The Role of the Psychologist in the Modern Economy


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In this paper it will be argued that we now live in a managed world economy, that this economy is managed on the basis of explicit information, that this managed economy has come into being for the best of reasons, but that, while it has conferred untold benefits on mankind, this managed economy has serious weaknesses. Psychologists have a crucial role to play in carrying out the studies, and developing the tools, which are required to enable it to function more effectively. We need new concepts of democracy and bureaucracy and new tools to use in assessing organisational effectiveness and in staff appraisal. If we, as psychologists, are to contribute to the necessary studies and to the evolution of new concepts and tools, we will need to (i) present the case for our involvement in this kind of work much more forcefully, (ii) press for changed concepts of the nature of science, and (iii) press for the establishment of an appropriate institutional framework within which to carry out the necessary research.

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In writing the best case for social research that has ever been published¹, Rothschild argued that social scientists had not laid claim to the major role which they should be playing in modern societies. Basically, he argued that modern societies could not function effectively without a considerable volume of social research. Unfortunately, he said, social scientists had failed to perceive the need for studies of the type and scale which were actually required and tended to propose studies which were too academic and too individualistic. The attitudes fostered in the course of undergraduate training led researchers to avoid messy policy-relevant studies the results of which would not be beyond dispute and argument. This also led them to avoid pressing home the implications of their studies by engaging in politically-relevant debate. And social scientists were too inclined to engage in criticism of each other’s work in a way which made it difficult to convince those who control the flow of funds that more money should be channelled toward them.

Rothschild did not spell out the changes which have taken place in society and which formed a context for his remarks. However, the fact is that, over the past 40 years, dramatic changes have come about in the way in which society is organised. We now live in what is essentially a managed world economy. The national economies of which it is composed, trans-national corporations and international trade are managed on the basis of explicit information. Decisions are made by ‘men’, wise or not, and not by the invisible hand of the economic marketplace. The role of money has been overturned instead of providing a mechanism whereby people can vote with their pennies to determine the direction in which things develop, the control of cash flows is now used to achieve goals which have been established through the information-based politico-bureaucratic process. ‘Customers’ are typically no longer individuals, but corporate giants purchasing on behalf of thousands, if not millions, of people – for health services, local authorities, airlines, national governments and alliances of countries. The citizen has the utmost difficulty influencing the way in which the two thirds of his ‘income’ which is devoted to taxation is ultimately spent.

The extent of this change is not generally recognised. In all EEC countries, approximately 45% of GNP is spent directly by governments. This does not include local authority expenditure or expenditure by the nationalised industries. When this is added on, the figure comes to some 65%. This still does not include the effects of legislation requiring firms to install such things as safety and pollution-control equipment, motorists to insure their cars, or grant and levy legislation which is designed to ensure that people spend much of their ‘own’ money in ways deemed appropriate by government. When these are added, the total comes to some 75%. One can argue about the figure of 75%, and one can argue about such things as how much control governments actually have over the way in which citizens spend transfer payments ... but the general conclusion that governments play the dominant role in managing modern economies is indisputable.

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These changes have come about for the best of reasons. An economy managed by the invisible hand of the marketplace gave us little control over the quality of the urban environment, crime, the inequitable distribution of income, plague and disease, environmental despoliation and pollution by producers or consumers, or even continued economic development itself. The immense social costs of dealing with the by-products of an industrial civilisation, and providing the education, highway, and regulatory infrastructure required for its effective operation, were not subject to market forces. Only an extension of explicit management will give us control over international forces which have until now been beyond control - such as the worldwide depletion of physical and biological resources, pollution, population growth, exploitation of third world countries, international movements of money, tax evasion and unjustifiable marketing practices on the part of trans-national companies, and war. Only an increase in world management will enable us to further improve - or even maintain - the quality of life - the wealth - of modern society.

The significance of these observations is this: while it has frequently been obvious that there was a need to evaluate particular policies - and especially pilot programmes - the central importance of evaluation and social accounting in modern society has generally not been appreciated.

Not only has the importance of such activity been underestimated - with the result that the establishment of more and better social research and development units has not been identified as the key development which is needed if we are to find ways of running our society more effectively, there has been little discussion of either the institutional base which is required if social researchers are to perform their role effectively or the concept of science and research which should inform decisions about which research should be funded.

In order to underline the importance and nature of the social research which is required, and in order to begin to discern something of the structures and expectations which are required if that research is to be carried out effectively, the results of two programmes of research will now be briefly summarised.

In the course of some research which was conducted between 1959 and 1965 we showed that high-rise family housing:

- was unacceptable to the tenants - and for good reason: it imposed a sedentary way of life upon them (because they felt that any noise they made would disturb their neighbours); they were unable from their kitchens to supervise children at play outside; the lifts often went wrong or were vandalised; the tenants were isolated because they found it difficult to get to know their neighbours (because they never saw - let alone met - them on neutral territory); and they were unable to alter their houses in order to adapt them to their own particular needs (something which - as the growth of DIY has since demonstrated - many owners of two-storey housing spend a considerable amount of time doing).

- was more costly to build than equivalent two-storey housing

- was more costly to maintain than two story housing

- accommodated less people per acre than two storey housing - which had the added advantage, if properly developed, of providing highly desirable garages, gardens, and access to public open space at the same density.

Despite this high quality research - which reached the pernickety standards demanded in civil service research units - no action was taken. Building high rise family housing continued into the 60s. The disaster is now recognised for what it is and these expensive tall blocks are being demolished. The most important lesson to be learnt from this is not that the policies in force were misguided. It is that we need to evolve structures which will make it possible to ensure that action is taken on the basis of good information.

This is not the end of the story, however, because our research and that of colleagues also yielded other important insights. Not only did people want a wide variety of different types of housing, and wish to avoid the grey uniformity of external appearance which is associated with public housing, the creation of vast single-class suburbs - many as large as whole towns - made it very difficult for young people who aspired to other ways of life to make contact with like-minded people and gain sufficient insight into their values and way of life to make meaningful choices. Also, bureaucratic rules made it difficult for tenants to establish the community support networks which are associated with unplanned working class communities - and this forced many people to lead isolated lives of demeaning dependence on welfare agencies and tranquilisers.

These further observations illustrate that not only do we need some (social-research based) means of ensuring that public servants attend to the needs of their clients and try to invent better ways of meeting those needs, they also
illustrate the importance of (a) legitimising the notion that choice is required in public provision, (b) providing the public with the (social research based) information they need to make meaningful decisions, (c) providing public servants with the (social research based) tools they need to administer that choice, and (d) in part through social research evaluating and improving each of the choices so as to better meet the needs of those concerned.

Why have public housing at all? First, because it was necessary to build housing - and whole new towns - on an unprecedented scale. Second, because those for whom public housing was intended had, in the past, been very badly catered for (and mercilessly exploited) by builders, landowners and landlords. Third, because, although those concerned had a clear need for housing, they often lacked the resources which would have been required to transform that need into an economic demand. Fourth, because, even when they did have the necessary cash, they often did not have the collateral information and power needed to ensure that they were not exploited. And, fifth, because the knock-on effect of a large number of street people or impoverished families who lived in poor and insanitary housing (both immediately in terms of disease and crime and, in the longer term, through the community's inability to make use of the considerable talents which undernourished and alienated youth could otherwise develop) would be so great. It may be noted that these needs still exist among our vast army of poorly paid and unemployed people, and, in particular, among the single unemployed.

In short, if one left it to the market, one got a large quantity of appalling and socially unacceptable housing which had serious implications for everyone in society.

There is another lesson to be learnt from this case. Public servants were, and remain, remarkably blind to issues which involve linkages between Departmental responsibilities. One of these has to do with the linkages between housing policy and economic development. To accumulate the points required to demonstrate "need", one had both to have children and to have lived in the same locality for many years. If one moved from one local authority to another, one went back to the bottom of the waiting list. This markedly restricted geographical mobility. One survey showed that 94% of public housing tenants in England were unwilling to move under any circumstances.

Saith and Hayek, of course, argued that it is precisely this inability to appreciate connections, relationships and cumulative consequences which is the strongest argument for leaving such decisions to the invisible hand of the marketplace. Unfortunately it was precisely the failings of the marketplace which led men to try to manage these processes. What is more, with the aid of Information Technology, we are now in a much better position to study and identify relevant relationships and consequences. The true conclusion to be drawn is that we need to establish policy research, evaluation, and development units whose brief it is to examine such issues, and then to find some way of ensuring that public servants take account of the results.

Another, and in many ways even more disturbing, set of examples of the failure of public servants to act on information and consider the needs of their clients come from education. Education was one of the first sectors of the economy to be socialised, for two main reasons: Firstly because education is intended to benefit everyone and not just those who pass through the system; secondly because the poor are in no position to pay for the education of their children and this is not only unfair on the children concerned but is likely to deprive society of their talents.

Good though the reasons for socialising education are, research we have conducted since 1965 shows that some two thirds of the money spent on secondary education is wasted so far as the development of human resources is concerned. Secondary schools do little to foster the qualities which most parents, teachers, employers and ex-pupils think they are there to foster and which other research shows it is, indeed, most important for them to foster. The qualities which are required include initiative, the ability to work with others, and the ability to understand and influence society.

There are many reasons why schools tend to neglect these goals. Most of these reasons were not obvious until research was undertaken, and, even then, most of them emerged only incidentally. Little of the research was initiated with a view to identifying the forces which deflect schools from their goals. HM and the DES tended to assume that exhortation was all that was necessary: if teachers did not follow their prescriptions the problem was assumed to have to do with teacher training or management. In reality, the problems are much more deep seated, having to do with value conflicts, beliefs about the way the public sector should operate, and the absence of the tools needed to manage individualised, competency-oriented, educational programmes. A great deal of further research and development activity - such of it of a fundamental nature - is required if the barriers are to be overcome.

The reasons why schools have tended not to foster these qualities include the lack of understanding of the psychological nature of the competencies which are to be fostered, how they are to be fostered, and how progress toward them is to be assessed. The assessment problem is of particular importance because it emerges that the main function of schools is to allocate position and status. Teachers therefore tend to teach toward whatever goals are assessed in the certification and placement process - because it is only in this way that their pupils (and themselves) can get credit for their work.
When one studies the processes which lead to the development of competencies like initiative, leadership, and the ability to solve problems one discovers that such qualities can only be fostered in the course of activities which the pupil concerned values and cares about. Yet teachers have no tools to help them to identify individual pupils’ values, concerns and priorities or to monitor the growth of these high level competencies in the course of individualised educational programmes.

As soon as such programmes are envisaged it emerges that one cannot, in the same classroom, foster qualities like toughness and strength, instant obedience, and the ability to stick up for oneself and qualities like creativity, initiative, sensitivity to the gerns of new ideas, and the ability to communicate effectively. If one is to foster the latter qualities with any pupils it is therefore necessary to legitimise the provision of a variety of educational programmes directed toward the development of different competencies. This conflicts with the current emphasis on equality in public provision and education in particular.

Yet other barriers to the introduction of generic-competency-oriented education stem from concepts of the role of the teacher and the criteria which are applied in staff appraisal. Teachers must pay attention to the needs of individual pupils and try to invent better ways of meeting them. Yet teachers are not expected to be innovators and inventors. No time is set aside for such activities. Their job is viewed as being to do the bidding of elected representatives. There is no means of getting credit for engaging in the difficult, demanding, frustrating, and risky business of trying to find better ways of meeting each students’ needs. Thus it emerges that, if education is to be brought into secondary schools, it is necessary for the pupils’ parents to evolve new understandings of how public sector institutions should work and the role of public servants, including teachers.

It is not possible here to do at more than hint at the conclusions to which our work in this area point and the further research which is needed if secondary schools are to be transformed into more developmental environments. The points which need to be drawn out of this discussion are that the conclusions suggested by our data were not anticipated when the studies were initiated, are not unarguable, and involve going well beyond the data to, for example, draw sociological conclusions from psychological data and then ask what psychological tools could be invented to enable schools to harness sociological forces in such a way that they would push schools in the direction in which most people want them to go rather than away from those goals.

Another notable conclusion is that the public servants responsible for the development and implementation of educational policy have not only failed to monitor and attend to the needs and reactions of the clients of the educational system, they have also failed to act on the information which was available. As if this were not serious enough, they have also failed to note that there are a wide variety of pupils within the educational system. These pupils have different motives to tap and different talents to develop and offer to society. Yet schools have made very little attempt to tap these motives or identify and develop these talents.

So here we have evidence – which has been available for 20 years – of another vast misuse of public money, further evidence of the need to provide variety within public provision, and further evidence of the need to hold public servants accountable against different criteria. It is important to emphasise that the problem could not be solved by ‘returning’ the activity to the marketplace. This is because (a) if our society is to develop, many attitudes and skills – which is the responsibility of the educational system to identify and foster – need to be widely shared in society and not just possessed by an elite, (b) we need a wide variety of people who possess different combinations of specialist information the need for which cannot become clear until after the event and which it is therefore difficult to purchase as an individual, (c) many people are in no position to pay for themselves or their children, and (d) the main benefits are not going to be derived by people as individuals but by them as members of a society which has developed as a whole: everyone is going to benefit (even those who have no children), so everyone should pay. People would be most likely to pay, as individuals, for those “educational” programmes which were most likely to lead to credentials which would in turn buy entry to protected occupations. But those credentials would neither testify to the development of important competencies nor lead those who provided the courses to focus on such competencies. What is more, those who could pay and expect to recover the costs from increased personal income would be those who used the educational system most ruthlessly to promote their own advancement. Yet such are not the sort of people whom we should be appointing to senior management positions in our society. The people we need are those who are most committed to orchestrating communal action for the common good.

One could multiply examples of the deficiencies of public provision – in health, welfare, defence, and the management of agribusiness and international trade. At a more micro level, the inability of public servants to act in the public interest are well documented in Chapman’s book* Your Disobedient Servant. But, when considering what needs to be done about these problems, the question is: “Does ‘privatisation’ represent anything more than clutching at a straw –
or does the only viable solution involve a series of major inputs from social researchers? There is ample evidence that both large and small companies frequently fail to act in the public interest and are often anything but innovative. The privatised legal system is anything but cheap, responsive to clients' needs, and well suited to meeting their needs. Nor does it have a reputation for acting in the public interest. The real problems are much more psychological. In the UK there is a widespread lack of interest in innovation, in doing things efficiently, and in effective management. Organisational structures do not promote innovation and encourage their members to pay attention to clients' needs. Structures of promotion do not ensure that it is in the employee's interests to act with the long term needs of the organisation or its clients in mind.

In concluding this section we may return to, and underline, the need to do more to examine the linkages between one area of policy and another. The policies enacted tend to be domain specific. Thus, the way we provide for social security makes for the subsection of large numbers of people to a demeaning and dehumanising way of life which kills initiative and enterprise. The way we provide health care separates it from agricultural policy, housing policy, and environmental policy - including job design and transportation policy. For this reason we spend a lot of time treating diseases which are caused by the over-consumption of milk and beef products themselves produced as a result of specific agricultural policies and diseases which are caused by pesticides or hormones the use of which is encouraged by agricultural policy. We spend a lot of time treating depression caused by neighbourhoods which breed isolation. We treat the symptoms of stress caused by the way we organise work. And we treat accidents and lead poisoning caused by motor vehicles - the need for which in turn derives in part from the way we provide and finance housing (for this deters people from moving home in order to live nearer their place of work) and the way we organise job allocation (for this does not make it easy for people to find work near their homes). The way we allocate position and status creates a "deemand" for expensive 'education' which, in reality, confers few benefits on those concerned other than a passport to a protected occupation.

It is the growing awareness of these deficiencies which has led many to embrace privatisation. (Evidence for this assertion comes from our own quality of life surveys which showed that people are dissatisfied with their washing machines and cars. They are more dissatisfied with the quality of the environments in which they live. They are still more dissatisfied with social, welfare, health and educational provision. But they are most dissatisfied with their relationships with public servants and politicians.

The Way Forward

Privatisation is, in reality, no solution to these problems: one either creates vast private monopolies in place of public monopolies or else one creates private organisations which are dependent for their continued existence on the patronage of one or more public servants or public service departments. It further transpires that reduced operating costs are often only achieved at the expense of the weakest members of the workforce. Indeed, special legislation had been introduced to enable the firms concerned to evade pension and social security legislation. Alternatively, or additionally, the costs of monitoring and policing the activities of vast organisations (like telecommunications and transport) may be externalised. Nor does breaking up large organisations necessarily make the provision cheaper, more efficient, or more responsive to customer needs: witness the law, old people's homes, and small private landlords. To exercise economic power effectively one needs many other powers. In the United States, breaking up the Bell telephone system has increased costs to the consumer by a factor of three. Deregulation of air travel, which at first reduced fares, has led to the concentration of 80% of US air traffic in four companies and now to increased fares.

I would suggest that, in place of this fashion for privatisation, based as it is on an unwillingness to examine the reality to which it refers, what is needed are:

New expectations of the public service and the way it should operate.

New criteria against which to judge the performance of individual public servants - criteria which include 'initiating the collection of, and considering, relevant information'.

New tools which make it possible to evaluate the behaviour of public servants against these criteria.

Means of generating better information on the consequences of alternative decisions and feeding that information into public debate.

New tools to provide and evaluate choice in public provision. The problem is not only to provide choice but also to ensure that the clients who are making choices fully understand the consequences of the alternatives. (The consequences to be documented are not only short term and personal but also longer term and societal).
New tools to hold senior public servants accountable for making their sections hum for creating climates characterised by dedication, initiative, sensitivity to clients' needs, and the invention of better ways of meeting those needs.

If I am right, psychologists could have a major role to play in helping to articulate and develop these concepts, institutional structures, and tools.

Many readers will say that I am wrong, that democracy, and staff- and performance-appraisal systems within the public service, are designed to do precisely these things. My question is whether they work - and my tentative-answer, based on the evidence presented above, is that they do not. My submission is that the level of public activity is now so great that our traditional concepts of bureaucracy and democracy are inadequate. Because of the role it has come to play in modern society, government is grossly overloaded and in no position to make good decisions. Our expectations of our public servants are no longer appropriate. My conclusion is, therefore, that we need to develop new forms of democracy, bureaucracy and citizenship - and new expectations of, and tools and procedures to supervise, our public servants. And my contention is that psychologists have a major contribution to make to the evolution of all of these.

Let us return to education to illustrate what I have in mind. As we have seen, the available evidence suggests that individual teachers (public servants) need to be held accountable for studying each of their pupils' talents and finding ways of helping them to develop these. To find out whether teachers are achieving this goal we need new, research-based, appraisal instruments. But it is also true that, if teachers are to monitor their performance and take the initiative needed to find better ways of meeting their pupils' needs, they must devote a great deal of time and energy to risky, frustrating and innovative activity. In fact, they need more than time, for, as we have seen, their job descriptions need to change so that they are expected to take initiative and be inventors. They need a structure which encourages contact with teachers in other classrooms and schools and which provides support for them when things go wrong, as they surely will. And even that does not bring us to the end of the changes which are needed, because what teachers can do in their classroom is mainly determined by forces from outside. Teachers therefore need to be encouraged to band together to gain control over some of the wider social forces which otherwise prevent them doing their jobs - even when narrowly defined - effectively. Beyond that, they need some means of getting credit for their accomplishments.

In the last paragraph we saw that, as a society, we need new expectations of teachers, new tools to enable teachers to take stock of their pupils' needs, their own performance, and the performance of the schools in which they work, and for staff and organisational appraisal. What now needs to be said is that, if this information is to be used effectively, it will be necessary to have some public supervisory structure which does not depend on a long chain of authority to a distant elected representative who is necessarily ignorant of the work of a particular teacher and the issues in his or her school - and who, in any case, has many other things to do. Teachers therefore need to be accountable to some local group. Since what is appropriate for one teacher to do must necessarily depend on what other teachers, locally and nationally, are doing, any one teacher, and his or her supervisory group, must be part of some network of monitoring groups. The same conclusion emerges from the fact that supervisory groups which are too heterogeneous (like Parent-Teacher Associations) will not work. Parents must be able to find a group which has congenial values. To do this they must know what is available.

So now we have the task of working out how such a network of supervisory or monitoring groups ought to operate. It is important to note that the information needed to make the system function includes taking what is 'known' on one register - in the way in which many teachers know a great deal about what is wrong with the educational system and about the limitations of their colleagues - and making it known on another - more explicit - register which makes it usable. One way in which this can be done is by adopting the strategies of the 'illuminative' evaluator, but other possibilities include the development of formal tools designed to surface such information. Examples of these include classroom, school, organisation, and community climate survey instruments. Such instruments would enable monitoring groups of the kind we have described to look at what is going on, decide whether they like the look of what they see, and, if appropriate, decide to change it. (Howard describes a system of educational monitoring and improvement based on both the structures and climate surveys described here).

The evolution of new ways of thinking about monitoring structures, the understandings of the public service, and the development of the necessary stocktaking and information-gathering tools are all tasks for psychologists.

We are now in a position to draw two other points out of this discussion.

First, if the kind of innovation in the social process envisaged above is to come about, there is a need for an unprecedented public debate about the goals of society, the state of that society, and what is to be done about it. This debate cannot take place without the assistance of the media, and those who take part in that debate need some
mechanism through which they can make their views known. As Toffler has pointed out, modern information technology (such as Prestel) makes it easy for people to vote from their living rooms. But the value of feedback of this sort is not only dependent on the dissemination of information, it is also dependent on psychologists developing sets of survey questions which yield more meaningful results than those obtained from opinion polls. If meaningful conclusions are to be drawn from such data it will also be necessary for those concerned to develop understandings of democracy which do not imply that majority decisions should be binding on all, but which instead imply that some means must be found to enable people with different priorities to get equitable treatment, geared to their priorities, from the public service.

Second, the time required for many members of the population to engage in the kind of participative - democratic process which is required to oversee the public sector activities which dominate our society will be considerable. It is therefore important to note that such civic activity contributes to the efficiency of our society and the quality of life of all. In other words it is wealth creating activity. It therefore merits financial reward

(1) (It is not inappropriate at this point to emphasise that the costs of providing the economic marketplace are enormous: two thirds of the cost of the average article goes on distribution and marketing. Yet this work - unlike the chore of supervising the public sector - tends to be viewed as contributing to wealth creation.)

In the course of this paper we have seen that a substantial investment in policy monitoring, development and research units is required. What now needs to be added is that those units must also be concerned with studying the long term personal and social consequences of the alternatives. The results must then be fed back into a vital public debate. And some means must be found to give effect to the results of that debate.

Implications for Psychologists

My objectives thus far in this paper have been to show that modern society needs psychologists to:

(1) carry out evaluations of a wide variety of public policies, to identify barriers to their effective operation, and to contribute to the invention of better policies.

(2) examine the workings of the public sector as an organisation.

(3) develop the tools which are required to administer diversity in public policy and provide feedback from each group of clients.

(4) develop the tools which are required to take stock of organisational functioning in the public service, and to use in staff appraisal and staff guidance, placement and development so that: (i) it is possible to ensure that public servants pay attention to, and take action on, the information provided under (3); (ii) public servants can get credit for exercising high level competencies and (iii) the public service - for which most of us now work - can make the best use of the available talent in energetic, innovative, activity.

(5) above all, to contribute to the evolution of new concepts of democracy, the public service, the role of the public servant, wealth, wealth-creation, work, and citizenship.

These observations have major implications for the kind of research we see ourselves undertaking, the criteria we apply to research proposals and the products of research, the institutions we seek to establish to carry out that research, the relationships we seek to establish between researchers and policy makers and the public, and the beliefs, expectations and attitudes we foster in the course of undergraduate education. The concluding sections of this paper address some of these issues.

The Concept of Research

We will now discuss separately the kinds of research which are needed to evaluate and improve specific policies and the kinds of research which are required to develop the more general concepts and tools which are required to run modern society effectively.

Evaluation of Public Policies

Accuracy and unarguable values widely believed to be the hallmarks of science. This view dominates the thinking of the US Joint Committee on Standards for the Evaluation of Educational Policies and Programmes. However, it will be argued here that, while this view may well be appropriate in academic research, it is not appropriate in policy and evaluation research.

To take an example, there is little point in demonstrating that an innovatory educational programme, weakly implemented and without other supportive changes, does not have dramatic effects. Yet most pilot programmes are of this sort: the teachers directly involved have typically only a limited grasp of what is to be achieved and how it is to be
achieved. (Indeed, it is frequently the case that no one at the start of the programme could specify the pedagogic processes which are to be used to reach the goals). Crucial equipment has usually not arrived, and facilities are makeshift. There are no tools to enable the teachers concerned - or even the programme evaluators - to find out whether the new goals have been achieved, still less to give individual teachers or pupils tradeable credit for having achieved them. Teachers in other classrooms - with whom the pupils may be spending more than 90% of their time - may have changed neither their teaching practices nor their expectations of pupils. The programme goals may never have been discussed with pupils or parents and may therefore not have their support. And employers and universities may still be selecting their entrants on the basis of conflicting criteria. Under such circumstances, what is required is an evaluation which (a) uses the available evidence to infer what the effects of properly developed inputs, in various contexts, would be likely to be, (b) identifies the barriers which are preventing the programme being more effective (And it is important to note that many of these barriers may have their origins in the sociological functions which schools perform for society rather than the educational process itself), and (c) attempts to evaluate outcomes which it would require a considerable investment in fundamental research (based on yet-to-be-invented psychometric models) to evaluate properly.  

An evaluation which does not endeavour comment on (i) all important outcomes of an educational process (including both the positive and negative outcomes), (ii) all important barriers to the effective implementation of the programme - whether deriving from resources, psychological and pedagogic understanding, or sociological processes, and (iii) the crucial steps needed to make progress, is hard to justify. Evaluators who fail to cover the ground because important variables are 'intangible and hard to measure' commit crimes against mankind - because this will mean that significant programme benefits and failures, and real barriers to diffusion and dissemination, are overlooked in all subsequent discussion of, and decisions about, the activity.

It emerges, therefore, that, while the hallmark of good academic research may well be accuracy, the hallmark of good evaluation is comprehensiveness. A good policy study is one which yields new understandings and insights and points the way forward. Eisner’s emphasis on the ‘art’ of educational evaluation and ‘educational conscience’ may be important in legitimising the kind of activity advocated here, is therefore unfortunate in that it fails to challenge the concept of science which informs most academic thinking - and especially that of the Joint Committee on Evaluation.

In such a context, it is inappropriate to judge the work of an individual researcher against the criterion of “proof beyond reasonable doubt”. What is needed is a contribution to a public debate which advances understanding. It is the process of science which leads to accurate and complete understanding, not the work of an individual scientist. Instead of asking whether a researcher’s conclusions are beyond dispute, we must ask whether his work yields new insights, information and understanding. What is needed is public debate between scientists all hotly pursuing “the same” issues. Administrators’ concern to avoid “duplication” is therefore as misguided as is their quest to initiate research which will give unarguable answers to clearly defined questions. As a profession, we therefore need to encourage those who control the funding of policy-relevant research to fund research into important issues — even when neither we nor they know how it is to be done and even when it is clear from the start that the conclusions will be debatable.

Although many people will find what has been said disturbing, it important now to share another insight which has emerged in the course of 25 years of policy research. This is that such work regularly points to the need for studies of, and public debate about, fundamental social values, political beliefs and beliefs about the operation of the public service itself. A few examples will illustrate the point. As has been indicated, studies of educational policy pointed to the conclusion that one of the main reasons why a great deal of the money spent on secondary schools is wasted so far as the development of human resources is concerned is that our preoccupation with equality prevents us respecting and fostering the wide variety of value-based competencies which exist. To handle the problem we need to both legitimise the provision of variety in the public sector and to respect individual pupils’ right to opt out of programmes which they do not find congenial. In a similar way, studies of values, attitudes and institutional structures associated with economic and social development pointed to the conclusion that understandings of how society does and should work - ie social and political beliefs and expectations - are of fundamental importance. It emerged that, in Britain, we need new understandings of terms like “management”, “participation”, “democracy” and “wealth”. An attempt to develop the tools required to measure qualities like initiative, leadership, and the ability to work with others suggested that, as psychologists, we need new psychometric models which give pride of place to political understandings and values. To assess these qualities we need to find out what the person concerned values and what he or she believes about how society works and understands by terms like “democracy” and “participation”. An evaluation of a pilot programme of school-based teacher education suggested that one of the chief barriers to effective teacher education is the concept of the role of institutions of higher education held by the Scottish Office, the institutions themselves, and the public in general.

Not only are all of these conclusions debatable, they are also deeply disturbing to those who control funding, and
even though, in retrospect, our sponsors are inclined to agree with our conclusions they feel unable to support the research which would be required to substantiate and find ways of doing something about them. Perhaps even more importantly, they disturb psychologists who referee applications for grants to bodies like the ESRC. As Rothschild emphasised, the need to put our own house in order is serious.

If we are to encourage useful evaluation we must therefore:

1. Change our expectations about appropriate outcomes of the research process.
2. Change our beliefs about what is appropriate for researchers to study.
3. Change our beliefs about the research process - so that it comes to be seen as appropriate for researchers to follow up, and write up, unexpected observations made in the course of their research and so that further research to follow up unexpected re-orientations can be funded.
4. Do much more to protect researchers who stumble into new areas and find themselves in conflict with the assumptions of those who control funding.
5. Most importantly, emphasise that effective applied research almost always involves a considerable amount of fundamental research - for which academics who did not have contact with applied problems would be most unlikely to see the need: academic life is not ideally suited to stimulate new lines of fundamental research or paradigm shifts.

The development of the understandings and tools which are required to run a modern managed economy effectively.

It has already been emphasised that we need to press the case for more policy-relevant and evaluation research and for changes in the criteria which are applied to research proposals and reports. It is appropriate now to draw together, and say a little more about, the research which is needed to develop the concepts and tools which are required to run modern managed economies effectively.

We have seen that we now live in a society which is managed by "men" (and not by the economic marketplace) and that that management is based on beliefs and explicit information. We have seen that the main actors on this stage are public servants. It is they who mainly decide what information will be collected and how it will be presented to politicians and the public. It has not been shown that prices are mainly determined by public servants, nor that public servants manage trade as a result of their control of tax structures (ie that they use money as a management tool instead of allowing money to manage the economy) but these things are also true. And it has been shown that government is grossly overloaded and that the form of representative democracy to which we have become accustomed is no longer viable.

Our earlier discussion, and these observations, point to the need to:

A. Develop tools which will make it possible to hold public servants accountable for such things as:

- Considering the needs of their clients and inventing better ways of meeting those needs.
- Considering, and taking appropriate action in the light of, the long term social consequences of the the options available.
- Initiating the collection of relevant information, including information on the world-wide social consequences of potential courses of action.
- Seeking out, and using, the information which is available and using it to come to defensible conclusions about the course of action which is in the long term best interest of the public and each of the sub-groups of which it is composed.
- Creating organisational, community, and societal climates characterised by innovation, efficiency, and dedication to the public interest.

B: Develop mechanisms which make it possible to:

- Stimulate public debate about issues varying from those of concern in local workplaces, classrooms and communities to those of international concern.
- Weight the opinions of those concerned to allow for the fact that some views deserve to carry more weight than others (the uninformed should not be allowed to impose their values on others who have quite different priorities and concerns.)
- Ensure that both public servants and others who have a significant impact on what happens in society consider the available information and come to justifiable decisions about what is to be done.

These two sets of problems call for the establishment of a number of units charged with the task of developing the
concepts, tools and institutions which are required to manage modern economies effectively. The tools are different from those required to, for example, administer choice in education and housing. We need tools which can be used to give public servants credit for engaging in the difficult and demanding business of innovation, which can be used for staff guidance, placement, and development (so that our managed economy can make the best use of the human resources which are available to it) and which can be used when deciding whom to appoint to senior management positions.

I have to confess to being less clear about precisely what research should be initiated to contribute to the evolution of the new concepts of democracy, bureaucracy, wealth, management, participation, and citizenship which are required. But this is clearly an area which urgently needs to be probed by researchers who have a reputation for carrying out projects which throw light on the consequences of adopting alternative institutional arrangements and which stimulate the development of relevant insights and ideas. Two specific suggestions which may be made are, on the one hand, to experiment with techniques of television-based debate and feedback, and, on the other, to initiate an international project which would involve psychologists from different countries spending significant amounts of time in each others countries, not reviewing research, but using the contrasts between those countries to surface embedded concepts of how information should be collected and used and how decisions should be taken. It strikes me, for example, that these assumptions are very different in Norway, the UK, and Japan.

Relationships Between Researchers and Policy Makers and The Institutional Framework required to Carry out Research.

It will be clear by now that useful policy-relevant research is very different in nature from what has in the past commonly been assumed to be the case. The structures which are required for its effective execution and the framework of expectations within which it is carried out are also very different. Classical, but still highly relevant, discussions of these issues have been contributed by Cherns, Donnison and Freeman.

At an absolute minimum we need to press for the establishment of a number of units to work in this area. These units should not be university-based because the criteria to be applied to the researchers' work are so very different to those appropriate in academe. Academic time scales are also inappropriate. Teams of researchers need to be able to devote their full time to the work and they need to be provided with an assured career structure which does not require them to conform either to traditional bureaucratic or academic criteria. While there needs to be sufficient contact with policy makers for the researchers to become thoroughly familiar with the problems which need to be tackled, researchers need considerable scope to determine the way in which they will tackle them and to follow up on new issues which come to light. There also needs to be some mechanism whereby people who are 'peripheral' to main stream decision making can initiate studies and ensure that they are carried out from their own perspective. These reflections suggest that, instead of being accountable to administrators, researchers should be accountable to a Director who should himself or herself be accountable for creating a climate of innovation, dedication, the development of new understandings and ideas, and the development of new tools which can be used to run the public service more effectively. The tendency to assume that applied research can be effectively carried out by researchers who are individually on short term contracts tied to individually-funded short term projects has proved to be a recipe for disaster and, in any case, bears no resemblance to what Rothschild had in mind when enunciating the customer-contractor principle.

It is important to underline the scale of funding which should be envisaged because the string and sealing-wax grants provided by the SSRC/ESRC have led psychologists to have quite inappropriate expectations. More appropriate standards for funding are to be found in the Government Social Survey, where it is not uncommon to find £250,000 being devoted to projects with very limited objectives. The extent of the underfunding of policy research can also be judged from the fact that two years losses of the British Steel Corporation would have funded the Scottish Council for Research in Education since Stonehenge was built. Yet far more of our national resources are devoted to - even misapplied in - education than steel.

It is also important to emphasise the need to challenge the grossly inefficient US contract research model, where, owing to widely held views about what constitutes good research and acceptance of "sponsors' right to redirect research as those who control the purse strings within them change, it is not uncommon to find that several million dollars have been spent on evaluation programmes which advance understanding not one iota.

Beliefs, expectations, and understandings to be fostered in undergraduate education.

The very different beliefs we need to develop about what constitutes science, psychology, good research, and, especially, the role and nature of policy research and evaluation have already been discussed. It remains to emphasise how important it is for universities to encourage students to develop more appropriate expectations.

But perhaps the most important message for the universities to disseminate is that what British society most
But perhaps the most important message for the universities to disseminate is that what British society most urgently needs is not a new set of specific policies in health, housing, incomes, pricing, management, labour relations, third-world trade or whatever, but policy development units, and, especially, units set up to develop new concepts of bureaucracy and democracy and the tools which are required to run them more effectively. Psychologists have a major role to play in these units. We know more than anyone else about organisations, institutions, and tools of policy appraisal and performance assessment.

These may sound like grandiose claims, but it must again be emphasised that we are living in an economy which is quite unlike that which most of us take it to be. Our claim as psychologists must therefore be, not that we can help to introduce some Utopia, but that we can help society to do better that which it is already doing.

Notwithstanding the strength of this argument, the question of how all this is to be paid for will still be raised. The answer is to be found in the previously mentioned fact that some two thirds of the cost of any article is spent on distribution and marketing - that is, on making the economic marketplace work. An effective managed, economy, in which most of the necessary information was contributed by psychologists - and not by financiers or "economists" - could hardly cost more to administer. And, in pressing this case, use should also be made of our earlier observation that such activity would constitute genuine wealth-creating work. If evidence for that statement is required it may be obtained by asking how much people from other countries would be prepared to pay to move into societies offering different levels of quality of life.

SUMMARY

In the course of this paper it has been shown that society needs:

- To invest much more in the evaluation of policy and, especially, in identifying the barriers to its effective operation.
- To examine the workings of the public sector as an organisation.
- New procedures and tools to administer the public service.
- New social accounting tools.
- New tools to provide and evaluate diversity and variety in public provision.
- New concepts and forms of bureaucracy and democracy.
- New concepts of wealth, work, and wealth-creating activity.
- New concepts of money: "How is all this to be paid for?"
- New concepts of citizenship.

If it is to do these things it needs new psychological concepts, understandings and tools.

If we, as psychologists, are to contribute the necessary evaluations, concepts, understandings and tools we need:

- Research structures - and a climate of expectations - which will enable us to pursue non-obvious explanations of policy defects, follow through on the insights we develop, do the necessary fundamental research, and undertake the necessary development work. Examples of the latter include developing the tools which are needed for staff guidance, placement and development in the workplace and the educational procedures which are needed to enable more children to read effectively. There is a tendency to expect the results of social research to be instantly applicable although this is most unlikely to be the case in other sciences.
- R&D Structures which encourage teamwork rather than competition.
- Changed views (both on our own part and on the part of those who control funding) about the nature and status of 'pure' and 'applied' social research. The distinctions to which academic psychologists have contributed have made it very difficult for policy researchers to market an appropriate concept of their role. Effective applied research nearly always involves a considerable amount of fundamental research, indeed fundamental action-research - an idea which is often viewed as a contradiction in terms.
- Changes in widely held beliefs and expectations about the research process and the nature of science itself: the hallmark of science is the publication of a cumulative series of justifiable position papers which promote debate and thus advance understanding. It is not 'proof beyond reasonable doubt' in the work of an individual scientist or team of scientists. Although it may be thought unnecessary to labour this point, the prestigious US Joint Committee on Standards for the Evaluation of Educational Programmes has accepted precisely the view critiqued here. The error arises from applying expectations appropriate to the scientific process to the work of an individual scientist.
Wider recognition of the fact that, whatever standards may be appropriate in the academic world, the hallmark of a good evaluation is its comprehensiveness - its ability to comment on all important outcomes (positive and negative) of the policy being evaluated and on the barriers to its effective operation. Failure to discuss all important outcomes leads subsequent policy discussion to focus on the outcomes which it is easiest to measure rather than those which are the most important. Failure to identify the barriers to successful implementation leads to the rejection of potentially important policies because pilot programmes did not work for reasons which are often quite irrelevant to the theoretical basis of the programme. In evaluation research it is essential to get a rough fix on intangible outcomes and on the effects of hard-to-document constraints. It is also important for evaluators to go well beyond their data and say what the effects of the programme would be likely to be if it were properly implemented in an appropriate context.

These reflections suggest that we need to:

- Change the beliefs about science, and the expectations of the scientific process, which we foster in the universities.
- Change widely held beliefs about the kinds of problem which it is appropriate for researchers to study so that they are no longer only asked to tackle 'precise questions to which a precise answer can be obtained'.
- Change widely held beliefs about the environment which is likely to lead scientists to notice the need for fundamental research and to tackle the problems so identified with energy and in a team manner which is likely to yield results quickly. This is unlikely to occur in the universities as currently constituted.
- Encourage students to recognise that it is both important and scientific to write up unexpected insights gained in the course of their research.
- Foster a felt need for social R&D by:
  - Using the universities and the media to discuss the changes which have come about in society and:
    - (a) arguing that these changes are basically highly beneficial - that public servants are the greatest layers of golden eggs that have ever evolved
    - (b) pointing to alternative solutions to the widely recognised problem of getting the public sector to function more effectively, and
    - (c) presenting alternative formulations of the problem of wealth-creation and wealth itself.
  - Arguing and demonstrating that we can help society with problems like explaining why schools do not achieve their goals and then helping them to do so, but then saying that, to do this work effectively, we need policy R&D units, changed relationships with policy-makers, and 'new' beliefs (actually those contained in the original Rothschild report) about the role of public servants in commissioning research.

It is remarkable that the establishment of policy R&D units and the execution of the research needed to manage our administered world economy effectively is not on the agenda of the Liberal and Social Democratic Parties: they are still trapped into knowing what the policies should be instead of saying that they do not know what should be done but that the problem is to establish the structures which will enable the solutions to emerge.

Our basic task must therefore be to get discussion of the issues discussed in this paper onto the political agenda.

NOTES

2. Raven, 1967
3. Raven, 1967
7. See Rose, 1980; Klein 1980
8. See Bellini, 1980; Ekins, 1976; Etzioni, 1984; Kanter, 1985; Roberts and Wainer, 1986; Sutherland, 1949.
10. We urgently need to find ways of involving more people in the community-support networks which could better cater for our pension, welfare, child-care, education, economic development, environmental quality, crime prevention, and health needs - and do so in which a way as to avoid implying that such activity is not "real work" which merits financial reward. For a fuller discussion see Robertson 1985 and Ferguson, 1980
11. Raven, 1980
12. Some of these ideas are elaborated in Raven, 1984, but the network of monitoring groups is a more recent addition which echoes Ferguson, 1980.
14. Howard, 1982

15. This statement should not be interpreted to mean that this is the only basis on which such activity could be organised. Thatcherrite Voluntarism and Trotskyite compulsory labour on behalf of the commune are other alternatives.

16. The role and management of such research units, and the relationships to be established between policy makers and researchers, is discussed in Cherns, 1970, Donnison, 1972, Etzioni, 1971, Raven, 1975 and 1985.

17. A fuller discussion of these issues will be found in Hamilton, 1977; Eisner, 1985; Raven, 1984, 1985.

18. Further examples will be found in Raven, 1984.


26. Cherns, 1970; Donnison, 1972; Freeman & SPRU.

27. A fuller discussion of these issues will be found in Raven, 1985.

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