate a number of these factors in more detail. One facet of this might be the implications of surveillance in private/public geographies of care. Although it may seem a helpful development to be able to monitor people in their homes, what are some of the implications for privacy and security? Moreover, does surveillance equate to care that might be provided in situ?

There is a substantial literature arguing that care is a reciprocal activity, not simply something that is done to a person, so what might be lost if care is carried out by a machine? Additionally, we need to consider the embodied experience of touch and expression of care, and what the trade-offs are in safety and security for the cared-for in the different iterations of these arrangements.

Working To Protect The Rights Of Vulnerable Groups

Many of these applications seem helpful ways to prevent social isolation in aged care and disability services, yet in other spaces there have been significant concerns expressed surrounding their application. In the US, similar technology that is being used in nursing homes to connect older people to families and friends has been rolled out to an estimated 600 prisons across the country, where in-person visits have either been significantly restricted or stopped entirely, in favor of video calls.

While the prisons cite security concerns, experts and public alike have deemed it inhumane and counter-productive. There are important differences in the prison and nursing home examples (although both constitute different forms of care). In the latter families and friends do not just Skype but physically inhabit an avatar in the same room and this is intended to supplement and not replace face-to-face contact.

Yet there are also worrying similarities, in both public framing and recipient demographics. Both groups are psychologically and physically vulnerable, and prone to social exclusion. Both groups are likely to be in need of training or therapy programs which can be mediated digitally or in-person. And while both technologies are presented to the public as a way of increasing family connection, they're sold to the purchasers (prison and nursing home administrators, or government departments) as cost-saving measures.

There might be nothing new in this, but it means that there is an important balance to be maintained in stewarding these technologies to ensure that we can open additional avenues for social inclusion and communication, without decreasing or offering an excuse to multiply the barriers in front of physical interaction. This is where governments play an important role as stewards of technologies, developing guidelines, recommendations, and legal baselines. Our project will be a step in supporting this endeavor.

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THE POLITICS OF THE PROBLEM: HOW TO USE CAROL BACCHI'S WORK

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In 1991 Carol Bacchi comprehensively introduced poststructuralism and social constructionism to policy studies with her book *Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems*. It detailed an approach called 'What's the problem represented to be?' and offers a different way of conceptualizing and understanding policy. Whilst usual approaches tend to treat policy as axiomatic or self-evident, Bacchi's challenges the privileging of all forms of expertise and knowledge. For Bacchi, approaches to policy studies are 'inherently political' and need to be treated as such. Her approach comes from a feminist understanding that every issue affects the lives of women. She seeks to shift attention to policies as constituting competing representations of political issues, by focusing on the discourse that surrounds them (defined as the language, concepts and categories used in the framing of issues).

For Bacchi, research is never simply descriptive of a 'problem' or issue, it's always political. The relationship between participation, knowledge and power is pivotal, and leads to critical questions regarding not only what kind of knowledge is considered relevant for policy processes, but also who may legitimately speak. Bacchi's approach foregrounds and calls attention to the need to analyze how dynamics of power operate in policy making processes, especially given the historic tendency to marginalise those from affected communities. The 'WPR' approach serves as a necessary interruption to the presumption that 'problems' are fixed and uncontroversial starting points for policy development, and it reminds us that the banal and vague notion of 'the problem' and its partner 'the solution' are heavily laden with meaning.

As a methodology, WPR opens up a range of questions that are seldom addressed in other approaches and offers a framework for examining gaps and silences in policy debates by interrogating what remains unproblematized in certain representations. In answering each of the above questions, context is paramount. This is because 'problems' are often constituted differently due to location-specific, institution-specific and history-specific factors. To date, Bacchi's approach has been used analyse pay equity, antidiscrimination legislation, affirmative action policy, education, child care, abortion, sexual harassment, children and domestic violence, inclusive development and disability mainstreaming, gender and education, food security, gendered evidence in family law, problem solving courts, addiction, mental illness and impairment among others. The approach primarily revolves around 6 guiding questions outlined below.

Question	Goal
1 What's the problem of (eg. domestic violence, abortion, etc.) represented to be in a specific policy?	To identify the implied problem representation in specific policies
2 What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?	To identify and analyse the conceptual logics that underpin specific problem representations. The term 'conceptual logic' refers to meanings that must be in place for a particular problem representation to cohere or to make sense
3 How did this representation of the 'problem' come about?	To highlight the conditions that allow a particular problem representation to take shape and to assume dominance

4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?	To raise reflection and consideration about issues and perspectives silenced
5 What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?	To identify the effects of specific problem representations so that they can be critically assessed
6 How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?	To pay attention both to the means through which some problem representations become dominant, and to the possibility of challenging problem representations that are judged to be harmful

An illustrative example of the application of Bacchi's work that showcases some of the strengths of the approach is Carson and Edwards exploration of prostitution/ sex work policy in relation to sex trafficking. The issue is arguably one of the most vexed and contentious areas of policy, particularly among feminists. The type of terminology used is political and can automatically signal different sides of the debate. The different problematisations of the issue has implications for how governments and policy makers respond to the issue of sex trafficking and vice versa. There is a significant amount of scholarship on how to combat sex trafficking, but there are vastly different and often polarising perspectives on what the most suitable approach is. For policy makers, trying to make sense of the issue can be difficult without a deeper understanding of the political nature of evidence and advocacy surrounding the issues.

Bacchi's approach helps to make sense of competing policy approaches by showing how different framings and understandings lead to differing policy responses and perceived solutions across contexts. For example, in the Australian state of Victoria, 'prostitution' is framed as 'sex work' within a dominate labour rights framework. In this legalised environment 'sex work' is not seen as related to sex trafficking, which dealt with separately in legislation. Whereas in Sweden, the practice is framed as 'prostitution' and is viewed as inherently exploitative, as a gendered form of violence, and counter-intuitive to long term gender equality. This framing, 'prostitution' is viewed as inextricably linked to sex trafficking in terms of normalising and fuelling demand. This dual approach of viewing the issues as linked is often referred to as the 'Nordic' model, with only 'buyers' criminalised. Thus, each context has a different framing of what the 'problem' is, and what the relationship between 'prostitution/sex work' and sex trafficking is, which is informed by different political, ideological and advocacy perspectives. This shows how what constitutes 'evidence' and 'advocacy' is born from the problem framing of a policy issue, which reveals the underlying values and assumptions that are held by government and policy makers in the maintenance of a particular problem frame.

Mainstream policy makers may be skeptical about using such an approach that can appear to provide more complexity than clarity, but a deeper understanding of the political nature of policy framings is necessary to help ensure that the most suitable and contextually appropriate response is provided. Bacchi's framework helps make sense of fraught policy areas and better equips policy makers to decipher and understand the political nature of different forms of 'evidence' and advocacy, and how it fits with different theoretical and ideological perspectives and agendas. It also has significant implications for activists and advocacy organizations by exposing what kind of 'evidence' and understandings are likely to gain traction within a particular setting. However, as with any methodological approach, caution and reflection is always needed. The extent to which any analysis is generalizable is historically contingent and coincides with the contextual richness of a particular issue. As Bacchi has emphasized herself, using a gender frame for understanding problem representations needs to be considered as a starting point for analysis, not an end point. Ultimately, her approach shows how policy 'responses' need to be understood as part of a discursive construction of the 'problem'. In regard to 'evidence based policy', this type of interest in the effects of research frameworks and the interventions that flow from them, remind us of the political nature of research practice and the responsibility for those involved to be attentive to what is included and excluded in their understandings of the social world and subsequent responses to policy issues.

REIGNITING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY IN THE APS

Published online March 5, 2018

How has the Australian Public Service (APS) been progressing and embedding gender equality, and are its efforts working? In the report *Embedding Gender Equality in the Australian Public Service: Changing practices, changing cultures*, UNSW Canberra's Dr Sue Williamson explains how the *Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy* has started an important conversation about the nature of equality, and where the APS may improve to achieve its goals. This piece was originally published in *The Mandarin* 29/07/2017.

A report being released today finds that the Australian Public Service (APS) is well on the way towards progressing and embedding gender equality, but more remains to be done. Our report, *Embedding Gender Equality in the Australian Public Service: Changing practices, changing cultures*, is based on extensive interviews and focus groups conducted in three government agencies. We examined what works to progress – and hinder – gender equality. One of the key findings is that *Balancing the Future: The Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2019* has reignited conversations about the need for the APS to remain a leader in gender equality in Australia.

The APS has traditionally been considered an 'employer of choice' for women. Further progress in key areas, such as rolling out 'flexibility by default', will enable women and men to better combine their work and care responsibilities, and create a more inclusive leadership culture.

In pockets of agencies where women still experienced fewer opportunities than their male counterparts, or worked in a traditionally 'blokey' area, such as ICT, people told us that the strategy has put gender equality back on the table. It is once again acceptable to talk about gender equality, and challenge workplace norms and practices which inhibit women's progress through the ranks, or men's ability to access flexible work arrangements.



Flexible working is on the rise. Source: APSC, *State of the Service 2017*.

Talking about gender equality also means sharing stories about what works. We heard many positive stories – about male employees who used the carer's room to work, while looking after sick children, SES officers who publicly shared personal highlights with their teams, and middle managers who left work early to spend time with their family in the afternoon, logging on later in the evening. We also heard about many initiatives and innovations to enable women to progress their careers. Reports of formal and informal mentoring were widespread, and training opportunities and leadership courses were ample. Secondments to other agencies were also widely utilised and considered to be valuable to career progression.

In one notable example, one agency facilitated a job sharing arrangement between two employees of different classification levels, an EL2 and an EL1. This arrangement provided greater flexibility for the more senior employee, an EL2 who converted from full-time to part-time employment, whilst providing supervisory experience for the more junior employee, an EL1 who assumed the responsibilities of the EL2 two days per week.

Part-Time Bias Still Part Of The Culture

We also found, however, that while great strides have been made, that some women have fewer opportunities than others. Many female part-time staff we spoke with perceived a lower level of opportunity, mobility, and career development. Some of the barriers included a strong organisational attitude that full-time employees were more committed to their agencies and careers, and an underlying cultural assumption that part-time employees were less available or able to undertake urgent or challenging work. Australia has one of the highest rates of part-time work in the world, roles predominantly filled by women, so it's important that these employees have access to the same opportunities as their full-time colleagues.

The conversations underway – about women in leadership, men and caring responsibilities, workplace flexibility – all indicate a healthy and committed APS well on the way to embedding gender equality.

Dr Sue Williamson is an academic at the UNSW Canberra Business School, and was recently named as a finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Awards for the ACT for her work on progressing workplace gender equality.

Dr Meraiah Foley is a post-doctoral research fellow with the Public Service Research Group at UNSW Canberra, currently examining gender equality in the Australian public sector.

LET'S 'LEAVE LOUDLY' THIS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Published online March 6, 2018

Laptops, mobile phones and other technological advances have created a workplace culture where employers and employees work around the clock. But more and more workplaces, and a few governments, have stepped in to ensure that work-life balance is protected to maintain productivity and employee wellbeing. UNSW Canberra's Dr Sue Williamson and Dr Meraiah Foley explain why 'leav[ing] early' should be modeled by public sector leaders to encourage healthier work behaviours. This piece was originally published in *The Mandarin* 05/03/2018.

Staying late at work is often worn as a badge of honour. Recently, some forward-thinking executives have begun to challenge this view, proving that small innovations can have a big impact. Robbert Rietbroek, CEO of PepsiCo Australia & New Zealand, began 'leaving loudly', a campaign which calls on managers to leave work at a reasonable hour and encourage their staff to do so as well. Many public servants have told us that their senior managers are also adopting this practice. This simple act may not seem like such a big deal. But scratch the surface and we can see it is important for two reasons.

First, when executives leave loudly, they send a signal to employees that working late is not a proxy for commitment to the job. This is important, as employees who use flexible or non-standard work practices often report feeling stigmatised for operating outside the grain. Furthermore, research shows that when senior executives adopt and support human resource policies, organisational support for those initiatives becomes more embedded.

Secondly, leaving loudly encourages clearer boundaries between work and home life. Having an identified break is important to maintain wellbeing and productivity. In a world of increasing connectedness, leaving at a reasonable hour demonstrates that it is time to attend to outside commitments.

PepsiCo has another innovative practice to increase workplace flexibility — 'one simple thing'. This is a personal activity which is essential to wellbeing and work-family integration, prioritised and enabled by employees working flexibly. Similarly, we are aware of at least one APS leader who introduced a similar concept of non-negotiables such as uninterrupted family meal times or weekend sporting events. Non-negotiables will not be forfeited due to work needs.

While people may be leaving loudly and enjoying their non-negotiables, many employees get back to work after the kids have been collected from school or after dinner. A US study of 1000 employees found that more than 60% of men and almost half of women send work emails after 9pm. That's likely to represent a lot of people working a lot of extra hours.

So, what can be done about this? Last year the French government enacted new legislation requiring companies with more than 50 employees to establish hours when staff should not send or receive emails. Such regulation enshrines the right of workers to disconnect and places a much-needed brake on the blurring of work and home lives.

Organisations need not wait for the heavy hand of regulation. In 2014, German auto-maker Daimler adopted an innovative solution to the problem of holiday emails. The emails sent to employees who are on annual leave are automatically deleted. Senders receive a polite email informing them of this fact and providing them with an alternative contact to answer their query. Initial reports suggest the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Such practices recognise the need for people to completely disconnect from work. They also help to ensure that employees and managers are not subtly penalised for taking time off by returning to an overflowing Inbox.

Strong organisational leadership can change workplace culture by embracing the use of soft power: relying on persuasion and attraction to encourage behaviour change, rather than compliance. Soft power also sits well with notions of inclusive leadership, which, as we talk to employees and employers in both private and public sectors, is becoming firmly embedded in organisations.

So, this International Women's Day, public sector leaders might consider ways they can use their soft power to role model healthier work behaviours. Let's celebrate by doing 'one simple thing' and leaving loudly, to the benefit of us all.

THE VEXED QUESTION OF MARKET STEWARDSHIP IN THE NDIS

Published online March 7, 2018

Research from UNSW Canberra's Gemma Carey, Helen Dickinson, Eleanor Malbon and Daniel Reeders shows that government must take an active role in ensuring that the important policy goals of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are met through market stewardship, employing more than just light-touch measures. Eleanor Malbon and Gemma Carey explain their research findings in this article first published in *The Mandarin* 17/01/2018.

The NDIS is an important innovation for people with lifelong disability and for the Australian Public Service. Despite the potential gains of the scheme, there remain crucial risks which could impact its ability to achieve its aims.

Specifically these include risks around the development and sustainability of the NDIS market. For example, the market may be too inflexible or not responsive enough to offer the innovative and person-centred care it promised. As we have suggested previously in, there's an acute risk of thin markets emerging, meaning less choice and control for some people with disability. Our new research shows that government must take an active role in ensuring that the important policy goals of the NDIS are met through market stewardship, employing more than just light-touch measures.

We found that policy makers and bureaucrats involved in the implementation of the NDIS have a wide range of ideas about how much government should steer or steward the NDIS markets across Australia. The design of the NDIS has always attempted to straddle the political left and right – it promises the left emancipatory choice and control back to people with disability, while also promising that more work will be done by markets and less by government (in line with the preferences of more conservative political parties).

Our research found that ambiguity regarding what role government should take in managing markets appears to stem from concerns about undermining the original vision of the NDIS set out by the Productivity Commission its blueprint for implementation back in 2011. The Productivity Commission argued that government should take on a stewardship role through addressing thin markets and providing ongoing block funding. However during implementation this has been diluted.

In our research, we drew the distinction between light-touch regulatory roles, such as protecting against fraud or unsafe providers, and stewardship roles which protect against inequality and thin markets and demonstrated there are different risks managed by government(s) depending on whether they engage with a regulatory or stewardship approach. To avoid inequities in the NDIS and/or market failure, governments need to take on a stewardship approach in addition to a regulatory approach. This requires a more hands-on approach as well as greater information sharing between different government agencies.

The good news is that since this research was conducted, a new NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission is being set up and is set to take on a market oversight role, in addition to quality assurance and safeguards. However, large information gaps continue to exist about how well the NDIS markets are performing in different locations, meaning that important information for making stewardship decisions is missing. The next stage of our research is set to tackle that information gap and provide insight into thin markets in select locations in Australia.

For more information see: Source: Carey, G, Dickinson, H, Malbon, E & Reeders, D 2018, 'The Vexed Question of Market Stewardship in the Public Sector: Examining Equity and the Social Contract through the Australian National Disability Insurance Scheme', Social Policy & Administration, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 387-407.

WITHDRAWING FUNDING FOR HOSPITALS' MISTAKES PROBABLY WON'T LEAD TO BETTER PATIENT CARE

Published online March 9, 2018

The Commonwealth Government announced late last year that they are changing the way they fund hospitals. While the initiative aims to improve the quality of hospital care and reduce overall costs, the new policy may result in some negative impacts. Helen Dickinson, Associate Professor of UNSW Canberra's Public Service Research Group explains why the pay-for-performance scheme may lead to unintended consequences. This article was originally published in *The Conversation* November 29, 2017.

The Commonwealth government has just announced a change in the way they fund hospitals, effectively withholding part payment where patients have avoidable complications. The initiative aims to improve the quality of hospital care and reduce overall costs, but without other measures, this probably won't do much to stop hospital-acquired complications from occurring.

The New Plan For Hospital Funding

Public hospitals are funded by an activity-based system in which they receive money for the services they deliver. Diagnosis-related groups are used to classify hospital episodes of care into a number of codes, which are then reimbursed at amounts set by the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority.

Complications that occur during hospital care, and where there is good evidence these could have been reduced through clinical risk mitigation strategies, are known as hospital-acquired complications. These include things like surgical complications, pressure injuries, falls and health care associated infections.

If you experience a hospital acquired complication then the complexity of your care is likely to increase and you may stay in hospital for longer. This means the cost of care for this treatment goes up. Estimates suggest where you have a health care associated infection the cost of your care increases by 9%, renal (kidney) failure by 21% and malnutrition by 7%.

From July next year [2018], if you experience a hospital-acquired complication, the hospital will get a reduced rate of funding for that care. Of course, the chance of you developing a hospital-acquired complication will depend on a number of characteristics (such as age and the reason you're in hospital), and not just the quality of care you receive. So the amount of money the hospital loses is determined using a risk adjustment model. Assessment against a range of characteristics determines whether an episode of patient care is low, medium or high in terms of complexity, and this score is used to determine the funding reduction.

If a patient is at low risk and experiences a hospital-acquired complication, the hospital will receive funding for that person's care reduced by the full incremental cost of the hospital-acquired complication. If a patient is at high risk then the funding for that episode of care will be reduced by a proportion of the incremental cost of the hospital-acquired complication. The new policy builds on a change to funding systems that was introduced in July, which withdrew funding for serious errors (so-called "sentinel events").

Why This Approach Is Being Introduced

It's estimated that for the years 2014-15 and 2015-16, there were just over 101,000 and over 104,000 cases in Australian hospitals of hospital-acquired complications, respectively. So the money spent on these cases could have been put to other uses across the health system. The Independent Hospital Pricing Authority estimates A\$280 million will be saved by introducing this policy.

The idea is this scheme will mean hospital managers and staff work harder to ensure they avoid these issues occurring. The scheme is not designed to eliminate hospital-acquired complications entirely – this would be very difficult to achieve in a complex system like a hospital. But the intention is the threat of losing some funding should drive processes of improvement. The resulting impact for those receiving hospital care can be significant if it means you avoid a significant or traumatic complication that compromises your health.

What Could Be Some Of The Negative Impacts Of The Approach?

The challenge with this type of approach is we don't know whether pay for performance works. It's widely debated, but on the whole hasn't achieved the expected gains in health effectiveness and safety. These types of schemes can also have unintended consequences. They're extremely costly to run, meaning savings may not actually be made overall. And there are some concerns relating to the maturity and accuracy of the data collected. These types of systems are already operated by some health insurers, where there have been reports of disputes because doctors fear they won't get paid for their care.

Some hospitals and professionals might engage in gaming, assigning more complex diagnosis groups to patients to mitigate any penalties. Managers and doctors may be less likely to report when an error occurs. Others may try to game the system by choosing patient populations that are likely to produce the greatest financial benefit – younger, healthier and wealthier individuals – suggesting significant equity concerns as a result of these schemes.

Will The Policy Work?

What is clear is a funding and pricing approach on its own will not reduce the number of hospital-acquired complications. A cynical view might suggest the amount hospitals could lose might either not be all that significant or could be made up for in gaming.

But more than this, achieving quality and safety in health care is a complex issue. Most professionals do not deliberately provide poor care, or fail to follow clinical guidelines because this would involve more work or they simply don't feel like it. There are very good reasons relating to the complexity of competing demands of providing high quality care in hospitals. And, these schemes could have profound impacts in terms of equity, producing poorer outcomes for those who are most disadvantaged.

Unless this approach occurs at the same time as other measures, it's unlikely to make much impact, and could lead to unintended consequences.

PROBATION: AN UNDERUTILISED TOOL FOR ACHIEVING HIGH PERFORMANCE

Published online March 9, 2018

Performance management is key to achieving employee effectiveness and efficiency, but are organisations using probation as a tool to achieve high performance? Deborah Blackman, Fiona Buick, Samantha Johnson, and Michael O'Donnell of UNSW Canberra's Public Service Research Group believe that employers should use probation to help define high performance and encourage desired employee behaviour.

This blog post is a summary of the presentation made at the 20th International Research Society on Public Management Conference 2016 in Hong Kong.

What does an organization need to be high performing? Research indicates that high performance work practices (HPWP) make high performing organizations[1] these include job design, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, rewards and high involvement work practices. But we suggest that, although not commonly listed, one of the most influential HPWPs could be probation. Commonly seen as a negative condition of recruitment, we argue that probation is a missed opportunity to establish and maintain high performance.

What Is Probation?

Probation is a defined period of time of 6 or 12 months when a new employee and their supervisor begin working together for the first time. It's a time when expectations are set and good behaviors are modelled.

During the probation period, the new employee's capabilities, skills, work performance and general conduct are assessed and problems with performance or behavior are identified and addressed. Traditionally the probation period is seen as a time for supervisors to 'catch' poor performance or bad behavior, and for new employees to lie low and simply 'get through it'. It can be a negative, even fearful, time when employee and supervisor focus on achieving minimum performance standards.

However, probation can be much more positive; a period when expectations are set and employees are supported to meet those expectations. Rather than 'catching' a new employee when they fail, a new employee would be given clear descriptions of what is expected of them and the opportunity to see high performance and appropriate behaviors modelled around them. After all, if a new employee does not know what high performance looks like how can they achieve it?

How Is Probation Currently Used?

"The probation period is for both sides to say 'This is working' or 'It's not working' and to very early on [identify performance problems]... I mean, [six months is] a really long probation period. That's plenty of time to identify if there's a problem, work on the problem and either, be part-way, at least, to resolving it... And you can also extend that six month period. I mean, there's provision within there to extend it, if you're not sure how things are going." — Senior Manager, Operational Agency

The research suggested that probation is not recognized as a time to build high performance. Rather it's seen as a time to rigorously assess performance. At times, the role and goals required of a new employee are made clear, but not always. This is despite new employees seeking clear strategic direction and priorities and clear vision, goals and objectives, all of which support high performance.

Most people believed that probation was used to avoid long term poor performance. They saw the process

as complicated and time consuming and requiring a set of skills from supervisors that many simply did not have. The research therefore showed that the ineffective implementation of the probation process was attributed to both process and managerial capability issues. In other words, probation is poorly used because it's seen as complicated and difficult.

How Can Probation Build High Performance?

We suggest that probation needs to be reconsidered. Instead of being seen as a complicated process designed to catch poor performance, it could be a positive time when new employees are given clear goals, a clear role and the opportunity to observe and model high performance.

"Managers come to me say, 'We've got this person that's on probation, they're not going so well', and I say, 'Sack them. Don't blink an eye ... if you've done everything you should have done, then go, sack them'. but two months, three months later they've walked in and they've said, 'You know that person you told us to sack', and I said, 'Well you didn't do you', 'No. So now we're here to performance manage them.'" — Middle Manager, Large Operational Agency

Further, probation, as a tool for building high performance, should occur at multiple points in a career; not simply at the point of initial recruitment, but in the first few months of any new role or assignment. During this time, supervisors would explain what high performance looks like, actively set high expectations and offer support and encouragement to achieve this.

Critically, for probation to achieve high performance, supervisors must be confident and skilled in being positive role models and giving feedback; moreover, they should see it as core part of their role. For probation to be an influential HPWP, organizations need to see it as an opportunity to explain, model and reward high performance and integrate it into other HPWPs such as learning and development and ongoing performance management.

[1] For details of the original study see Blackman, D., Buick, F., O'Donnell, M., O'Flynn, J. & West, D. 2013. Strengthening the performance framework: towards a high performance APS. Australian Public Service Commission, www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/strengtheningperformance; and Buick, F., Blackman, D.A., O'Donnell, M.E., O'Flynn, J.L & West, D. 2015. Can enhanced performance management support public sector change? *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 28 (2): 271 – 289.

THE COMPLEXITY OF CITIZEN EXPERIENCE: 'SYSTEM EFFECTS' MAPPING FOR INTERVENTION DESIGN

Published online May 30, 2018

System Effects is a methodology developed by UNSW Canberra Researcher Dr. Luke Craven to explore the 'user' or citizen experience of complex phenomena, such as climate resilience, poor health, or job market access. The method is proving to be useful for citizen and user engagement worldwide, and Luke details it's varied applications and processes for us here.

The System Effects methodology emphasises the varied nature of social phenomena, their causes and consequences, while at the same time giving policymakers tools to understand the complex nature of how those varied factors manifest at the community- or population- level. System Effects can be used to support the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions aimed at changing the structure of complex adaptive systems to drive particular outcomes. By beginning from the 'user' understanding of complex systems, the methodology helps to re-centre lived experience in social science and policymaking practice.

Developed as part of Dr. Craven's thesis which focused on developing new tools to understand and address food insecurity from a systems-based perspective, System Effects is increasingly being applied to a whole range of issues by national, state, and local governments across the world. For example it is being used to:

- understand the barriers to job market entry in Oslo, in partnership with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV);
- understand the systemic impact of disaster events in Sydney, in partnership with Resilient Sydney and the NSW Office of Emergency Management;
- support social workers to deliver systemic care to persons facing homelessness in Newcastle, UK, in partnership with Newcastle City Council;
- support the development of policy to prevent food borne disease in Cambodia, in partnership with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and USAID, and;
- support effective environmental stewardship in New York, in partnership with the US Forest Service.

But what exactly is System Effects and how does it work? The methodology draws on soft systems methodology, fuzzy cognitive mapping, and graph theoretical analysis. Its objective is to aggregate and quantify participant-generated system models of a given problem (e.g. poor health or malnutrition) and its determinants to inform intervention design. The participant-led approach begins by asking research participants to visually map or depict the range of variables they perceive be causes of the problem at hand; drawing arrows between the variables to indicate causality.

Once completed, the researcher creates an adjacency matrix for each participant response, using a coding scheme to ensure consistency in the factors present across the community. The foundation of this method is that individual participant maps represent network diagrams, with the barriers between them acting as 'nodes' and the connections between them as 'edges' or links. This results in a matrix and then these individual adjacency matrices are aggregated into one matrix that brings together individual perceptions. The aggregate weight of connections between variables depends on the frequency with which that connection is identified across the sample. Aggregating individual mental models in this way accounts for every variable identified across the sample, and the diverse range of causal pathways present, as well as making clear the intensity and frequency of particular connections at the community- or population- level.

This aggregate adjacency matrix can be used to create a directed network graph, where the nodes represent barriers to food access and each connection represents the number of participants identifying particular links between them. This is done using the network mapping software Gephi. Finally, these aggregate models can then be explored using graphic theoretical analysis to identify key structural components of the system. Unlike many analytical approaches that emphasize linear associations, System Effects emphasizes the complexity and heterogeneity of participant responses. These statistics provide a way to 'navigate' the complexity of a given problem and its determinants in aggregate at the community- or population- level, providing evidence to assist in the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions to address it.

The method presents opportunities to identify key structural features of systemic problems across communities, providing insights into their structure as complex systems. The results can be used to inform policy and program:

- Design: How can policies most effectively address systemic and complex determinants of disadvantage, given its heterogeneous nature?
- Implementation: How can the implementation of policies be effectively tailored to the systemic dynamics of particular contexts?
- Evaluation: How can we assess the systemic impact of particular interventions and their interactions with the contexts in which they are deployed?

The System Effects approach can and is being adapted to help answer each of these questions providing a range of tools to assist policymakers in promoting systems change in disadvantaged communities. More information about System Effects is available from I.craven@unsw.edu.au.

WHAT ARE NDIS SCHEME ACTUARIES MEASURING AND WHAT ARE THEY MISSING?

Published online July 31, 2018

In this post, Gemma Carey (@gemcarey), Helen Dickinson (@drhdickinson), Michael Fletcher and Daniel Reeders (@engagedpractx) examine the role of National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) actuaries, describing their purpose in the scheme, the limitations in the ways they are used and the implications.

Most of us are familiar with actuarial approaches, though we may not be aware of them. If you have house insurance, insure your car or have a job (where you are covered by work cover) the premiums you pay are based on actuarial modelling.

Actuaries and actuarial modelling are central to the operation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Internationally, the way that actuaries are used within the NDIS is very unusual although it is something that has not been written about extensively. If you have heard about actuaries and the NDIS it is probably because the outsourcing of this function made the news, largely due to \$2.3 million that is being paid out on this over 5 years.

In this piece we unpack this role, describing the function of actuaries in the scheme and the limitations in the ways in which we are using them.

Where do actuaries fit in the scheme?

Actuarial analyses are central to insurance principles, allowing the calculation of the expected future funding liability and targeting of investment in areas that create the largest reduction in future costs. Within the NDIS the actuarial approach "aims to ensure that long-run scheme revenues (premium income) remain aligned with scheme costs (reflecting service utilization and unit costs)". Within this approach, early intervention and targeted investment in certain support services is understood as a way of improving outcomes for an individual, while reducing overall lifetime expenditure across a number of different parts of government.

The NDIS Act outlines that the Scheme Actuary is responsible for overseeing and ensuring the financial sustainability of the scheme. Official duties of the Actuary, are to assess: (i) the financial sustainability of the NDIS; (ii) risks to that sustainability; and (iii) on the basis of information held by the NDIA, any trends in provision of supports to people with disability, including (a) the causes of those risks and trends; and (b) estimates of future expenditure of the NDIS. However, the Act does not authorize public monitoring and evaluation of how well the scheme is meeting its goals of ensuring choice, control, and better outcomes for individuals.

Supports to be provided under the scheme are based on the principle of providing 'necessary and reasonable care'. This implies that estimating future costs requires not only adequate data on life expectancy, but also the life-long impacts of factors such as the medical progression of disabilities, the impact of new technologies on what might be regarded as 'reasonable', and changes in family circumstances affecting the availability of informal care. There are inherent difficulties in operationalising ideas such as 'reasonable and necessary care', which are inherently fuzzy. Moreover, the NDIS Act authorizes expenditures only indirectly, as a necessary implication of a provision which requires that expenditures 'represent value for money.' This introduces a role for the Scheme Actuary into almost all aspects of the system, since pricing of services and planning personalized budgets all impact upon value for money.

How is evaluation of the scheme done?

Neither the Act nor the initial design outline provisions for meaningful and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of impact, whether against the policy objectives or the participants' self-identified goals. As a result, 'value for money' can only be judged in terms of efficiency – units of service delivered rather than outcomes achieved.

Despite how pivotal actuarial analysis is to the success of the NDIS, there continues to be a great deal of uncertainty about how actuaries operate within the scheme and how accurate modelling can be. As noted by the actuaries, "Analysis conducted by the Australian Government Actuary has confirmed that there are uncertainties around all cost elements of the NDIS, e.g. populations, severity distributions, and average costs".

To fulfil the mandate set out in the NDIS Act, scheme actuaries require complex and longitudinal data, particularly to ensure continuous monitoring. Serious questions remain over how these data are obtained and its quality, with a current lack of transparency around the monitoring framework being designed by the actuaries and implemented by the NDIA, an agency whose capacity has come under considerable scrutiny. The Productivity Commission report (the blueprint for the scheme) argued that actuarial modelling would also play an important role in evaluating specific services and interventions funded under the NDIS. How this has translated into practice is unknown, as a result of limited transparency with both the actuaries and the NDIA.

The scheme is overly-focused on costs

Normally, actuarial cost modelling of services works through estimating costs based on independent information about prices and expenditures. However, in the NDIS, actuaries set the prices of services and supports, and, to some degree, also make decisions regarding what services are to be provided to whom through the NDIA and planners. For example, the actuaries have advised planners to not be afraid to make large upfront investments in equipment. As noted in the rules for the scheme actuary, the role is to "monitor, assess, and report on consistency of resource allocation across regions, planners, disability type, and other groupings as appropriate". This could potentially see them involved in planning in a much more hands-on way in the future.

The actuarial modelling of NDIS performance focuses solely on costs. As the Productivity Commission notes: "Financial (or actuarial) models measure any discrepancies between expected and actual costs and outcomes, and the adequacy of revenues to meet projected costs over the long-term". The models explain why such discrepancies may have occurred, and analyse their implications for the financial sustainability of the scheme and its objectives for achieving outcomes for people with disability (either in aggregate or in specific categories). By itself, this modelling is limited in its ability to measure personal wellbeing or social and economic outcomes. It also cannot assess whether participants' goals are being met, or whether participants experience their choice and control as purely formal (i.e. I get to choose who provides the service) or substantive (i.e. I get to choose how the service is provided). For a more robust evaluation of wellbeing, outcomes, and goals – which is after all the fundamental objective of the NDIS – alternative methods are needed and as the NDIS Costs Report points out, is a more difficult task than measuring costs against cost expectations

To date, there is limited information on benefits to individuals and families, which means that it is not possible to conduct a proper cost-benefit analysis. The NDIA has developed and piloted what it calls the NDIS Short Form Outcomes Framework, which comprises 8 participant domains (including choice and control, daily activities, relationships, home environment, health and wellbeing and life-long learning) and five family carer domains (e.g. whether families have the support they need, whether they know their rights, if they can gain access to desired services). The short form questionnaire does not attempt to assess whether participants feel the services delivered contribute to achieving their stated personal goals, largely because personal goals are so diverse and the instruments being used are not able to measure this.

In other words, while packages in the NDIS are personalized, the measures for success of the scheme are not. The NDIS needs a proper monitoring and evaluation framework that goes beyond assessing costs if we are to understand its real impact on lives.

EXPLAINER: HOW MUCH DOES THE NDIS COST AND WHERE DOES THIS MONEY COME FROM?

Published online August 3, 2018

In this post, Helen Dickinson (@drhdickinson) explains the costs of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, where the funding comes from and some of the debates behind the funding of the scheme. This piece was originally posted at The Conversation on May 8th, 2018.

Although the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is relatively young, there has been much debate over how it will be funded. Treasurer Scott Morrison recently said Labor had left a A\$57 billion shortfall in funding for the NDIS. So many were left scratching their heads at the announcement that next year's proposed increase in the Medicare levy – which was supposed to cover some of this shortfall – would be scrapped.

So how much does, and will, the scheme actually cost? Who is supposed to pay for it and why is there debate over the funding?

Calculating The Costs

These are difficult questions to answer because we lack high-quality data about the extent and nature of disability in Australia. The information we do have is based on predictions, and work is underway to check these are accurate.

The case for creating an NDIS was made by the Productivity Commission in its 2011 inquiry on Disability Care and Support. The commission recommended Australia's system of inequitable, fragmented and inefficient disability services be replaced by a new national scheme that would provide insurance cover to all Australians in the event of significant disability.

The one thing all sides of politics agree on is the NDIS represents a significant increase in disability spending, which stood at around A\$8 billion per year at the time of the initial Productivity Commission report.

Original estimates suggested the NDIS would cover 411,000 participants and cost A\$13.6 billion at maturity. However the Productivity Commission now estimates that around 475,000 people with disability will receive individualised support at a cost of around A\$22 billion per year.

The A\$8.9 billion difference between the Productivity Commission's original estimates and the current estimate is a substantial gap. But A\$6.4 billion of this difference is due to pay rises awarded to social and community services employees.

The remainder is due to the growth in the population and also the inclusion of participants over 65 years who were not included in original estimates. Once we account for these, estimates are fairly close to those originally predicted.

Last year's Productivity Commission review of costs found the NDIS was broadly coming in on budget. Greater-than-expected numbers of children with autism and intellectual disability were accessing the scheme, but not all those with an individualised plans were able to spend their budgets.

So, for now, the NDIS seems to be tracking as intended. The NDIS budget is estimated to gradually increase over time to 1.3% of GDP by 2044-45 as participants age. Estimates also suggest the scheme will produce benefits adding around 1% to the GDP.

Where The Money Comes From

The original Productivity Commission report suggested the federal government be the single funder of the NDIS and that revenue to support the NDIS be paid into a separate fund (the National Disability Insurance

Premium Fund) to provide stable funding for the scheme.

The Productivity Commission suggested this approach because disability services have long been subject to debate about who should bear the costs of these services: the Commonwealth or the states and territories. Indeed, part of the reason for the NDIS was to guarantee funding for disability services and stop these debates and blame-shifting.

But this isn't what happened.

The way the NDIS is funded is complex, with revenue coming from a number of sources. The NDIS is funded via a pooled approach from Commonwealth and state and territory governments. The Commonwealth provides just over half of the funding for the NDIS and the rest comes from state and territories. This arrangement is governed by a number of bilateral agreements that are revisited every five years.

At the creation of the scheme, all existing money spent by various governments was directed into the NDIS to cover costs. Then, in July 2014 we saw a first increase in the Medicare levy: from 1.5% to 2% of taxable income.

However, the increased Medicare levy doesn't meet the full costs of the scheme – just as the levy doesn't cover all the annual costs of Medicare. This revenue was directed into a special fund for the NDIS, DisabilityCare Australia, which is designed to reimburse governments for NDIS expenditure.

Any additional funding the NDIS needs has to come from general budget revenue or borrowings. The NDIS Savings Fund Special Account was established to collect the Commonwealth's contribution to the scheme. This fund pools underspends or savings from across government, protecting these as a forward contribution to the scheme as it grows over future budgets.

Behind The Funding Debate

Warnings have been sounded about the NDIS's reliance on multiple sources, fearing it creates a risk of future instability of financing.

When the Labor government originally introduced the NDIS, it said it would fund the scheme through an increase in the Medicare levy, reforms to private health insurance and retirement incomes, and a range of "selected long-term savings" including an increase in tobacco excise and changes to fringe benefits tax rules.

Labor said the combination of these revenue streams would ensure the NDIS was fully funded to 2023. But many of the savings Labor promised were intentional, rather than set in stone, and were not dedicated to the NDIS as the Medicare levy was.

It's estimated the Commonwealth will contribute around A\$11.2 billion to the NDIS in 2019. Of this, around A\$6.8 billion will come from the redirection of existing disability funds and the Commonwealth's share of the DisabilityCare Australia Fund.

This leaves an annual funding gap of around A\$4 billion once the scheme becomes fully operational, accumulating to around A\$56 billion by 2028.

The Commonwealth announced it would increase the Medicare levy from 2% to 2.5% of taxable income from July 2019 as a way of filling the funding gap. Estimates predicted this would raise an additional A\$8 billion in revenue over its first two years.

The bill needed to do this had stalled in the Senate, with Labor and the Greens opposed. They suggested the increase should only be applied to those in higher income tax brackets. Last week the Treasurer announced tax receipts were running A\$4.8 billion higher than was estimated in December, meaning the levy was no longer needed.

For now it looks like funding for the NDIS is assured, but many within the disability community have expressed concern this does not assure funding for the long term and uncertainty may continue to prevail.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF CARE LOOK LIKE?

Published online August 6, 2018

Will it soon be possible to outsource our caring responsibilities for ourselves, our children and our parents to robots? Catherine Smith and Helen Dickinson ask what the human rights, privacy, equity and practical implications for care would be in a tech-dominated future.

This is the era of the so called 'sandwich generation' with busy professionals caring for children and ageing parents. Imagine being able to more effectively manage both sets of care relationships via a series of new technologies - and better look after yourself in the process. That's the future being promoted by a number of startup tech firms at a recent showcase.

Here we saw tech that allows you to monitor your children via smart devices. Through this you can check out where they are, how they are performing in school, how much screen time they are consuming (and remotely cease this if you think it is too much). The next big consumer boom in the med tech space is predicted to be in genomic testing. So you will know just what to feed your children given your knowledge of their predispositions to certain conditions and intolerances. Your smart kitchen ensures that you are always fully stocked on necessities, by automatically ordering products you run out of.

When you have a few minutes in your day, you check in with your robot life coach to view your own vitals and see how you are tracking in relation to a number of your life goals. Maybe you even do this while moving around in your autonomous vehicle, which is safer than you personally driving the vehicle and frees you up to work on the move. Your home personal assistants even monitor your speech patterns to check for symptoms of depression or Parkinson's.

All of this you can do safe in the knowledge that your parents are well and being constantly monitored via wearables or in-home robots. These will tell you if they should suffer a fall or if one of a number of pulse, blood oxygen or other readings indicate something of concern. If anything should cause worry you can be immediately connected to a healthcare professional who can also access your parent's personal data and advise on courses of action - all supported by artificial intelligence.

Sounds pretty cool, right? There are huge number of companies emerging that are keen to support you to more effectively "manage" your personal and collective caring responsibilities. But what costs does this come at and are there aspects of this we should be concerned about?

"If your DNA is being profiled who are you happy being able to access this? Maybe you want your GP to see this, but what about your insurance company?"

These potential applications raise a number of important questions, many of which have ethical and moral dilemmas. How safe is this data that is being shared and who owns it? Blockchain is widely employed as a way of ensuring that this is kept and transmitted safely, but is this infallible? If your DNA is being profiled who are you happy being able to access this? Maybe you want your GP to see this, but what about your insurance company? What about researchers? With a big enough data we might be able to make some new breakthroughs in the health arena. So should we all consent to share our anonymised and aggregated data? The recent response to the My Health Record scheme suggests that many of us are wary about this.

Would knowledge of genomic predispositions make us behave more "rationally"? If you knew that you were more likely to develop heart disease would you eat more healthily? Conversely, if this wasn't a worry for you would you then engage in more "risky" behaviours? If we know one thing for sure it is that people don't always behave in ways that are predictable or considered the more 'rational' option.

Some of the companies we spoke with talked about offering incentives to individuals to share different

aspects of their data in return for vouchers or discounts off other products and services. While this avoids a situation where individuals are not rewarded for the use of their data, it raises potential equity issues. Those most likely to respond to such incentives are likely to be those of lower socio-economic groups. Indeed, the Australian Human Rights Commission has recently raised a number of concerns relating to technology and their potential to enhance inequities.

Although the discourse around many of these technological developments is that they should make us more “safe”, there is already evidence that suggests reason for concern. Addiction to technology is a real concern for many, particularly in relation to younger children. China has uniquely set legislation addressing this after concerns about wellbeing and intense game play regarding on-line game Honour of Kings. The developer, Tencent, responded by limiting users to the amount of time they can spend on the game and at what times. Although welcome by some, this a blunt approach and does little to address our obsession with electronic devices more broadly.

A feeling of safety in many of the examples we came across typically also involved some significant surveillance, either via camera, by data or a combination. Although this might lead to some of us feeling more secure, for others this could come with concerns about issues of human rights. A recent story in the New York Times highlights the issues associated with the expansion of facial recognition software and surveillance in China and some significant concerns about this within the context of an authoritarian regime.

It is clear that there are some exciting developments to come in the technology space that will have a profound impact on our everyday lives. But these developments also bring with them a series of potential negative impacts and associated ethical and moral concerns. Although some of these developments are some way in the future, many of these exist in our everyday lives now. Yet, one of the issues we are coming across in our research into the use of robots in care services is that governments are not yet systematically having conversations in a widespread way about what these technologies mean in terms of the ways in which we design and deliver public services and some of the challenges that these raise. A failure to consider these issues will likely mean that the first time we ever really consider these issues is when some sort of incident arises, by which time it will be too late.

While there is much to be excited about in terms of the future of care services, there are some developments that should give us pause for thought. It is a future we need to prepare for to ensure that we get the type of care services we want and need.

This post contributed by Catherine Smith, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne and Helen Dickinson, Public Service Research Group, University of New South Wales, Canberra.

BACK-TO-BACK MOGS INDUCE ‘DYSFUNCTION’, WARNS APS REVIEW SUBMISSION

Published online September 17, 2018

Professor Deborah Blackman, Associate Professor Helen Dickinson, Dr Karen Gardner, Dr Fiona Buick, Dr Samantha Johnson and Dr Sue Olney from UNSW Canberra’s Public Service Research Group believe that machinery of government changes are often poorly planned, disruptive and costly. Their APS review submission outlines five priority areas for reform. This article was originally published on *The Mandarin*.

The machinery of government (MoG) reshuffle has become a standard part of a change in government in Australia. It demonstrates that the minister has different priorities to their predecessor and is a nice announceable to show you’re doing something. But MoG changes are also “disruptive” and “undermine the capacity and capability of the APS to meet core responsibilities and deliver functions in an efficient and effective manner”, argues a submission to the Australian Public Service Review.

“Our research into machinery of government changes suggests that they are frequently enacted but poorly implemented and are, therefore, unlikely to deliver on anticipated gains,” say a group of academics from UNSW Canberra’s Public Service Research Group.

“Our research demonstrates that many MoG changes are highly disruptive, particularly when they involve functions/departments with fundamentally different organisational cultures and they are implemented within a short timeframe. Many MoG changes are implemented in relatively short timeframes, with public servants claiming that inadequate time is devoted to planning, ensuring cultural fit between functions/departments, and implementing the change effectively.

“This means that not only are functions/departments merged that are culturally incompatible, but departments are provided with inadequate time to work through critical differences and establish a plan for how to effectively integrate different cultures.

“As a result, they are unable to provide sufficient consideration to how to establish mechanisms to facilitate integration across disparate groups, often leading to these groups operating in isolation to one another and, therefore, not achieving the anticipated gains.”

These problems are exacerbated for those working in support functions such as finance, IT and human resources, “as this is where personnel are combined and departmental differences in policies, processes, cultures, managerial approaches and so on are most stark”. Integration problems are often long-lived “due to insufficient time to develop practices to overcome dysfunction induced by structural change”, add authors Professor Deborah Blackman, Associate Professor Helen Dickinson, Dr Karen Gardner, Dr Fiona Buick, Dr Samantha Johnson and Dr Sue Olney. “This is particularly a problem when departments undergo multiple MoG changes within a short period as they do not have sufficient time to recover from each change before embarking on a new one.”

MoG changes are expensive too, with staff being unable to do their jobs, relocating and working out new operating procedures. These problems are often made worse by a lack of planning and trying to do everything in a rush. One UK study found the cost of setting up a new department to be at least £15 million in the first year, while a parliamentary committee estimated the cost of Victoria’s post-2014 election MoG to be over \$5 million, though the committee complained the figures were rubbery.

Middle Manager Capability

If the APS is to do well on productivity, innovation and technological change, the factor that will make the biggest contribution “is achieving high performance through the capacity, capability and skills of employees”, the authors argue. Middle management is their biggest area of concern: “The APS must find a way to ensure citizens enjoy the benefits of market models while protecting those vulnerable to market-produced inequities.”

Change management could be improved by middle managers “actively undertaking a change intermediary role where they make sense of the change intent, operationalise it, and provide role clarity for employees,” the submission says. Such a move would help reduce resistance among staff.

“Adopting a change intermediary role would not only reduce resistance to change, but support the introduction and adoption of innovation. However, the research showed that, although the importance of middle managers is recognised, many have undertaken inadequate development, particularly prior to becoming a middle manager, to adequately prepare them for this role.”

Top performers and laggards are often given development opportunities, but those in the middle are often left to “muddle through”. They may be given the chance to act in a role, but whether they are supported to develop their skills in that position is dependent on senior individuals around them, argue the authors. Better embedding and integration of experiential and formal learning would help improve the skill base of the APS.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Developments in fields such as robotics, artificial intelligence, 3D printing, virtual reality and blockchain have the potential to significantly impact on government work. However, the authors are concerned governments are doing little to engage with these technologies and are waiting until they become more widespread to think about responding to them.

Public sector implementation capability is already constrained, they argue, so work must be done now to prepare for the future. The academics believe it would be a mistake to wait until there is a public outcry to act, which may lead to a rushed and inadequate response. The growth of these technologies is of particular concern because of their potential to exacerbate disadvantage for the vulnerable.

Performance Measurement

Governments have often tried to measure performance through systems that encourage gaming and tunnel vision. To counter problems stemming from an over-reliance on data, governments are moving towards “more hybrid approaches, aligning different accountability mechanisms both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ to drive improvement across public services”, the authors note.

“These include continuous quality improvement networks and professional approaches that leverage provider legitimacy and authority for using data to achieve desired outcomes; and assurance approaches using public reporting, financial incentives and contractual mechanisms as the stimulus for change.”

More needs to be done to ensure performance is properly measured, however. A critical appraisal of the motivations, rewards systems and techniques that underpin different approaches, and the kind of data, system architecture and processes needed to advance implementation and increase adaptive capacity for change is needed: “We recommend the APS adopt a pragmatic approach that facilitates accountability and improvement at multiple levels if government is to realise the potential of performance measurement systems, particularly as the availability and use of different types of data expands rapidly into the future.”

Fair Outcomes For Citizens

The widespread use of markets has led to a significant shift in how social services are delivered. “Yet research shows that while some citizens benefit from these approaches, others are marginalised,” the authors argue. “Factors that drive inequalities, such as age, gender, level of education, disability, health, access to technology, socioeconomic status, residential location and household structure, emerge as clear fault lines in systems underpinned by these principles and as previously noted, digital government can exacerbate this.”

Institutional architecture — such as the proliferation of public and private stakeholders — can make it more difficult for government coordinate policy effectively. This trend impacts on the skills required of public servants. It entails “a shift from authority to diplomacy and pragmatism, balancing accountability with experimentation, recognising that context matters, understanding that diversity is crucial to design and implement fair policy, and clear-eyed appraisal of citizens’ experience of government across a broad spectrum of needs and circumstances,” the authors argue.

“To fulfil the social contract between government and citizens, the APS must find a way to ensure citizens enjoy the benefits of market models while protecting those vulnerable to market-produced inequities.”

POLICYMAKING AMID COMPLEX SYSTEMS: FINDING THE LEVERS OF INFLUENCE

Published online September 18, 2018

Finding the right levers to influence policies in a complex environment can be very difficult. The Mandarin's David Donaldson sought and consolidated the views of three academics, including that of UNSW Canberra's Public Service Research Group professor Deborah Blackman, on policymaking in complex systems. This article was originally published in *The Mandarin* 15/05/2018

Policymaking is full of problems impacted by complex systems — incorporating a large and often unpredictable range of people, institutions and other factors over which government typically has little control. When things go wrong, it might be because government hasn't figured out which levers to use, or the policy solution itself could create its own unintended consequences.

"There are lots of really great policies developed, but not all of them do the things that we'd like them to do," says UNSW professor Deborah Blackman, in a podcast released by Policy Forum about what policymakers can learn from the science of systems. *"A lot of it is about not understanding the system,"* adds Blackman, a member of the Public Service Research Group in the School of Business at UNSW Canberra.

Taking a systems approach is helpful not only for understanding the policy big picture, but for working out where to go next. *"Particularly for policymakers, there's so much written about change management,"* Blackman tells the ANU Crawford School's Professor Helen Sullivan. *"What you're trying to do is change a system. That means you need to understand where the leverage points are, and **when** it will be possible to do them. We might not be able to fix the 20-year problem this year, but we can work out what year one needs to look like, so that we can think about 20 years. Even in a political cycle, that gives you something to be starting to move things with."*

Often a good place to start is by looking at what's working already, as well as where the big risks are, who you might get offside by changing the current setup, and what you have already tried to change but not managed to. *"We might think we understand where the leverage point is, but clearly we don't. And if we keep pushing at the same leverage point, if you keep trying to do the same thing, why would you think it would be different next time? If the leverage point has not worked, then you need a different one."*

Speaking to public servants recently, she said it became clear that many want to improve their ability to use mandate and politics cleverly. *"We assume that public servants can do that, and it became clear that it's not necessarily a learned skill, it's a capability that people need to develop,"* said Blackman.

Fragmented Governance

One issue policymakers often confront is that while different government departments might have clearly designated areas of authority, reality is not nearly so clearly divided. An example is what's called the food-water-energy nexus, explains Professor Claudia Pahl-Wostl, director of the Institute for Environmental Systems Research at the University of Osnabrück in Germany, and co-chair of the Global Water System Project.

"You can't manage or govern on water without considering other sectoral policies," said Pahl-Wostl. *"Often these policies are really incoherent, responsibilities in administration are very fragmented, [and] there are no effective instruments to coordinate policies."*

This is where thinking about systems can be helpful, and the way in which the needs and services of

different actors are interrelated. *"What we try at the moment is to develop a more systemic perspective, to use an ecosystem-services approach. There are different services that people get or want to have from the ecosystem. How are they dependent?"*

Systems Of Systems

Datu Buyung Agusdinata takes this kind of thinking one step further by looking at 'systems of systems'. A senior sustainability scientist at the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Institute of Sustainability at Arizona State University, he defines this a combination of autonomous systems, which are independent operationally, but must nevertheless be part of a larger system to address an issue they can't address on their own.

Cities are another area where a system-of-systems approach is helpful. If you're thinking about urban revival, for example, the challenge of attracting people and companies to an area needs to address questions as diverse as schools, quality of life, retirement options for workers, access to transport for companies, macroeconomic policy, and so on.

"For the food-energy-water nexus, you have utility companies that control the provision of energy, you have farmers which produce food, and then you have water treatment plants and cities," explains Agusdinata. *"They have to coordinate, because they need to achieve higher goals, to reduce the environmental footprint of food, energy, water consumption. This goal is not actually the reason for water utilities to exist, they exist to provide service reliability, they don't exist to cut emissions. So how could you then reconcile these different priorities?"*

DEVELOPING AND RECRUITING THE FUTURE PUBLIC SERVANT

September 20, 2018

Public service workforce reform has been on the minds of public administrators, especially in light of high profile reviews such as the Independent Review of the Australian Public Service. UNSW Canberra's Public Service Research Group academics Professor Deborah Blackman, Dr Samantha Johnson, Associate Professor Helen Dickinson and Dr Linda Dewey delve into this issue in greater detail from a development and recruitment perspective. They suggest that there are four distinct elements in social learning that can serve as a framework for building workforce capability and supporting change within the public service.

A full version of their thoughts can be found in Dickinson, H., Needham, C., Mangan, C. and Sullivan, H. (2019). *Reimagining the Future Public Service Workforce*. Springer Briefs in Political Science.

It is not uncommon to read pieces on public sector reforms discussing what public services do and how they are undergoing significant change. If this is true, then the types of competencies and skills needed to acquit public service roles will also need to undergo some radical change in terms of the development and recruitment of public servants. In a recently published chapter, we suggest that there needs to be a rethinking of development and recruitment processes to embed a social learning approach. In this piece we set out the key building blocks of this approach.

The Importance Of Social Learning

Traditional recruitment processes, which have often focused on experience in a similar role or task, are not well equipped to consider the desired attributes of a different future. Moreover, formal training has a number of inherent limitations; some core skills can be transferred and integrated into work relatively easily, but more complex tacit knowledge is harder to develop and/or transfer, requiring organizations to actively support their employees in applying and implementing their new knowledge. The question becomes, therefore, how can a wider variety of skills be attracted, developed and sustained?

People learn from each other through observation, imitation and modelling, a phenomenon described as social learning; it is one of the reasons why "walking the talk" is so important. Advocates of social learning suggest that it can help support the integration of new capabilities – soft skills in particular – into organizations in a way that will create collective change. There are four distinct elements in social learning and we suggest these can serve as a framework for building workplace capability and supporting change which will need to be applied through new human resource practices that actively implement each element.

1. Attentional Processes: Learning By Observing Role Models In The Workplace

People identify appropriate and inappropriate behaviors and learn the apparently acceptable rules of behavior from observing the people with whom they interact regularly, in particular the most appealing or dominant members of their social group. Understanding the significance of observing modelled behaviors helps explain why embedding new organizational capacity, through the development of new employee skills and capabilities, can be difficult to cement in the workplace. While on the one hand the desired behaviors, such as innovation, are articulated and championed verbally, on the other hand, people continue to copy the original behaviors that are modelled regularly and accepted as appropriate.

Human Resource Manager (HRM) practitioners can help support learning and behavioral change by identifying those people in the workplace who currently model, or would be best placed to model, the desired behaviors. In the workplace this may be the middle and senior managers, but equally it may be

those who are seen to be successful, confident, charismatic and highly visible. Training these people in the preferred or new behaviors, and supporting them to explicitly portray these behaviors regularly and consistently, can support change through social learning. Changed recruitment activity also provides an opportunity to introduce and subsequently model new or preferred behaviors in the workplace. HRM practitioners can identify the behaviors required to support change in the organization and recruit candidates who can confidently apply those behaviors or who have a clear potential to do so once trained. What will be critical is that the new recruits are not socialized into current practices, instead of demonstrating new ones and so HRM and Human Resource Development practitioners must work together to ensure that the behaviors they seek to encourage through training programs are the same behaviors they identify and select in recruitment activities.

2. Retention Processes: Remembering And Reproducing Desired Behaviors

Having role models is a good start, but they need to be seen within a context where their skills are explicitly supported and consistently rewarded. The observer must consistently see, and have repeated exposure to, preferred behaviors, in order to develop visual and verbal cues that allow easy recall and practice of the behavior. In the modern workplace, being engaged and focused on another's behavior can be challenging when emails and other electronic communication have replaced much face-to-face interaction, particularly with senior staff who are the most effective role models. We suggest that the most pertinent support mechanism at this stage of the framework is mentoring and coaching. By providing those who should be modelling new desired behaviors and are responsible for developing them in others with support from people who know what the intended outcomes are, there is a much greater chance of consistency.

3. Motor Reproduction Processes: Refining Behavior Through Self-Assessment And Feedback

The third element of the framework is where, through self-corrective activities and feedback from others, people refine newly acquired behaviors bit-by-bit until mastery is achieved. An environment and workplace that is supportive of legitimate attempts to apply new behaviors, correcting errors and providing constructive and corrective feedback, will enable new behaviors to be applied. For this to happen, two things are required: an environment that tolerates error and a workplace that provides regular, constructive or corrective feedback. It is widely reported that many public sector organizations are risk averse and this is often cited as the reason why there is a persistent call for increased innovation. This risk aversion can inhibit learning and change, as observers may be reluctant to apply new behaviors for fear of the adverse consequences of error. It is well understood that employees will struggle to correct and refine new behaviors if constructive feedback is not forthcoming. But this requires not just employers supporting employee mastery of an activity, but also creating supporting systems and structures which reinforce desired behaviors and promote employee beliefs that they can achieve.

We suggest that the role of HRM practitioners will be to consider how to build an environment that tolerates and manages experimentation and a workplace that provides positive, constructive and corrective feedback, not only through consistent HR practices, but also through management development and general organizational governance. Recognizing this bigger system feedback issue helps to explain why recruiting for new skills is not enough; when the new person arrives they must be supported to use and demonstrate the skills.

4. Motivational Processes: Mastering And Embedding Behavior

Applying new behaviors at work regularly enough to achieve mastery of new skills will require both individual motivation and organizational support. People will be motivated to practice, refine and master new or preferred behaviors when they believe that the behavior will bring valuable and positive results and self-satisfaction. Performance management is a strategic management tool which can provide the wider

context, purpose and clarity that an employee needs to be able to perform their role well. Managers and mentors can use the process to explain what high performance will look like, and this links to the ongoing modelling needed for social learning.

What is apparent is that, as well as HR practices being linked to a strategic objective, they must also have a goal to create the environment that will support actively managed social learning that links formal and experiential learning and supports the development of mastery. In organizations seeking to develop future public servants with a wider variety of skills, HR practices must support the change by ensuring that, not only are the new skills and behaviors required clearly identified, but the organizational systems are in place to support their sustained attainment.

Bandura's social learning theory offers a framework that can be used to bring about change through HR practices that support behavioral role modelling, the practice of new behaviors in the workplace, regular and constructive feedback on behavior and clear rewarding of valued behaviors.

FLEXIBLE WORKING: INNOVATIONS AND ISSUES

Published online September 21, 2018

Australia's Fair Work Act 2009 provides employees in the national workplace relations system with a legal right to request flexible working arrangements. And while this practice is welcomed by employers, it may be more difficult to implement in practice. UNSW Canberra's Public Service Research Group academics Dr Sue Williamson and Dr Meraiah Foley, as well as Central Queensland University's Dr Linda Colley, explain some of the policy's innovations and challenges experienced by employers when they assist employees in achieving balance between work and their personal lives. This article was originally published in *The Mandarin*. 26/07/2018

It is increasingly recognised that flexible workers are happier, healthier and more productive. Yet many employees still have trouble accessing flexible work arrangements, or progressing in their careers whilst working flexibly.

Over the past year, we have held conversations with almost 300 public service managers in four states about how they enable employees to work flexibly, when it works, and why sometimes it doesn't. Building on our previous research, we found many leading practices, but also a need for more support and guidance.

"Most managers expressed a need for more guidance around how to motivate and monitor employees working flexibly, particularly those working from home."

Public service managers proved to be an innovative group. For example, when faced with a cyclical, regular increase in workload, some managers negotiated with their part-time staff to work full-time for the busiest periods of the year. Team members were happy to do this within a relationship of reciprocity.

Others had managed to turn a difficult situation into a positive. One of the recurring issues in the 40 focus groups we conducted was that when full-time staff became part-time, managers lost the 'left-over' part of the position. Some managers had taken the 0.4 or 0.2 remainders and created a new position, which was used to provide another staff member with an acting opportunity, or to 'float' across the workgroup, undertaking work as needed.

Many managers were also strategic. When developing workplans, they considered those working flexibly to forecast resource needs and deadlines. There was general agreement, however, that senior managers also needed to recognise that not all staff could undertake the workload of a full-time employee, and higher level workplans needed to reflect this.

Why Managers Refuse Flexi-Work Requests

We heard a range of reasons why managers would like to refuse employee requests to work flexibly. Some were concerned that if they allowed one employee to work from home, they would be inundated with requests from other employees. Many were concerned about managing a team of largely part-time employees, and the potential impact this might have on meeting deadlines, especially given that the manager often absorbed the urgent work. Without clear guidelines around these tricky scenarios, a handful of managers thought the whole thing was just too hard. Indeed, most managers expressed a need for more guidance around how to motivate and monitor employees working flexibly, particularly those working from home.

Many managers were also unclear about when and how requests for flexibility could legitimately and legally be denied. Although the **Fair Work Act** states that a request can be refused on 'reasonable business grounds', what constitutes reasonable grounds is unclear to managers. The Fair Work Ombudsman states that 'reasonable business grounds' can include: the requested flexibility being too

costly, too impractical, resulting in a 'significant loss of productivity' or having 'a significant negative impact on customer service'.

The Fair Work Commission has also examined the acceptable reasons why requests for flexible working have been refused. These also centre on the proposed working arrangement not being 'operationally viable'. Essentially, the 'floodgate' argument is not a good enough reason to refuse a request; and neither is managerial preference to not have employees working flexibly.

Many managers, however, do not have the time to search for this information. The numbers of requests to work flexibly are likely to escalate due to an increasing recognition that flexibility can benefit a wide range of employees, as well as organisations. An opportunity therefore exists for public sector human resource practitioners to lead the way and provide regular and ongoing updates about how to manage flexible workers.

Dr Sue Williamson, PSRG, UNSW Canberra, Dr Linda Colley, Central Queensland University, Dr Meraiah Foley, PSRG UNSW Canberra

This article is based on 'The Role of Middle Managers in Progressing Gender Equity in the Public Sector', a report written by the authors and Professor Rae Cooper. The report was being launched on August 1 and is available from the Public Service Research Group's website. The New South Wales, Queensland, South Australian and Tasmanian governments participated in, and funded the research; the Australia and New Zealand School of Government was the principal funder.

For more information on the project, email s.williamson@adfa.edu.au.

LEARNING FROM FEMINIST APPROACHES TO EVIDENCE BASED POLICY: THE CASE OF THE CONFLICT TACTICS SCALE

Published online September 25, 2018

The Women's Policy Action Tank was established to place a gender lens over policies, many of which purport to be gender-neutral, because many policies are never subject to such a specific interrogation of gender blindness and effects. In today's insightful piece, Lisa Carson (@LisaC_Research) of the Public Service Research Group at UNSW Canberra provides an overview of her co-authored piece (with Eleanor Malbon (@Ellie_Malbon) of the Public Service Research Group at UNSW Canberra & Sophie Yates (@MsSophieRae) of ANZSOG and UNSW), which provides a practical example of why analysing data and forming policy must be approached from the vantage point of those who are disenfranchised. Specifically, they argue that framing data, interpretation and application within the context of robust feminist theory allows for a more nuanced and complex analysis of policy impacts by taking on the flawed data analysis employed by men's rights groups.

In most established democracies, there is a desire to combine policymaking with evidence, earning a notch of legitimacy for policy and research alike. The use of evidence in policymaking is a good idea, but like many good ideas, it is more complicated in practice than it is in theory. Depictions of a 'clean' or objective relationship between evidence, researchers and policymakers leave little space for the realities of advocacy and normative arguments in politics.

In a recent paper we posed the question "What can policymakers learn from feminist strategies to combine contextualised evidence with advocacy?" Our answer is: a lot. In particular, we show the importance of using evidence that is sensitive to gendered contexts and the significant role that normative arguments play. We suggest a different approach to evidence and policy, informed by political science and philosophy, which emphasises a theoretically driven approach to evidence production and advocacy.

Our approach is informed by feminist standpoint theory and we argue that the political tussle over what evidence is considered to be relevant for policy formation should be informed by knowledge relevant to those in subordinate positions of power (who form the focus of and are impacted by particular policies). When it comes to policy, feminist theorists and practitioners draw attention to the importance of anticipating and applying a feminist understanding to both policy formation and its outcomes by using multiple levels of analysis, such as individual, collective and structural, as well as analysing differential impacts across intersecting axis including gender, race, sexuality, ability, and religion among others. Using different levels of analysis is necessary to ensure that we achieve better politically informed and context-specific understandings of policy 'problems' and proposed 'solutions'. We argue that this type of analysis is important because it has the potential to reveal additional layers of complexity that may otherwise be overlooked.

In order to show the importance of contextualised evidence and advocacy, we use a case study of interpersonal violence measurement tool the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). We argue that the evidence-based policy approach, even when considered as principle or ideal, frames the policy-making process as 'objective', and in doing so ignores the gendered contexts in which knowledge is produced, used and translated into policy and implementation.

The Contested Nature Of Measuring Violence And The Use Of The Conflict Tactics Scale

Early efforts to measure and respond to violence in families came from women's movement activists, who worked to expose the existence of private gendered violence and make what was commonly termed

'domestic violence' a social issue requiring legislative and policy responses. Research at this period came from a feminist perspective, aimed at agenda setting and consciousness raising. It was mainly qualitative and based on clinical and refuge samples - i.e., participants had by definition experienced significant partner abuse. Unsurprisingly, results supported the feminist viewpoint that domestic and family violence was mainly perpetrated by men in order to control women and their children.

When researchers began using quantitative tools to measure domestic and family violence in the general population (e.g., the US National Family Violence Surveys of 1975 and 1985), the figures appeared to tell a different story. In the late 1970s, a team of researchers in the US developed and began using a tool known as the Conflict Tactics Scale (updated to CTS2 in 1996). The CTS is based on conflict theory, which sees conflict as an inevitable part of human relationships, and violence as a tactic used to deal with conflict. The CTS has now been in use for four decades, and results derived from this measure are used to support claims that women and men are equally violent in intimate relationships, that a focus on gender inequality as a driver of this violence is misplaced, and that policy and practice responses should focus on individualised interventions rather than those based on the way that gender and power shape our society.

For as long as the CTS has been in use, feminist activist researchers have been criticising its validity. The main criticism is that it misses—and in fact is not intended to measure—contextual factors that are crucial to establishing patterns of coercive control. According to Dawn Currie, researchers from the family conflict tradition consistently “obscure the importance of gender” and its implications for existing power dynamics in intimate relationships, assuming that violence stems from conflict and that parties in conflict are equally powerful. The CTS asks participants to report the use or experience of 39 verbally/ emotionally or physically violent behaviours in response to a conflict or anger situation during the previous 12 months. Critics note that it counts the number of incidents but does not record the substantive issue that led to the violence, or any other pertinent context. The instruction to consider only conflict or argument-instigated violence reveals the assumption that all violence is used expressively, i.e. in anger, which potentially misses instrumental violence used to control individuals, and violence that doesn't stem from an identifiable cause. Researchers who combine the CTS with other measures that collect information about context have found that the CTS encourages over-reporting of violence, produces findings of gender symmetry in perpetration that are thrown into doubt by other contextual information, and can even lead to miscategorisation of victims as perpetrators.

The difference between feminist and mainstream domestic and family violence researchers is not that they advocate for one particular research method or that feminists dismiss the value of quantitative measurement tools. Rather, it is that they strive to be sensitive to power and context, do not pretend that their research is (or could be) objective or value free, and produce work that is theory driven rather than the “abstracted empiricism” common to many studies on domestic and family violence.

Senate Inquiry Into Domestic Violence In Australia (2014-2015)

Debates about the validity of the CTS as a measure for intimate partner violence, and the validity of the gender symmetry argument more broadly, were triggered in Australian politics in the 2014–2015 Senate Inquiry into Domestic violence in Australia. During the Inquiry, representatives for the men's rights activist group One in Three used evidence derived from the CTS measure to justify their claims that most family violence is mutual or 'common couple' violence.

However, the presentation of Straus's work and the CTS measure was anticipated and met by a representative from the violence against women research organisation ANROWS (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety). She identified One in Three's reliance on results derived from the CTS, which meant that the men's rights activist group was drawing on discredited evidence, and used this to demonstrate the need for evidence derived from measures that take the context of violent incidents into account. ANROWS' approach shows the power of using normative arguments in advocating for the Inquiry to recommend resources and research funding for domestic violence against women. ANROWS suggested that their evidence is more legitimate than the CTS-based evidence because it is theory-driven

and has better explanatory power in accounting for the gender dynamics at play. The success of this strategy that combines contextualised evidence and normative arguments allows for the recognition that the people most vulnerable to domestic and family violence in Australia are women, especially Indigenous women, women with disability and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The final Inquiry report did acknowledge the need to give support to male victims of domestic and family violence, but it also accepted ANROWS' analysis that women are most likely to experience violence in the home by a current or former partner, but men outside the home by strangers, acquaintances or neighbours. It also featured ANROWS' argument that the contributors to violence are complex and include “attitudes to women and gender roles within relationships, family and peer support for these attitudes and social and economic gender inequality in the broader societal context.”

Whilst all violence is wrong, regardless of the sex of the perpetrator, there are distinct gendered patterns in the perpetration and impact of violence. Work by critical feminists, practitioners, and some men and masculinities scholars has shown that there may be similarities between male- and female-perpetrated violence, but they are not the same, because the causes, dynamics and outcomes of violence against women are different from those of violence against men. For example, men may fear and suffer violence from predominantly other men and some individual women, whereas women tend to face more widespread violence, both individually and structurally.

Insights For Policymakers

This case illustrates that the combination of normative arguments and the gendered politicisation of evidence can be used to convince policymakers that certain quantitative measures are not reliable, and that resources to care for victims and survivors of domestic and family violence should be focussed on the women, and particularly the most vulnerable populations of women in Australia.

The case of feminist engagement with the CTS provides an example of a gender politically- and contextually-informed approach to evidence-based policy. Evidence cannot 'speak for itself' in a vacuum of objectivity, rather it needs political actors to give it voice and meaning. By examining feminist approaches to this case study, we can learn from feminist advocate researchers about the importance of context, normative arguments, and the politicisation of evidence in policymaking and implementation.

Our case study provides just one example that is informed by feminist theory and grass roots activism and advocacy. We argue that policymakers can greatly benefit from engaging with feminist approaches to policy and evidence, and especially committed feminist advocate researchers who refuse to accept that evidence can or should be decontextualised or depoliticised.

This post was part of the Women's Policy Action Tank initiative to analyse government policy using a gendered lens.

ARE ROBOTS AN ANSWER TO THE 'CARE CRISIS'?

Published online October 24, 2018

An ANZSOG-funded research project is exploring the increasing use of robots in care services to replace or complement the roles of humans. In this article, researchers Catherine Smith, Helen Dickinson, Gemma Carey & Nicole Carey explore how the growth of robots in care services is changing how we think about care, and what we need to do to ensure that the ethics of care are maintained. The full report is expected to be published in the near future.

It is well-established within policy and practice circles that we are facing an impending crisis of care. Australia, like a number of other advanced liberal democracies, is anticipating a future with an older population, with a more complex mix of chronic illness and disease. A number of care organisations already operate under tight fiscal constraints and report challenges in recruiting sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified staff. In the future, fewer numbers in the working-age population and increased numbers of retirees will compound this problem. If we then add to this equation the fact that consumer expectations are increasing, then it starts to look like future care services are facing somewhat of a perfect storm.

Robots are increasingly becoming a feature of our care services, capable of fulfilling a number of roles from manual tasks through to social interaction. Their wider use has been heralded as an important tool in dealing with our impending care crisis. We have recently completed an ANZSOG-funded research project exploring the roles robots should play in care settings, with particular attention to what this tells us in terms of definition of care. In our research we explored how robots are currently being used across a range of care services (health, disability, education and aged care) and areas where they will likely develop further in the future. We found that care is not a simple concept but a complex and relational set of practices which has important implications for policy.

One thing that we were interested in exploring with interviewees is: if robots are an answer to the care crisis, then what is it that we mean by care? Care is one of those terms that we all use regularly, but don't often stop to define precisely what it is that we mean. So what activities do we think robots might undertake and what are the implications?

What Is Care?

Typically, when public services think about designing care services they inevitably pull together a series of different activities (e.g. cleaning, washing, feeding and supporting other practical needs in day-to-day living) that comprise those services. Indeed, if we think back to when care services were first outsourced from local governments, this was often done by individuals observing workers and listing the different activities that they undertook.

In our research, although care was defined in terms of different sets of activities, there are other facets that are also thought to be crucial, namely, care being a relational and responsive activity. Participants aligned the concepts of robots and care with a definition of care that largely focused on the relational aspect of care service practices. Most people reasoned that humans and human interaction is essential to care relationships, and robots would not be able to replace this.

However, in the care of people with needs associated with autism and dementia the non-human qualities of a robot are seen to be a strength in relational care. In both situations, participants identified that robots are able to undertake repetitive tasks without experiencing the monotony and potential boredom of a human. Robots were described in these scenarios as having no emotional baggage, being patient and unable to get angry.

This was seen as an opportunity to remove a potential stressor from the relationship between the primary carer and those being cared for, and as an augmentation of their care relationship, not a replacement. It was identified as an opportunity to provide the carer with the additional time to address other activities.

Robots are identified as a way to combat loneliness and isolation but with a caveat of concern that they could also generate further isolation if their 'company' is used to replace human contact. In most cases, the robot is conceptualised as facilitating relationships. Some participants saw that they provided a conversation piece and relational bridge for the cared for and other people in their wider community, such as peers or family members from other generations.

Care is therefore seen as something that is defined in terms of a relationship, and where responsiveness to the needs of the cared-for is elemental to success. An element which arises in much of the care literature is one of reciprocity, where there is a synergy that develops in such a relationship. The role of the cared-for and the carer can be fluid, with the cared-for strengthened by the value they can bring to the relationship, and the reward that is felt in the giving of care.

Concerns of this nature arose particularly in discussions of 'Paro' - a robotic seal that responds with sound and movement to the touch of another. The robot is soft to touch and invites actions of nurture. This was identified as particularly useful for people with conditions such as dementia and autism, where its primary use was settling erratic behaviour. The opportunity to provide for responsiveness and reciprocity was otherwise largely unexplored beyond general discussions around the importance of empathy and the need for human carers to achieve it.

Ethics Of Care And Implications For Policy And Practice

Describing care as a responsive, relational activity is very much in-line with a way of conceptualising this practice as consistent with an 'ethics of care' perspective. In care ethics, care involves bestowing value on the cared for and activity that provides for their needs. Tronto identified that good care comes about when both of these dimensions - caring about and caring for - are present. Care is oriented toward particular beliefs, including concern and the ability to discern the risks of interference over the risks of inaction; interpretation of the responsibilities in each situation as opposed to aligning to a rigid set of rights; and responsiveness aligned with the setting and the individual. Privacy, dignity and agency are all of particular concern in the provision of care in services as a result of these orientations.


If we define care practice in terms of ethics, then accountability of the relationships of care goes beyond the cared for and the carer. It also includes those who have determined the ethical systems that guide robot behaviour, and therefore expands the care relationship into opaque and impersonal elements that require consideration. This has important implications in terms of policy and practice. If we replace some or part of a care process with a robot, it may have far-reaching implications. We therefore need to carefully consider how robot technologies fit within models of care. Without this there is a danger that we will not use these tools to their full effect, or will create unanticipated consequences.

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