

Avoiding a Bridge to Nowhere - Crossing the chasm between policy making and evidence

Evidence-based decision making (EBDM) has contributed to a wide range of policy making efforts, with the health sector being the primary beneficiary since the inception of EBDM in the early 80s. Today, there is increasing pressure on most public sectors to enhance decision making processes through the effective and timely use of the most available evidence possible.

However, public policy faces unique challenges when trying to fully embrace EBDM, with some claiming most public sector EBDM efforts are fraught with insurmountable barriers. As a result, increasing effort is being taken in what can be more accurately described as evidence-informed decision making (EIDM) - a small but important distinction with EBDM - where evidence is more fully considered in comparison to past practices, while seeking to account for public sector considerations.

Data analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning and other "big-data" capabilities are being increasingly sought out for their benefits to improve the public policy making process. However, as outlined above, such advancements are necessary, but not sufficient to close the gap in enhancing public policy making. Important non-technical considerations of the public policy environment are an integral component of the decision making process - and may be inadvertently overlooked by data scientist, resulting in ineffective or even rejected solutions.

In order to address and overcome some of the challenges applying EIDM in a public policy context, a novel framework will be presented as a means to identify opportunities for closing the evidence-policy gap. The framework will also propose means to identify where evidence is constrained in addressing public sector challenges. The framework will reference the relative importance of data sciences, technology, decision theory and leadership styles, among many factors, in extracting the most value from available evidence.

Numerous case studies, from medical devices and energy technology, to defence procurement and spectrum policy, will be provided as examples of the challenges and opportunities in bridging the provision of more sophisticated forms of evidence and public policy making.