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Relational Approaches to Policy Analysis

Title of the paper

Seeing Ahead – Relationally

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Abstract: Humans have a pragmatic, situated capability to generate images of the consequences of a contemplated action—to see ahead. Yet, little use is made of this judgemental capability in policy forecasting, which favours prediction and projection based on theory and past evidence, purportedly to avoid bias. This paper examines a relational approach to seeing ahead in order to take action to improve future wellbeing, based on trajectories of experiences and intersubjective dialogue between policy professionals and recipients. Appropriate methodologies are illustrated by Q methodology, which can provide insights into shared policy-relevant experiences while avoiding decision makers’ aversion to individual anecdote.

Keywords: relational policy analysis, pragmatism, policy forecasting, judgement, Q methodology

Introduction

Dominant approaches to policy analysis can be likened to driving full-speed ahead with a fractured windscreen, navigating with the aid of a tiny stream of data flowing in from a foggy rear-view mirror. Yet, safely delivering citizen-passengers to their future wellbeing also depends on being able to see the road and destination ahead. The paper considers how policy analysts can benefit from humans’ natural capacity to see ahead, which is fundamentally relational. I argue that judgements entailed in everyday lived experience and policy analysis require more explicit attention to rebalance a current overemphasis on evidence from the past. I then unpack the conceptual ‘building blocks’ and overlaps of *case*, *dialogue*, and *future*,

¹ This paper remains a work-in-progress. Comments and suggestions welcome.

which together create the space for a relational approach to anticipating the future based on fresh insights from policy experiences in particular situations. The intention is to focus on improving decisions, rather than on understanding decisions and the influences on them. Accordingly, seeing ahead requires appropriate methodological support, which I illustrate with Q methodology. In the remainder of this section, I set the scene with a brief overview of methods in policy forecasting.

Policy work is comparative and future-focused, aiming to bring about a better state of affairs tomorrow compared with today. The work may be directed to considering the merits of various actions to address some problem, or to ways to amend and maintain institutions or to support governance networks. Accordingly, among the most important questions asked of policy analysts is *What will happen if we do X?* where *X* is some action contemplated by a decision maker. Answers to such questions involve any number of subsidiary questions and associated methods, but all take the form of a forecast, or estimate of what may be. Using Dunn's (2011) terminology, there are three types of forecasts: projections (based on trends), predictions (based on theories) and conjectures (based on individual expertise). A given forecast may exhibit a blend of all three in offering a view of the effects of *X* integrated or overlain on the world as it would have looked in the absence of *X*. Whether or not *X* should be initiated, then, is a matter of deciding whether to prefer a hypothetical world with or without *X*.

It is not surprising that a great deal of attention is given to various forecasting methods and their contribution to decision-making. 'Evidence-based policy', even with various caveats and adjustments, requires that decision makers inform themselves selectively with the best possible information on what is 'known' about the world and policy interventions, thereby establishing a solid platform for estimating the effects of policy changes. At the same time,

interest in atheoretical data analytics is growing, using ‘big data’ and experiments adhering to the behavioural insights mantra “test–learn–adapt” (Haynes, et al., 2012). A third recent innovation, known by terms such as the ‘social investment approach’ (National Academies, 2016; New Zealand Treasury, 2016), has been made possible by advances in evidence and data analytics. Briefly, this matching approach seeks to prescribe the best available intervention to every individual requiring policy attention. Together these approaches place heavy weight on prediction and projection, and avoid conjecture as far as possible.

In contrast, conjecture based on individual expertise is given more attention in various futures methods, such as scenario planning and policy Delphi (United Kingdom, 2014). Similarly, participatory approaches engage citizens in discussions that explore how they might respond to policy proposals or in crafting new policies that will apply to them (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Such methods seek at some level to use everyday expertise to broaden the scope of decision making and to help counter tendencies for blinkered or optimistic views of the likely fate of a policy. But the expertise is largely used instrumentally, and little or no connection is retained to the possible policy implications for the participants.

Given policy’s future focus, a greater or lesser judgemental leap will always be needed in order to act. Yet, notwithstanding the breadth of methods currently used, including those that do draw on expertise, and acknowledging the significant contributions they offer, current practices restrict the scope of judgement. Preferred evidence-based policy practices seek to narrow the gap between what is now known and what might be later by concentrating on establishing a base of current knowledge that is as unbiased as possible (Leigh, 2009; Nutley, Powell, & Davies, 2013) and then strongly tethering forecasts of what might be to that knowledge. The filters used to admit ‘evidence’ to the basis for forecasts sift out a great deal of what is potentially available. In addition, simply relegating the question of what action to

take to the political process, as is also implied by dominant evidence-based policy rhetoric, serves to elevate the judgement of some (elected officials) over that of other experts without necessarily offering a satisfactory justification.

Second, and relatedly, the future is always uncertain and thus commands analysts' judgement. Analysts convey claims to decision makers based on *present* information about (a) the world as it is now, (b) the world as it is forecasted to be at some time after *X* is introduced, and (c) the world as it is forecasted to be at that same time if *X* is *not* introduced. Sophisticated analysis may attempt to elaborate on the uncertainties inherent in (b) and (c) to model the world as it may under different assumptions or once the disturbances occasioned by *X* (or in its absence) have played out. The more sophisticated the modelling, the greater the requirements on a modeller's judgement, and the farther out the tether to present knowledge extends. More information increases uncertainty (Nowotny, 2016).

Third, in everyday settings, people make judgemental leaps in the face of significant uncertainty, without recourse to sophisticated analysis. And on average they do so successfully (the human species is not yet extinct). Consider, for example, a centuries-old activity of Andean potato farmers:

Across the Andes in Peru and Bolivia, farmers gather in small groups in the middle of the night in late June. They climb high ridges and often ascend to the peaks of mountains. . . . The farmers huddle together in eager expectancy. They are waiting for the moment when they can see the Pleiades [The] farmers believe that they can use the particular appearance of the Pleiades to forecast the timing and quantity of precipitation that will fall in the rainy season, months later In years when the Pleiades are bright, large, numerous or otherwise favorable, they plant potatoes at the usual time. However, when the Pleiades are dim, small, scanty or otherwise

unfavorable, they anticipate that the rains will arrive late and be sparse, so they postpone planting by several weeks. (Orlove, Chiang & Cane, 2002, p. 428)

The thrust of the work of Orlove, Chiang and Cane (2000; 2002) is to show that a traditional practice has a scientific explanation for its success. Yet, for present purposes, it is a story about everyday judgemental expertise, of the sort that has enabled humans to survive by ‘guessing’ when to plant potatoes. Inuit survival strategies (Nuttall, 2010) provide a second example of the capacity of people to see ahead and adjust their course of action, based in part on accumulated cultural and embodied knowledge. Harnessing such ‘natural’ methods for ‘seeing ahead’ could offer a complement to other ways of forecasting.

This brings us to a consideration of the potential contribution of relational approaches to policy analysis. These approaches emphasise *processes* of achieving desired goals, such as that involved in farmers climbing hills and looking at stars, whereas other approaches take such specific and localised activities as epiphenomenal, as something like a temporary container for isolating cause–effect links: farmers and hills are no longer needed once we understand El Niño and La Niña weather patterns. Since we don’t always have centuries to wait for the right sort of scientific evidence, it is worth developing and adapting the method of the farmers to present policy challenges. The relational perspective is one of ‘walking with’ and ‘seeing with’ people, implying a field that is spatially and temporally intersubjective, whereas the causal modelling of conventional policy analysis is one of ‘looking over’.

A potential criticism of all relational approaches to forecasting is that they do not extend beyond the unique, individual situation. Accordingly, after finding that these approaches are conceptually merited, it is necessary to specify how this limitation can be at least partially

overcome. I do this with a consideration of Q methodology, and its capacity to find patterns in individual judgements, and to get new ideas that might apply to others.

The Shift to a Relational Approach

Relational approaches to forecasting specific policy futures seek to counterbalance three tendencies in the prevailing approach. First, all forecasts rely on some combination of data or information and reasoning. The prevailing rendering of the balance is to increasingly trust in data, even to the extent of automating the way the data is used to inform decisions that will have future impact on people. For example, a selection of indicators may be used to quantify a soon-to-be-paroled prisoner's chance of re-offending, creating a measure which a judge uses to set parole conditions (Yesberg & Polaschek, 2014). Increasing reliance on data in such ways is seen to positively reduce the scope of a decision maker's choice, often expressed as reducing subjective bias.

The first counterbalance, then, would *expose bias*. Bias can make a positive contribution to decision making, while hidden biases and subjectivities in so-called objective measures can impair decision making. Continuing with the recidivism example, experienced judges have honed their innate capacity to 'pre-judge', which means to form some incipient ideas that are worth paying attention to. Such pre-judging (prejudice) can go wrong if unchecked, but it is futile to suppose decisions can be made without some process of pre-judgement (which serves to filter salient information from background noise). In addition, a recidivism-prediction model may use a scoring system, which requires a user to assign scores judgementally to indicators. Most of these, such as 'prosocial identity' or 'attitude to authority' (Yesberg & Polaschek, 2014), have in turn been developed by other professional judgements. Finally, judgement persists in policy making (Majone, 1989; Fischer & Forester,

1993), notwithstanding significant support for relying on scientific evidence (Prewitt, Schwandt, & Straf, 2012). The counterbalance places more (initial) trust in the judgement of experts. Effort then is needed to deciding which judgements are worth pursuing and testing.

A second counterbalance recognises that ‘big P’ policy is still important, but the prevailing tendency is to *direct policy interventions to specific people* at specific times, or to specific localities based on some unique factors. For example, countries have universally applicable tax policies, but finely grained differential approaches to their enforcement. Paradoxically, the shift to individually tailored, flexible, and responsive policy is partly due to the power of depersonalised big data analytics. As a complement to the first rebalance (away from blind data and toward trust in expertise), the second rebalance would give more weight in forecasts to the diversity in policy recipients and their localised situations.

The third, and most general, rebalance is a shift away from *analysis of* policy problems, processes, solutions and so on, toward *understanding for* making better judgements. Analysis of seeks better knowledge of what is or has been, and why what is has occurred. On this basis, policy professionals hope to be able to point out things to avoid or do more of.

However, such intentions require that the conditions that support and constrain cause-effect linkages detected by analysis will continue to hold into the future. Complexity suggests that this is a risky assumption. In contrast, understanding for decision is oriented to the link between what is now known and the future. Rebalancing here would show a shift from looking back and externally on accumulated data to looking forward in an inward ‘test in the mind’ since there is, strictly speaking, no evidence of the future.

Together, these shifts draw attention to a moment of (present) decision, in which the decision maker decides on an action (which could include deciding to first learn more) that is expected to improve the future for a policy recipient. At this moment, non-analytical judgement and

person-specific information is emphasised. The situation is thus one of several intersecting relationships: between the recipient's past and future; between the decision maker and the recipient; between a new policy intervention and the recipient's life in its absence; and between analytical and non-analytical forecasts. Active within these relationships is an exchange of ideas from different actor and temporal perspectives and between present opportunities and constraints and changes in these.

The metaphor

Notwithstanding that metaphors can be pushed too far, a number of related ideas can be arrayed in a holistic way. Ours is a car driving fast along a challenging road. The driver is a policy professional exercising his or her professional practice. Accordingly, the driver has some external motivation to serve the public good, represented by a citizen-passenger, designated as the policy recipient, in the car. Consistent with modern theories of governance, both driver and passenger have roles to play in safely navigating to the destination. Unfortunately, the destination is too far away to see, the maps are poor, the condition of the car (as policy delivery mechanism) is partly unknown, and in any case will be modified en route as it suffers unpredictable damage and undergoes selective repairs.

Nevertheless, the driver and passenger have some resources. The rear-view mirror, though foggy, offers some information from behind. Looking through the also somewhat foggy windscreen, the driver and passenger can see an every-changing vista, complete with a horizon where the road meets the sky. The road itself is set in this vista. We can imagine the drive in 'real-time' or we can stop and re-start the car after some reflection or we can circle back to pick up new (backward- or forward-looking) information. All along, the driver and passenger are comparing what they see—illuminating the road with their natural ability to extend their perception into the future, and deciding together in that new light which point to

aim for on their joined horizon. Although our driver and passenger are communicating with language, the visual imagery is not accidental, and we can imagine the two exploring and connecting their ‘mindscapes’.²

Drivers naturally confront and cope with the signals they get from their surroundings as they drive along. In doing so, they are scanning the road ahead of them, then taking present action that affects the future. Within very modest limits, people can visually see what is in front of them. But lived time is clock time, and people cannot ‘see’ what was in view the minute before, or will be the minute after. The one hundred metres ahead may be clear in my sight, but a swooping hawk may lose its grip on the rabbit it’s caught, causing it to fly into my windscreen. As I scan the empty road, I can envisage such an outrage ‘in my mind’s eye’. Indeed, if I can (figuratively) pause clock-time, I can elaborate a rich portfolio of possibilities along those few metres, even as I travel them. I am in the territory of imagination, story, analogy, intuition, sensing, and reading signs—as well as Dunn’s (2011) prediction and projection. For example, if a car I hadn’t noticed appears ahead, I can adjust my speed and steering to stay safely in my lane.

The basic scenario

Forecasting—seeing ahead—is part of all policy analysis. To focus the discussion, I set out a basic scenario, encompassing triadic relationship in the metaphor involving (a) one *policy professional* (representing the combined functions of assessing a need for an intervention, choosing one, and implementing it), (b) one *policy recipient* (presenting a need and receiving an intervention) and (c) the *action* (intervention decision) that both the professional and

²The *Oxford Dictionary* defines mindscape as “the range of a person’s thoughts and imagination, regarded as a panorama capable of being contemplated by another person; mental landscape or inner vision”. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mindscape>. Ravetz & Ravetz, (2017, p. 105) brought the term to my attention, with their “synergistic social mind-scape”.

recipient are interested in, with the aim of moving from a current situation to a preferred one. The policy professional (perhaps a social worker) has expert knowledge in political, technical, legal, substantive theory relating to a specific objective and has accumulated understanding of outcomes from various interventions in varying conditions. The policy recipient (perhaps a homeless person) has expert knowledge of their own life course and its situation and has accumulated some understanding of their experiences. The action of their attention, the ‘object’, concerns both the policy recipient and the policy professional, but is ‘present’ to them in different ways (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 201), as an amalgam of intervention and anticipated outcome. The triadic relationship occurs at a ‘moment’ that has spatial and temporal dimensions.

Further, both for tractability in the discussion and for aligning with some important normative elements in the decision context, I posit the policy recipient as generally ‘like’ any social service user—someone who is referred to an agency, or self-refers in order to access some services over and above the usual background, general infrastructural services of a modern state. The person has some ongoing need (at least in the short term) within some specific challenging context, such as housing assistance due to a disability, care respite, substance abuse recovery, rather than a one-off need in a routine, less complicated context, such as applying for a driving license. The prevailing approach is to try to make the unique, context-variable, non-routine interaction between a service provider and a service recipient more routine and ‘predictable’. Following Nowotny (2016, pp. 124–125) who has noted that “the possibility of deriving straightforward and clear-cut solutions from available evidence is the exception not the rule”, I want to resist any simplifying temptation. Even though there are strong management drivers to ‘master’ uncertainty and carry on by routine, diversity and the non-routine command respect. This leads to a specific interest to better understand just what goes on in the relational exchange between the recipient presenting with a need and the

policy professional making a decision. The interest is to drill down into the exchange and to consider what characteristics best tune methods to the aim of the situation. Accordingly, though stripped to the basics, the situation is one that calls for “an understanding . . . that enables effective and responsible action within ‘ongoing business’. This ‘actionable understanding’ is informed by a constantly renewed past, directed at an always partially decipherable future, and situated in a present that is ‘eternally unfolding’” (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012, p. 18).

The triad is not, however, hermetically sealed. A policy that intervenes in one life necessarily intervenes in others. Policies may intervene at a systemic level (a city, an ecosystem, a community) and at significant levels of abstraction (a statement of aspiration or principle), and then work through webs of changes to affect people in their everyday lives. Thus, when a new policy is implemented, it ramifies out spatially and temporally through innumerable variously configured webs. Conventional and innovative policy analytic methods are improving in their ability to trace these lines. A full assessment is not possible here, but the overall orientation remains somewhat tied to existing knowledge and causal reasoning (but see, for example, Dryzek 1982; Mayer, van Daalen & Bots, 2004). A pivot between the known and the estimated (as exemplified by the Andean farmers noticing the Pleiades and then estimating the rain) is present in any public policy intervention in a single life trajectory.

Conceptual Bases

This paper is not designed to find and fix faults in the many existing theories and practices applicable to the basic scenario but to contribute to, and extend, existing ideas and practices relevant to it, with specific attention to the future. Some essential philosophical underpinnings can be briefly summarised:

Time: Lived, intersubjective, or social time is not exhausted by the metaphors of the arrow or the clock (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 285). Accordingly, the meaning of any ‘experience’ that may be brought to mind or shared with another may lack both a causal and a linear explanation or interpretation.³ The past, for example, may be a creative resource, not a predictor.⁴

Foresight: People are able to “see through the apparent confusion, to spot developments before they become trends, to see patterns before they emerge, and to grasp the relevant features of social currents that are likely to shape the direction of future events” (Whitehead, 1967, p.89 in Sarpong & Maclean, 2016). People can ‘try out’ possibilities in their ‘foresight’, that is, in their minds.

Uncertainty: All knowledge (and uncertainty) is local and concretely situated (Nowotny, 2016, p. 3). Uncertainty and complexity can be embraced, not masked, by those in that situation, which “lets the new enter through the cracks in the wall that seemed impenetrable” (Nowotny, 2016, p. 4).⁵

Methodology: Methodology is complicit in letting the light in. Relational approaches seek person-centred, locally generalisable patterns or middle-range theories. These methods favour the give and take in a dialogue or story-telling or comparative case study (Wagenaar, 2011; Wolf, 2016; Wolf & Baehler, 2017). They privilege non-analytically derived inputs (hopes, fears, visions, insight) over depersonalised ones (such as from big data analytics).

³ Consider the lyrics from Joni Mitchell’s *Help Me* (1973), which include a present worry about the past, when thinking about the future: “Help me, I think I’m falling in love too fast/ It’s got me hoping for the future and worrying about the past”

⁴ Daniel Schön (1983) evokes the sense of a ‘conversation’ with a past practice (such as creating a sculpture) as a practitioner confronts a present challenge (a new block of wood).

⁵ Again, the poets have this: compare the lyrics from Leonard Cohen’s “*Anthem*” (1992): “There is a crack in everything: That’s how the light gets in”.

The discussion now turns to the domains of ‘case’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘future’ as well as their overlaps to flesh out a relational approach to policy forecasting. Without spelling it out at every point in the abstract discussion to follow, it may assist a reader to hold in mind the basic scenario and metaphor pertaining to a pending decision regarding the precise parole conditions for a prisoner standing before a judge, or a resolution to the situation of a long-time homeless person.

Case

Cases are bounded. Initially, the scenario case is bounded by the recipient’s experiences, extending from the past and into the future. It is further loosely bounded by a specific aspect of the recipient’s life as a whole, which relates to a matter of present policy relevance. The case can function in several ways: as a resource that the policy recipient brings to the present decision moment; as the backbone of an emerging series of situation-salient experiences; and as the site of future policy-relevant outcomes. Any temporal duration can be looked at in the present moment, and the juxtaposition of slices of the case can highlight similarities and differences. At any one moment, any number of cases can be so conceived: the recipient can draw on other policy-relevant aspects of experiences, and the policy professional can consider others’ cases with similar policy boundaries. Such ‘casing’ is natural to any consideration of what should be done.

Experience, at the heart of the case definition, is hard to pin down (Jay, 2005). Writers from within a pragmatic tradition note that for something to qualify as an experience, it has to ‘stand out’, occur as a surprise, or be felt as a resistance (Bernstein, 2010, p. 135). An experience has a pervasive quality across a span of space and time, notwithstanding the “immense diversity of factors” that come together in *an* experience (Dewey, 2007 p. 6, as quoted in Bernstein, 2010, p. 146).

Experience derives from the same root as experiment (to try; to put to the test), and shares with it the sense of an occasion for learning. As DeHue relates (2001, p. 288), social science began with careful observations of disruptions affecting social experiences of interest, without ‘experimental’ intervention. Jay (2015, pp. 265–266) comments similarly in the everyday context:

Experience meant . . . learning valuable lessons from the past to be imaginatively applied to the future. . . . profiting from bodily encounters with a new and often harsh environment and drawing on the lessons they produced in the ordinary, everyday lives of common men and women.

Both the policy professional and policy recipient can extract lessons from experience after noticing what ‘stands out’. Pragmatism draws attention to the transactional nature of experience as well as the sense of the continual falling forward flow of experiences (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Within a local ecology comprising historical, cultural, environmental, social and economic contexts, experiences and their lessons or meanings emerge in *intersubjective and intertemporal practice* (Wagenaar & Cook, 2011, p. 198; Wolf, 2016, p. 612). As a pragmatic practice, the “motivating force is to assess what to do now in the light of available knowledge and aspirations, while giving attention to impacts both near and far in space and time” (Healey, 2009, p. 277). Healey goes on to articulate the relational nature of this case–experience practice, noting the “relation between the particularities of specific instances as well as wider relations and consequences” and the effort to “interrelate multiple phenomena and their relations as these interact with each other and as these relate to human and nonhuman concerns in all kinds of situations” (Healey, 2009, p. 277).

Dialogue

From the very rich literature on dialogue, two main points emerge for present purposes: dialogue is a realistic, respectful, genuine, unhurried present-moment conversational exchange, and its purpose is to come to agreement on meaning and understanding with respect to “something . . . placed in the centre which the partners in dialogue share and concerning which they can exchange ideas” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 378). This ‘object’ is the intervention-related decision to take in an extended ‘case’ centred on the policy recipient, which sets the occasion for considering ideas about it. In this setting, we can further single out three aspects of dialogue: its future focus, narrative and visual imagery. First, while dialogue is very often concerned with the future, most attention in the literature is on present exchanges. These exchanges may be about the future, and may even be about crafting the parameters of that future by present decisions. But in the scenario, relatively more of the focus is involved with the non-evidentiary field of the future. The prospective part of the case frames the dialogue.

Second, as set out in the basic scenario, the experiences of a policy recipient create a backbone for an experience narrative. Experiences are linked, and the exchange concentrates on the participants reaching some shared understandings of the flow of those experiences, both in order to carry the story forward and in order to know what the story will require. Dialogue in this sense is focused on developing understanding for action (Wagenaar, 2011). Thus, implicitly or explicitly, the conversational mode is in a relational, second-person voice (‘we are considering what we should do’). The second-person voice naturally weaves past experiences through the participants’ present listening and speaking, and retains the interactive communication that is part of living with others. Thus, the space between people,

where experiences and stories interact is full of meaning additional to that available in either first-person narratives or third-person summaries of positions or opinions (Wolf, 2016).

Third, the ‘seeing ahead’ engagement is intensely visual. While the word ‘conversation’ implies talk and may lead observers to overemphasise language, it is hard to conceive of stories without visual metaphors. A verbal ‘sketch’ or a conjured picture is presented from a vantage point and offers a perspective in which elements are arrayed in holistic relation, to be taken in at a glance with some aspects in the foreground and others in the background. In dialogue, exchanges of such images can coalesce in patterns, which participants jointly regard and further augment, leading to a claim of ‘what we see can (or should) be done’ (Wolf, 2016, p. 610). The shift in emphasis vis-à-vis language and image may be overly subtle, but relatively important: I cannot tell *the* story of my next 10 minutes, as I can for my last 10; I have *only* several pictures that flash in my mind’s eye, which I can then endeavour to describe in words.

Exchanges assume an intersubjective common ground. They rely on ideas and references that may be ‘called to mind’ and which then trigger and shape the next part of the exchange. That is, we imagine the participants casting their minds ‘around’ the conversational exchange in the moment to materials that are culturally available to both participants. Wagenaar (2011, p. 200) provides an evocative listing of these resources: “expectations, memories, historical events, meanings, understandings, experiences, ideals, norms, embodiments, unrealised potential against which we act and understand”. Resources and setting prepare the participants for the exchange of information and the development of understanding. As Gadamer (1975, pp. 269–270) has most clearly expressed, advancing understanding (seeing ahead) is conditioned by prejudice, which he defines as “a judgement that is rendered before

all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined”. According to Malpas (2016):

In the dialogue of understanding our prejudices come to the fore, both inasmuch as they play a crucial role in opening up what is to be understood, and inasmuch as they themselves become evident in that process. As our prejudices thereby become apparent to us, so they can also become the focus of questioning in their own turn.

While it is possible to engage in a conversation about knowledge (*episteme*) and technical skill (*techne*), dialogue is not essential to such exchange: it may be easier to learn something new by reading and reflecting than by talking with someone, and it may be more effective to practice a new skill under the gaze and guidance of a mentor rather than to talk about it.

However, dialogue is integral to the practice of *phronesis* and the exchange of stories: “In contrast to analytical and instrumental rationality (episteme and techne), the practical rationality of phronesis is based on a socially conditioned, intersubjective ‘between-reason’” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 140). Phronetic knowledge is context-dependent, it invokes values and is practice-focused. Phronesis in dialogue ensures that there is feeling, a shared project, and a requirement to act. “Phronesis is acquired over time and through experience. It involves the ability to generalize over a set of past situations in determining how best to act in a present one” (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012, p. 11, footnote 10). Whereas episteme as a ‘stock’ creates a structure for its own increase and techne provides a practitioner with an ever-increasing library of possible actions in context and for purpose, phronesis lacks the same sense of stock and increase. If there is an increase at all, it is qualitative. Phronesis may be better thought of as a Heideggerian mode of being and insight into practical situations (Malpas, 2016) and it is this ‘mode’ that is relevant in dialogue.

Future

The future is considered in numerous disciplines. Fukukura, Helzer, and Ferguson (2013, p. 146) note the importance of ‘prospection’ and the study of “how representations of the future affect current behaviour” in diverse fields. Leading psychologists recently proposed that humans were not so much *homo sapien* (wise) as *homo prospectus* (Seligman & Tierney, 2017). Most simply, of course, the future is a dimension of time, described in ‘forecasts’. Seeing into the future through the techniques of projection is a matter of extrapolation of trends. Projection is data-driven and generalising, but lacks feeling. Similarly, predictions are filtered by theory, not by memory, experience, or feeling. On their own, neither prediction nor projection call for action: they only model or hypothesise. Similarly, anticipation in the context of much ‘futures’ work is depersonalised. As described by Nelson, Geltzer, & Hilgartner (2008, p. 546) the futures toolbox supports “informed speculation”, the imagination, estimation and appreciation of possibilities, potentials, probabilities, and trajectories, which serve to “frame choices”.

But for a given actor with a given perspective and life to live, time is the avenue along which pass a succession of experiences, reaching backwards and forwards. Moments in the future may stand out as ‘anticipations’ *for them*. To anticipate is to glance forward at a prospective case in order to act. It has a ‘felt’ quality, and carries values, as the following quotations express:

. . . anticipation [is] a way of orientation, exploration, and possibility—a way of imagining, framing, and viewing the world. Anticipation thus differs from forecasts and scenarios in that it involves a way of finding one’s way in and around an environment and in and around one’s social and cultural worlds. Though not prediction, anticipation draws upon predictive capabilities, knowledge, experience, and skill. Life does not flow

from the past through to the present and on to the future in a straightforward linear fashion. Anticipation is relational in the sense of connecting several points in time—people anticipate at a specific point in time, but what is being anticipated occurs at specific times in the near or distant future. As such, it entails and involves exploration, discovery, experience, and curiosity. (Nuttall, 2010, p. 24).

On the basis of past experience and memory, which are selectively enriched and filtered through the Now, we can anticipate what is yet to come. Anticipation of the future, transcending the fleeting sensations of an extended present, includes curiosity and the desire to know. (Nowotny, 2016, p. 14)

What is anticipated—what is desired, feared, a matter of possibility and curiosity—colours the ‘object’ in the engagement between the policy professional and policy recipient. The ‘what’ of anticipation, the prospective case (with intervention in place) to emerge, is like the island over the horizon, as related by Prendergast Tarena (2015), “The phrase ‘seeing the island’ was used often by the Hawaiians to describe a destination they had yet to reach. Our navigator ancestors had to picture their island destination in their mind before setting sail” Prendergast Tarena evokes the journey analogy for any action undertaken without “fully knowing what it will entail”. Whereas other futures tools may attempt to locate the island and describe it, anticipation carries a navigator forward to the island.

Two-way intersections

In the above three sections, selective and overlapping conceptual descriptions were provided for the case, dialogue and the future. In this section, we continue to build toward a relational methodology for seeing ahead, by picking out for additional emphasis features in the three two-way intersections of the three concepts, and what these might imply for the remaining concept.

Case–Future and implications for dialogue. In the overlap between the case and the future, I have already defined the case extending into the future. Thus, an intertemporality, inclusive of the future is distinctive. In our world, intertemporality also implies interspatiality. At this intersection, a moment in the case trajectory presents the occasion (what is to be done?) and object (intervention leading to future wellbeing) for the dialogue. The overlap with the future ensures a prospective, anticipated version of the case is privileged. This case is already intersubjective in the present moment, a relationship between the ‘out-there-ness’ as the past moves into the present and an ‘in-here-ness’ as the present opens to the future.

Case–Dialogue and implications for future. Case, in its anticipatory leaning, sets the parameters for the consideration and negotiation of the present action that will affect the future. The case reveals some experiences as ‘standing out’ and creating tensions to be resolved in action. Dialogue on case suggests story or narrative, and the exchange of pictures. The movement is dialectical, in the sense “that problem and solution are not given, but bring each other into being in the process of acting on the world” (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012, p. 15). Bartels (2015, p. 4) notes, in terms equally applicable with a future focus, that “having productive conversations is a challenging, fragile, and demanding undertaking” that involves people in engaging with the situation, discussing the substantive issues at hand, and building and maintaining their relationships, all with the aim to foster integrative understandings, activities and relations.

Seeing ahead is an intersubjective endeavour, with the exchange taking place in a shared space, a local ecology. This ecology has a number of characteristics, according to Ashworth (2006) that influence the dialogue: space, time, mood (in the sense of the ‘atmosphere of the situation’ rather than some internal state or disposition), embodiment, identity, ‘sociality’ (relationship with other people and what others mean to the person), the ‘project’ (the central

concern of a person in the situation at issue) and ‘discourse’ (the available ways of talking and action that a person draws upon). Intersubjective common ground enables the participants to advance situated understandings (Wolf, 2016, p. 613). When we are engaged in attempts to understand, “we do not try to transpose ourselves into the [other’s] mind, but . . . we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 292).

Dialogue–Future and implications for case. In the dialogue, creative and actionable ideas emerge. Bartels (2015) reminds us that the aim of the exchange is to make practical judgements based on what the situation affords and constrains. With dialogue at the interface with the future, more is needed than “working routines, habits of mind, standard operating procedures, technical knowledge, or specialised skills”; rather practices “transpire from both routine and improvised practical judgements as the situation signals to the actor that certain actions are called for, but also that certain conventions, commitments, physical obstacles, normative beliefs, procedures or rules have to be taken into account” (Bartels, 2015, p. 50).

Three-way intersection

At the three-way intersection, narrative, dialectical practice meets an anticipatory ‘object’ in an intersubjective, intertemporal, and interspatial present moment. As seeing is integral to the concepts of dialogue about the future, and as there is always an object in view, we have the centrality of a practice based on ‘intersight’ or shared mindscapes. As participants move toward the shared mindscape, they may try different ways of picturing to help the other to see; this trial-and-error engages phronesis and method to make connections with ‘fresh ideas’. Some of these ideas may subsequently be retained in implementation.

In the basic scenario, a long-time homeless person was identified as a possible policy recipient. What might the meeting of this person—call him Adam—and his social worker

look like? Suppose that Adam's immediate experience has included being slowly welcomed/overcoming resistance to help out in a garden centre, in increasingly involved ways. An anticipation of a situation that includes a garden *and* a home takes shape, and the social worker is able to take action that includes placing Adam in a new home where he will be able to garden. In the exchange, there is a noticing of the other's mindscape, such that garden, home and Adam come together in a possibility that is both sufficient to coax Adam into housing and available within the often restrictive housing-assistance policy. Both can 'see' the home with garden.

Even in this simple synopsis, the policy professional gains a 'fresh idea' and forms the kernel of the solution (that a garden with a house attached be offered to Adam; and that Adam be gently helped to see himself in that garden). Recalling that Adam has been unable to settle/be settled, it is possible that the 'garden' opportunity has been available for some time. Yet, the idea occurs 'suddenly' in the moment to a professionally prepared mind, rather than through some quasi-analytic process. The professional had to notice something about Adam's case, to see and feel from Adam's perspective what gardening meant to him specifically.

An interesting parallel, known as narrative medicine, has developed in clinical medicine. As in the basic scenario, personal stories can complement and improve clinical, depersonalised practice. Narrative medicine seeks to "rehumanize" medical practice by asking doctors to focus on the patient they are helping and not only on the disease or treatment of the disease (Abettan, 2017). For example, it is evident that people living with a terminal condition may have very similar clinical profiles, but very different ideas about how they wish to live their final days. In the engagement with the clinician,

On the one hand, medicine aims at identifying within an individual a universal process and matching this singular case with a general law. On the other hand, medicine has to

take into account the variability of each individual patient medicine appears as a practice and a meeting of two people, mutually engaged in a process whose aim is health. (Abettan, 2017)

Similarly, in social policy, ‘evidence’ of what works for whom, in a general sense, can be used to prescribe treatments. Even when the match between need and treatment is fine-grained, it need not involve any personal exchange with the policy recipient, and thus can occur in the absence of recipient-specific knowledge.

Methodologically, for policy applications, it is important to reach beyond the ‘actionable understanding’ (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012, p. 18) available in the situation-specific basic scenario, since it is unlikely that resources will be available for extended dialogue with every ‘Adam’. In addition, equity and efficiency will exercise constraints, but also enable some channelling of clients into restricted, but suitable sets of possible ‘treatments’. In short, it is necessary to detect and articulate somewhat transferable hypotheses. These hypothesis will apply to more than one case, but a number of case patterns will also be apparent: we do not expect to find diversity-denying universals. Assuming that the basic scenario is suited to achieving a one-off action, the further question is the extent to which this result can inform other cases. It is analogous to clinical practice where, despite the uniqueness of each patient, a successful diagnosis and treatment of one person may inform the clinician’s practice with others.

Methodology Illustration: Q Methodology

A relational methodology for seeing ahead must allow individuals to provide a picture of their policy-relevant experiences and allow policy professionals to scrutinise pictures of

policy recipients in order to take intervention action. In a resource-constrained environment, it is not possible to engage each policy recipient extensively. And in a public context, it is important to ensure that similarly situated people are treated similarly. Q methodology (Stephenson, 1953; Brown, 1980) is suited to discovering insights from patterns of experiences shared by some people. It can be applied in a context that maps well to the basic scenario. We can imagine, for example, that in a cohort of long-term homeless people in a particular city, there are clusters of differentiating aspirations for the future.

In brief, Q methodology enables people to provide a complete picture of what is on their mind. Individuals are provided a representative sample of components of an anticipated future and asked to array the components according to their salience to them. Having done so, policy professionals and indeed policy recipients can view and consider the similarities and differences in these subjective profiles. They can use them to augment other information in the search for an actionable way forward. With the aid of statistical techniques (correlation and factor analysis), observers can make sense of the participants' points of view. They can see how different components hang together and how these align with prevailing conditions and understandings in the policy setting. Moreover, they can also query the patterns to discover new ideas. Just as in the clinical case, within unique individual stories, there is unlikely to be a generalisable core, but rather 'family resemblances'. Not every homeless person will respond favourably to the prospect of living in a house with a garden, but several people may have a related functional interest in some physical attribute of the house (such as a garage to work on bikes). In addition to providing pictures, participants and researchers can discuss them, before and/or after factor analysis, creating fuller dialogic engagement.

Gargan and Brown, writing nearly 25 years ago (1993) titled their article, 'What is to be done? Anticipating the future and mobilising prudence'. Since then, Q methodology has

spread widely to many disciplines and applications. The specific application described here builds on Gargan and Brown's observations.

Prudence, of course, is a common translation of phronesis, and evokes the need to act wisely in the face of some uncertainty (which the future provides). Gargan and Brown, as political scientists, looked at using Q methodology to complement rational decision processes by taking into account several underlying answers to questions of what should be done for the common good. The present interest is to use Q methodology to capture what may be otherwise ephemeral in dialogic exchanges, to then discover the several plausible, meta-level patterns of salient aspects of experiences shared by many in a local community, while not generalising to all, and then to share the results with other policy professionals. Communities may be prisoners ready for first-time parole after periods in prison of less than five years, or currently homeless people who have 'slipped through the cracks' despite being known homeless for more than two years. Peace and colleagues (2004) identified five clusters of sickness and invalid beneficiaries' views about work and welfare, and subsequently presented these profiles to front-line staff, with the intention of further sensitising them in their interactions with clients.

Conceptually, I now expand on what is achievable with Q methodology, and the underpinning reasons. I defined a case in terms of a series of experiences for a person in relation to some aspect of a life, such as being housed/homeless. The case itself has temporal and spatial extent and intersubjective meaning, which can be focused at any particular point. In Q methodology, a shared space of common communicability is called a concourse. Concourses are specific to a time and place, such that items within it—ideas about some topic—are understandable to all who 'belong' to that space and time, such as homeless people and policy professionals with responsibility for social housing. The policy

professional, who is aware of a number of stories/experiences/cases can provide individuals with a representative sample from the concourse. Individuals, then, reflecting on the vector of their life experience when situated in that concourse, can use the items to create a picture of their attitude or stance in that concourse. That is, in the present moment (situation), they can show their positionality to the policy professional. If specifically instructed, they can show an anticipated future of their life's vector of experience with housing. These pictures are emergent; they are created when called on, as participants engage in fine-grained weighing of the felt salience of each item, and they reveal a mindscape. There are likely to be elements with no salience, and which evoke neither a positive nor a negative reaction. These also are part of the picture. Even if, from some other perspective, the components are arranged in this picture in a way that seems inconsistent, there is nevertheless a pervasive quality to the picture, and acceptance that it is the view of the person. In an end-of-life setting, an example of incompatibility from a clinical perspective that is individually coherent could be a desire to remain alert but to experience no pain. In the homeless person case, it could be a desire to live in a city but also to have a large garden. It is up to the researcher/policy professional to detect such semi-generalisable hypotheses and then 'test' them with others who are similarly situated.

When Q methodology is used to find pictures of the future, these will exhibit the same 'pervasive quality' of any experience. In a statement that could be applied unedited to Q methodology (revealing a common connection with pragmatism), Cook and Wagenaar (2012, fn 19) comment, "what makes an experience an experience for a particular person, that makes it stand out from the flow of random noise around us, and that makes it indubitably manifest itself as an experience, is the history of the interaction of a particular actor and her environment". The act of assigning salience levels to statements is a form of inquiry as

engagement in the concourse, and all that has contributed to it, and continues to, for that person and in that moment.

Cook and Wagenaar (2012) and Abbetan (2017, and references therein), relate the Gadamerian underpinning to the understanding of meaning in a situation. In place of a literary text, we have the experience of the other as narrated (although not necessarily in a text, as other communication can be used, such as body language). A narrative is meaningful within the narrator's and hearer's 'horizons'. In the clinical setting, there is a dialogic encounter in which the clinician endeavours to understand. In Q methodology, the encounter has only a few 'turns', but each is rich. The factors offer a perspective into concourse, thus, in Gadamer's words (1975, p. 302) "a person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon".

Other methods

The above discussion has used Q methodology in an extended discussion of how individual processes of seeing ahead can be drawn together in ways that are more amenable for use in policy decision making, not on their own, but in concert with analytic methods. Other methods may also be useful, if their typically present focus is changed to one of anticipation. Such methods, generally, must be able to get beyond unique configurations of experiences. Most promising are methods that exhibit the three criteria noted by Ravetz and Ravetz (2017, p. 112) in the case of visualisation approaches. These approaches enable "visual thinking", which "mobilizes tacit and felt knowledge, the unconscious mind and the numinous; focuses on the creative, experiential and personal level; and helps to bridge the gap between analysis and synthesis".

As with Q methodology, visualisation approaches require a 'researcher' to draw the understandings together. The researcher may be a participant, an outsider, a policy

professional, or some composite of these identities or others. What matters is that the researcher can employ second-person relational methods. With visual thinking, this means creating some sort of ‘mosaic’ to present to the decision maker, in which the informative consequences of the ‘gaze’ are drawn into patterns (Wolf, 2016). In other examples canvassed in Wolf (2016), as well as in visualisation methods, the ‘objects’ at issue can be anticipated ones. Similarly, the extensive repertoire of approaches to interpretation (Wagenaar, 2011), which are generally directed to understanding the present and how it came to be, can be turned to the project of shedding light on the future and how it is anticipated to be. Somewhat further philosophically, the methods developed by Ragin (2000) could also be adapted. In place of the usual meso- or macro-level unit of analysis (a hospital or a country), a number of ‘fuzzy’ measures can be made of individuals (or better, by individuals of themselves, analogously to Q methodology). In place of known outcomes, the analysis can proceed with estimated ones. Other methods will surely be adaptable as well.

Conclusion

This paper fits within the broad category of policy methodological work, in which the aim is to better meet future needs. In particular, I have kept in mind those policies that are designed to target interventions to specific needs, be they of an individual or community. In order to achieve this aim, policy professionals must use techniques of forecasting, and hence they are always working with significant uncertainty, in addition to the challenges of diversity and complexity associated with any policy future. Advances in policy forecasting, and their many positive results, have reinforced the importance of better understanding what may happen, and thereby influenced decisions designed to make some possibilities more or less likely. To the degree that current methods may have (wittingly or not) masked or ignored some

uncertainty and complexity—and hence varied individual expertise and individuals’ ability to judge and act in those circumstances—for the sake of tractability, complementary methods can serve as correctives. In their absences, available information could lead to misunderstandings that ramify ahead, and embed skewed information in future analyses.

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