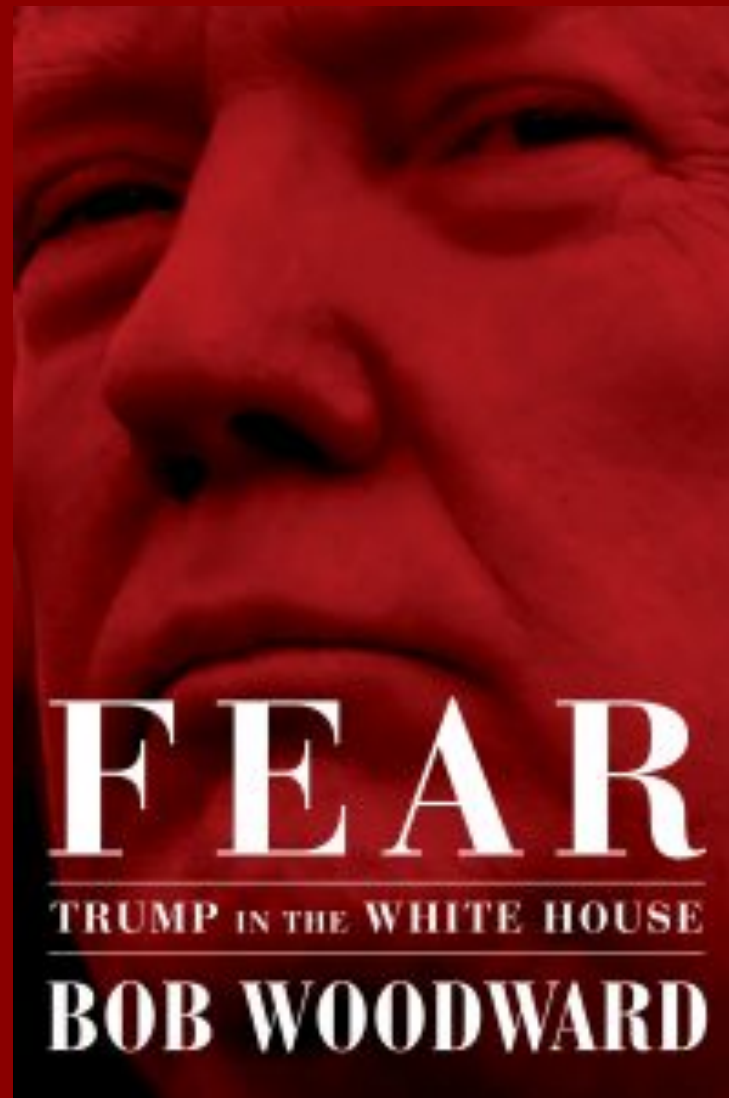




‘Drive out fear’

Creating space for evaluative thinking and speculation for practitioners and organisations



Michael Quin Patton
reminds us that:

*'Transformation
is not values-
neutral'.*



Cartoon © AES 2018

[We need to recognise] the high stakes involved, the life and death importance of thinking evaluatively in these uncertain and perilous times.

New Directions for Evaluation – Evaluative thinking Vol 2018, Issue 158 Wiley Online Library Michael Quinn Patton



*'We must attend
to formal and
informal things:
those above and
below the
surface.'*

Michael Quinn Patton

Drive out fear



Cartoon © AES 2018

Part 1: Talking about the problem

Part 2: What does it take? (6 things that have worked for us)

- Humility and honesty (not being an expert)
- ‘Good ideas can come from any person’
- Safe spaces for curiosity and speculation
- Policy Logic: it’s not linear
- Using evaluative thinking across policy cycle
- Talking about failure (case study)

Part 3: NSW Department of Education 5 ‘values’ – how could they help?

disruption
disruption

interrupt

Some words we use

- Disrupt
- Interrupt
- Changing
- Legal
- Challenge
- Transform

*Houston, we
have a problem...*



The 2010–11 the Australian Public Service *State of the Service* agency survey reported agencies' assessment of their own maturity on 13 capabilities*.

On a 5-point maturity scale:

- 45% rated themselves at **Level 2** for **innovation** and 37% for **change management**
- **risk management, strategic planning, policy development, citizen/stakeholder engagement** were most often at **Level 3**
- ... while *'leadership'* was reported as the most developed capability – with 40% of agencies assessing themselves at **Level 4**.

* Capabilities identified in *Ahead of the game: Blueprint for the reform of Australian Government administration*

Five
causes ...

1. The cultural and physical separation of policy and program expertise – and a devaluing program knowledge
2. Competition; lack of collaboration or inclusion
3. Excessive risk aversion
4. Inappropriate response to complexity
5. 'Evaluation' and evaluative thinking viewed as specialist knowledge

The APS *State of the Service Report 2013–14* found that across the APS there were ...

‘**functional siloes**’ between Divisions and also between agencies’ due to:

- lack of understanding of agency vision



- immediate and particular demands of day-to-day management
- limited opportunities to build relationships in larger agencies
- performance management regimes 'that have been task-oriented and are only now beginning to consider behaviours'.



Policy knowledge

- **Government's broader agenda**
- **Policy drivers**
- **Program origins**
- **Research or theoretical basis**
- **Theory of change**
- **"What's needed"**

Program knowledge

- **Logistics**
- **Client responses**
- **Cycles of activity**
- **Provider issues**
- **Monitoring data**
- **"What works on the ground"**

The risks of separating policy/program expertise

Shergold Review:

A major consequence ... is **policy failure**, where policy teams (and agencies) have been given responsibility for the roll-out of programs.

Policy teams may have little experience in:

- program design and implementation
- corporate administration
- risk management
- audit and compliance
- monitoring.

(Cont) The risks of separating policy/program expertise

Program teams may also suffer because:

‘People really need to be put in the context so we can generate new ideas for all.’

‘We don’t have good levels of [risk anticipation] because people can’t see what we’re aiming for ...’

‘It’s hard to identify outcomes when we’re only concerned with managing output.’

(Cont) The risks of separating policy/program expertise

‘It becomes less collaborative and more directive, [and] I don’t really like working in that sort of environment.’

The policy/program disconnect is negative . . . My team feels like ‘we’re just check-out chicks.’ (Program manager)

*‘No one ever asks program managers what they know.’
(Branch manager)*

Excessive risk aversion ...

‘...leads to the **centralisation of decision-making** and **suppression of policy innovation and ideas** at lower staff levels.

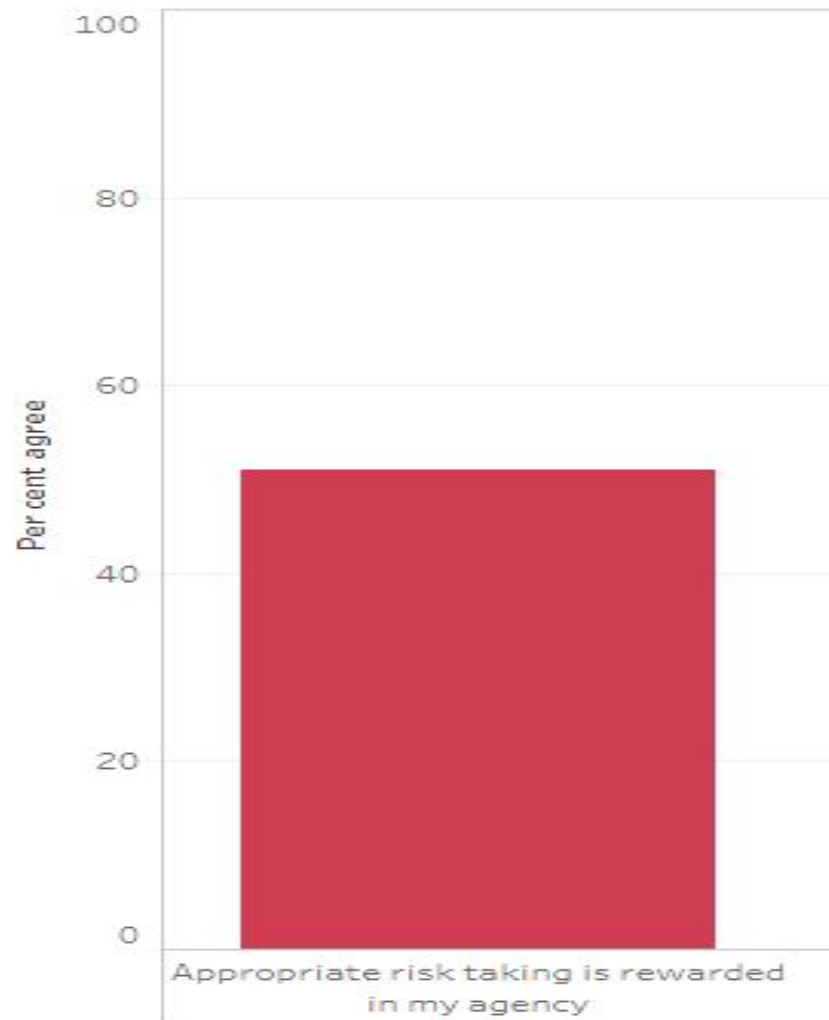
‘With limited experience of judging the taking of risk when the costs are small and predictable, the **ability to handle ... large and unpredictable crises** is increasingly challenging.’

(Shergold 2015: *Learning from failure*)

‘Excessive risk aversion’

Survey responses to ‘*Appropriate risk taking is rewarded in my agency*’

Workbook pp. 7–8



The Shergold review (2015)
Learning from failure) and the
Productivity Commission (2017)
found that across the APS there
was:

... *excessive risk aversion leading to
the **centralisation of decision-
making***

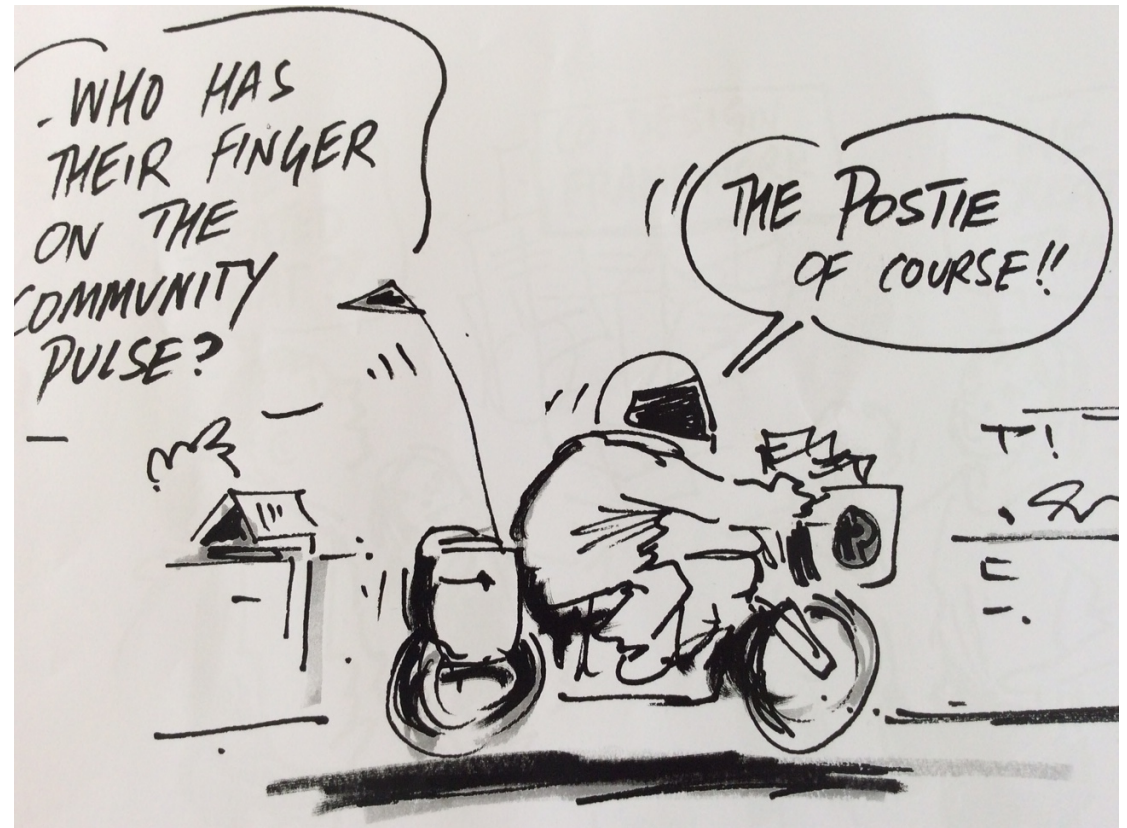
and

... ***suppression of policy innovation
and ideas at lower staff levels.***



But Michael Quin Patton tells us that we would benefit from:

'... hearing the voices of people we don't usually hear from ...'



Cartoon © AES 2018

Michael Quin Patton tells us
that we would benefit from:

*'... hearing the voices
of people we don't
usually hear from ...'*



Encouraging innovation

‘Encouraging and providing an avenue for innovation in policy and program design — *and recognising that good ideas can come from any person* — help to change attitudes of risk aversion and over-caution in the public service.’

(Productivity Commission 2017: Supporting paper 15 p. 17)

In an Academic Symposium on 'Improving Performance Information - Developing an Entity Performance Story' hosted by the Department of Finance in 2016, Professor Brian Head, of the Institute of Social Science Research at the University of Queensland, noted the strength of institutional and cultural barriers to talking about negative outcomes: there is almost no 'space' for this in government practice.

We need to have confidential spaces in which we can have these discussions – a 'cone of silence'. We should make it a place we can really have these discussions.



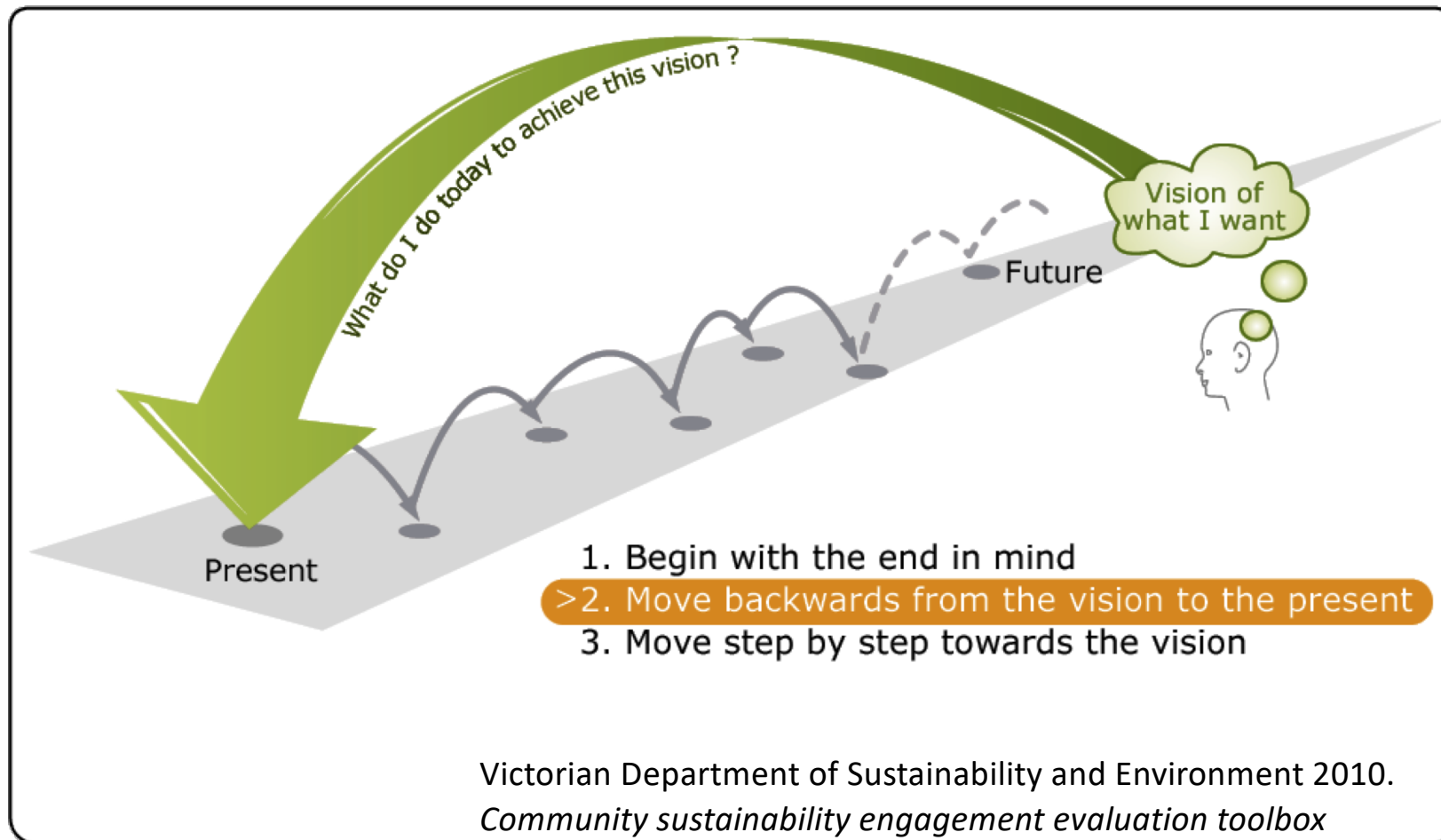
Creating safe spaces for speculation



The problem or pressure for government	Barriers to achieving change	Your role	Others in this policy space	Success at the end of the first year	Success in the mid term ('transition' or 'getting traction')	Success in the long term ('fixed')	Evaluation questions and data

Policy Logic

‘Backcasting’ or ‘backward mapping’



Facilitation style can help achieve good outcomes:

- Value (and record) all contributions
- Don't let anyone hang back – probe, push, invite
- Don't be an expert: ask big 'dumb' questions and make them dig for their own answers
- Challenge generalisations—ask *how they know*
- Identify and explore contradictions
- *Don't be linear*
- Regularly sum up and celebrate breakthroughs

‘Knowing how to turn a vague discussion of the presumed linkages between program activities and expected outcomes into a formal theory of action can be an important service to the program ...

*At times, helping program staff or decision makers to articulate their programmatic theory of action **is an end in itself** ...’*

Patton 1997: *Utilization focused evaluation* p. 162

Confusion of complicated and complex policy problems and systems

‘The distinction between complicated and complex systems is of immense importance to public policy, yet is often overlooked.’

Robert Poli (2013)

Complicated or complex?

Complicated problems:

- Causes can be individually distinguished
- Can be addressed piece by piece
- For each input there is an appropriate output
- The relevant systems can be controlled

Complicated or complex?

Complex problems and systems:

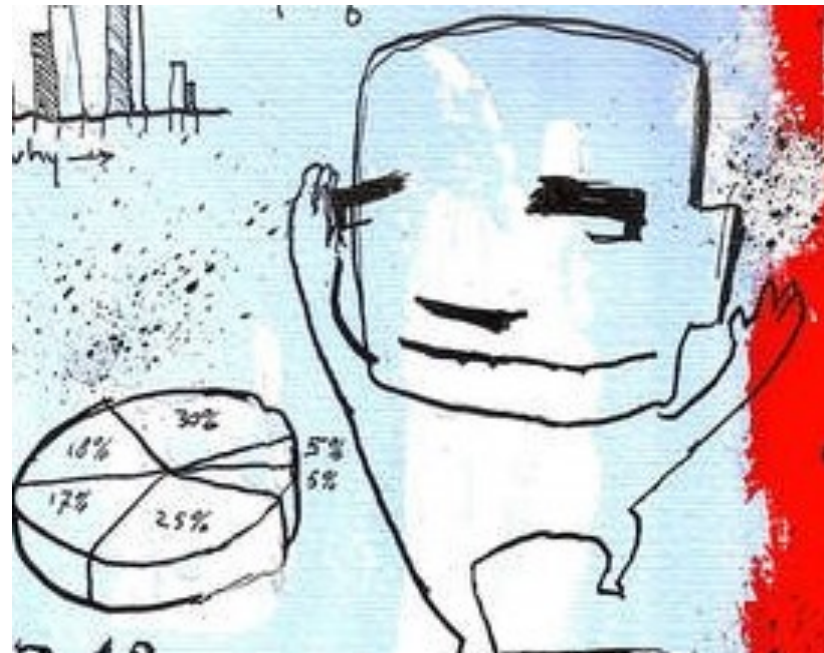
- Multiple interacting causes that **cannot be individually solved**: they must be addressed as **entire systems**
- The problems cannot be solved once and forever
- Interventions can cause new problems
- Relevant systems cannot be controlled ...

Complicated or complex?

*‘Decision-makers commonly mistake complex systems for simply complicated ones and look **‘learning to dance’** for solutions without realizing that with a complex system is definitely different from ‘solving’ the problems arising from it.’*

Roberto Poli 2013

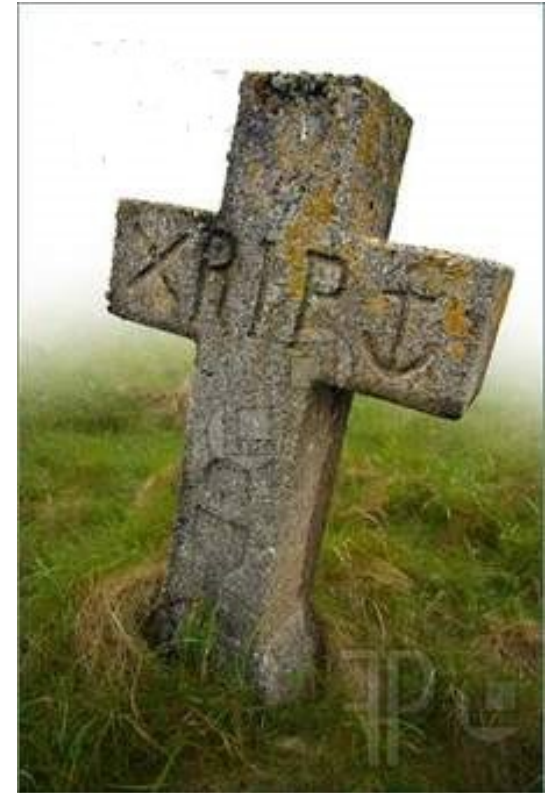
*What do you think
Poli meant by his
suggestion that we
'learn to dance' with
complex systems?)*



Evaluation is under-valued

- Not planned for at the outset
- Seen as an area of specialist practice
- Under-funded
- Feared as a process that is 'done to' a program at the end of its life ...

... rather than as an analytic process undertaken in partnership with program practitioners at any stage of program implementation.



Let's talk about failure

Case study: Investing in our Schools



Senator BRANDIS (Minister for the Arts and Sport) —I am delighted to be able to inform Senator Fifield of the current state of the *Investing in Our Schools* program ...

The *Investing in Our Schools* program is yet another example, of which there are many, of the Howard government taking up the slack to compensate Australian families for failed, negligent, inefficient state Labor governments.

The program allows for school communities, principals and parents, among others, to identify and prioritise the needs of schools and make applications for Australian government funding on a school-by-school basis.

It cuts out the inefficient 'politburos' of state education departments, who have failed—

(Hansard 12 September 2007)



Investing in Our Schools

Divergence
between policy
intention and
implementation

Questions so far?

*Evaluative thinking is part
mindset, part **skill set**.*

Source: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/evaluation-resource-hub/evaluative-thinking/disciplines-of-evaluative-thinking> - accessed 5 March 2018

While *evaluation* focuses on the tasks of gathering information to make a judgment ...

... *evaluative thinking* is being **strategically curious** and thinking critically in the service of your stated aims and value, within a specific context.

Evaluative thinking as defined by Buckley, Archibald, Hargraves, & Trochim (2015) is:

‘... critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action.’

New Directions for Evaluation –
Evaluative thinking Vol 2018, Issue 158
Wiley Online Library

Includes Michael Quinn Patton: 'An
historical perspective on the
evolution of evaluative thinking'

[We need to recognise] the high stakes involved, the life and death importance of thinking evaluatively in these uncertain and perilous times.

Michael Quinn Patton
New Directions for Evaluation – Evaluative
thinking Vol 2018, Issue 158 Wiley Online
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*Values and culture in evaluative thinking:
Insights from Aotearoa New Zealand*

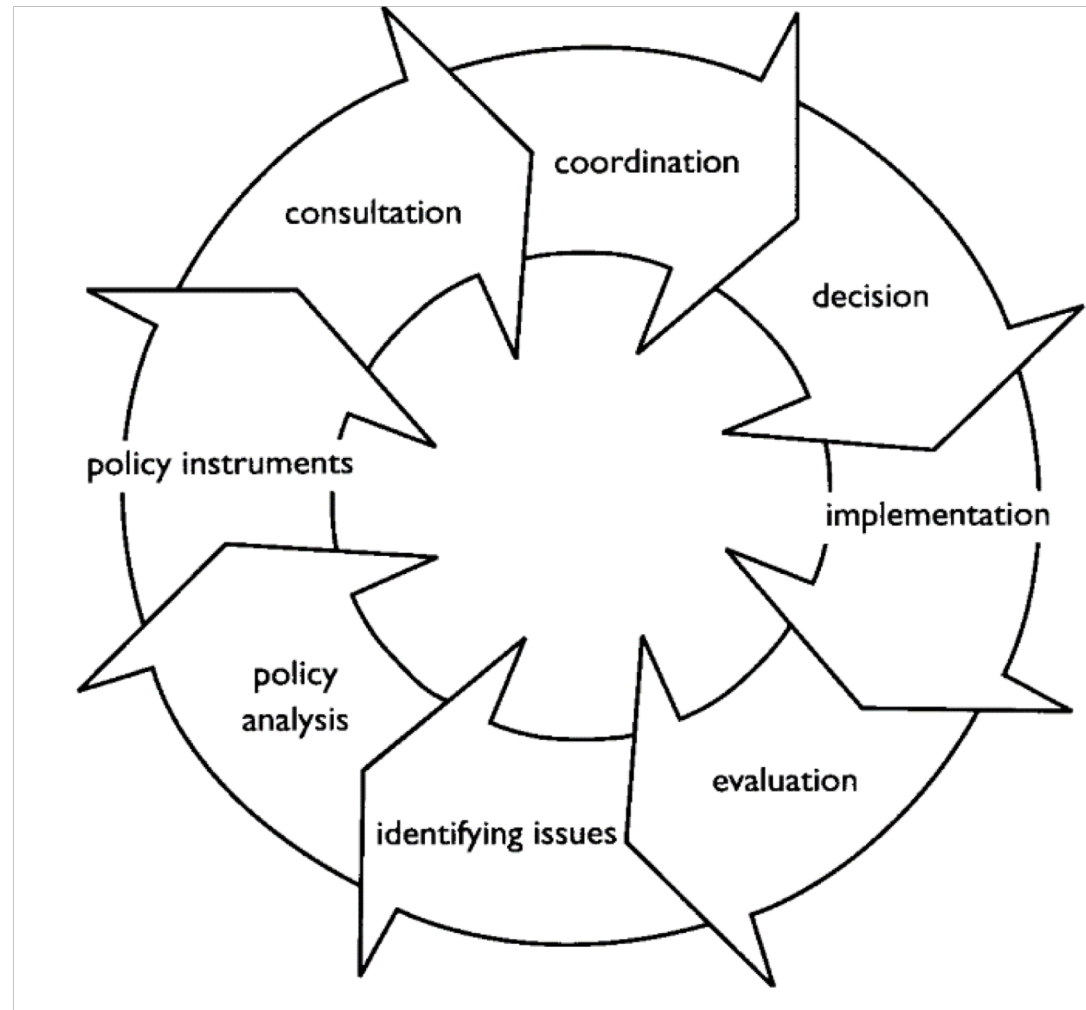
Nan Wehipeihana, Kate McKegg

Evaluative thinking, as currently discussed in the evaluation literature, is relatively **culture free**, in spite of the well-known connection between values and culture.

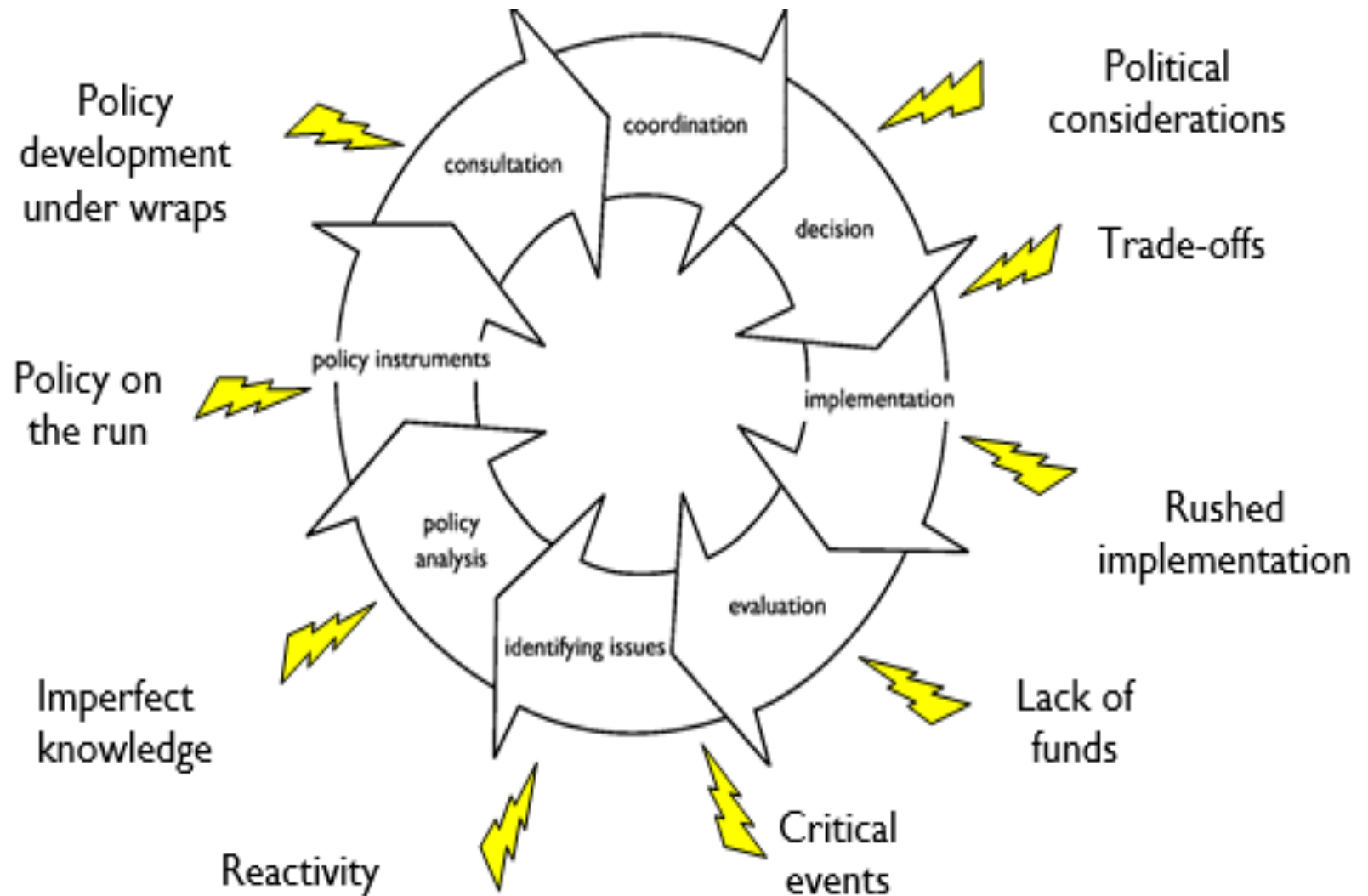
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‘The Australian policy cycle’

Althaus, Bridgman
& Davis 2007



Vs real-world policy cycles



A real basket of strawberries ...



A real basket of strawberries ...

‘Penalty rise to tackle strawberry saga

The federal government has announced a number of criminal code changes to deter people from putting needles in strawberries:

- Contamination offences penalty in the Commonwealth criminal code to be increased to 15 years in jail.
- Four new contamination offences to be created with 10 year maximum jail terms, with the level of proof being *recklessness* rather than *beyond reasonable doubt*.

The 5 values underpinning evaluative thinking

1. **Curiosity** - where we are willing to ask questions that might not have easy answers
2. **Ambition** - as we continually work to improve our processes and our impact
3. **Courage** - as we question and challenge existing practice in ourselves and others
4. **Humility** - recognising that insight can come from a wide range of sources and there is always more to learn
5. **Honesty** - where we do not seek to bend the facts to suit ourselves or cover up 'inconvenient truths'.

Source: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/evaluation-resource-hub/evaluative-thinking/disciplines-of-evaluative-thinking> - accessed 5 March 2018

Thinking evaluatively:

Which of these resonated for you?

Are any redundant?

***Would you want to add/substitute
other values?***

Would you use them?

And scaling up:

How could you use these 5 values as the basis for building an evaluation culture in your organisation?

Final questions?