

# Policy Entrepreneurs

## A self-assessment questionnaire for researchers

Life and the literature point to four broad styles of policy entrepreneur: story-tellers, networkers, engineers and fixers. The description of these four models of policy entrepreneurship has been developed by Simon Maxwell at ODI, in order to help researchers identify what kind of policy entrepreneurs they are, so that they can capitalise on their strengths, develop their weaknesses and improve the impact of research on policy.

### Story-tellers

Scheherazade was a consummate storyteller. She offered to marry a sultan who had been so aggrieved by his wife's betrayal that he had taken to marrying a different woman every day and having her murdered the following morning. Scheherazade managed to survive by telling him the most wonderful stories, which she spun out for so long that she succeeded in bearing him several children and living to a happy old age. There is a literature about the importance of telling stories in changing policy. Roe developed the idea of development narratives. He argued that one of the principal ways that practitioners, bureaucrats and policy-makers articulate and make sense of complex realities is through simplified stories or scenarios. Much of the literature on this topic demonstrates that narratives can be profoundly misleading and that 'counter-narratives' develop but there is no doubt that they are incredibly powerful. It is not difficult to think of powerful narratives which have informed policy: 'getting the prices right', structural adjustment, the Washington Consensus, the Post-Washington Consensus, debt-relief as the answer to poverty- reduction. These are powerful stories which help us to get over to policy-makers what the problem is and what the solution might be. Successful policy entrepreneurs need to be good story tellers.

### Networkers

Policy-making usually takes place within communities of people who know each other and interact. If you want to influence policymakers, you need to join their networks. President Lyndon Johnson talked about being inside the tent or outside the tent. If you are inside the tent, your voice is heard and you will have an influence. If you are outside, you will not. Malcolm Gladwell provides a great example of a networker in his book *The Tipping Point* in his story of Paul Revere, riding out in 1775 in America to raise the militia against the British. He describes the fact that on that night, two people set out. One was Paul Revere, and the other was William Dawes. In all the villages that Paul Revere went to, the militia turned out and defeated the British. In the villages that William Dawes went to, no-one turned out to fight. Why is that? The answer is that Paul Revere was networked and William Dawes was not. Paul Revere was a well-known pewtersmith and silversmith, who sat on all the committees, was well-connected, knew people and had their trust. William Dawes did not. Researchers who are good networkers are likely to have more policy influence than those who are not.

## **Engineers**

The third model comes from the literature about 'street-level bureaucracy' and is informed by this phrase: 'policy is what policy does'. There can be a significant implementation gap between what politicians and policy-makers think that they are doing and what actually happens on the ground. Researchers need to work not just with the senior level policy-makers, but also with the 'street-level bureaucrats'. Who better to represent that way of working than Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Unfortunately, the best story about him is apocryphal, but it illustrates the point well. Brunel was very much engaged in the debate about whether paddle wheels or screw propellers were more efficient and powerful for moving boats. In order to test that theory, the (sadly apocryphal) story is that he built one of each, tied them together and put them in the Bristol Channel to see which would tug the hardest. The story captures the idea of being engaged on the ground and not just sitting in a laboratory. Researchers need to become practically involved in testing their ideas if they expect policy makers to heed their recommendations.

## **Fixers**

The fourth and final model of the policy entrepreneur in our field is the 'fixer'. The examples could include Rasputin and Machiavelli. This model is about understanding the policy and political process, knowing when to make your pitch and to whom. The literature on organisation and management provides much evidence and advice about this approach. Charles Handy, in *Understanding Organisations* (1976) said that if you want to change anything, you need first of all to think about your source of power. Handy identifies these sources of power as: physical power, resource power, position power, expert power, personal power and negative power. As researchers, our 'expert' power is often very powerful. If you are able to look a Minister in the eye and tell them that by applying the principles of game theory to a problem, the solution becomes obvious, they will normally crumble and do what you say.

## **What are you?**

Most people use all these styles at different times, and it is not necessary to be adept at every style. However, if you over-use or under-use any one of the four styles, you might consider whether you should re-balance your activities – or perhaps find a partner within your team who can complement your skills.