## **The pressures within: dilemmas in the conduct of evaluation from within government**

**Abstract**

Government departments can be requested to conduct research on behalf of a Minister with a policy interest in a particular area. When there is a political imperative and particularly when a media announcement has been made, there can be ramifications for the rigor of the research and subsequently the interpretation of the results. This chapter examines the area of research and evaluation commissioned by and conducted within government departments in Australia. It then refers to two case study evaluations that broadly reviewed the effectiveness of programs in public schools in Australia where politics impacted on the development, conduct and reporting of the research. Through the first case study, the chapter explores problems for researchers within government departments when research methodology is imposed prior to the development of clearly defined research questions, resulting in methodology that is not rigorous and inadequate to meet the stated outcomes for the research project. Such problems impact on the veracity of the conclusions that may be drawn at the conclusion of the research. The second case study considers the complexity of providing a balanced interpretation of the results, including reporting of outcomes to government executives that are unsatisfactory or inconsistent with established or preferred policy directions. These dilemmas are explored from the perspective of a research manager employed by the department. The chapter concludes by discussing a range of strategies that may be employed by researchers and evaluators to counter political impact. Links are made to issues raised in preceding case study chapters and to theoretical chapters in section 1.

**Background**

This concluding chapter reflects on the lived experience of the author as a government employee responsible for the conduct of performance reviews and evaluations of State government initiatives in Australia over a period of 17 years. Two specific cases are discussed that illustrate points raised throughout the book and strategies explored for addressing issues and challenges encountered. Over the 17 year period I was employed in four State government agencies, including education and training departments and an audit office. In these roles I was involved in leading, managing and conducting evaluations and performance reviews, the reports of which were used by the departments to advise on the effectiveness of policy, its implementation and development, and in the case of audit, tabled in State parliament.

**The Politics of Research and Evaluation**

The literature clearly acknowledges that evaluation is an inherently political process (Markiewicz, 2005; Palumbo, 1987; Patton, 2008; Simons, 2000; Slattery, 2010) and in recent years, the work of evaluation has become even more politicised as have its uses and non-uses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Weiss’s (1970) seminal work regarding the politicisation of evaluation has been acknowledged and cited by many authors since its publication. She regards politics and evaluation as being linked in three main ways.

Firstly, the programs and policies which evaluation examines are the products of political decisions. This means that discussion, debate and operational management by many officers has already occurred prior to the implementation of any policy and program so politics are already part of the landscape before decisions about conducting an evaluation are made. Secondly, the product of the evaluation ultimately feeds into a further decision making process so the evaluation report itself becomes a political entity. Thirdly, evaluation as a process is political because it involves assessing and judging. Fundamentally, Weiss (1987; 1993) contends, evaluation takes place in a political context and is subject to political pressures.

Patton’s (2008) more recent work in the field of utilisation-focused evaluation purports that politics are never absent from evaluation work, although the degree of politicalisation may vary. Patton expanded on Weiss’s (1987) work to argue that politics are involved in all aspects of evaluation, including the data collection stage, and he offers six sources of political inherency:

1. The involvement of people in evaluation means that their own values, perceptions and politics are involved.
2. Because evaluation requires the classification and categorisation of data, this means that decisions are made regarding the way the data is filtered.
3. The fact that empirical data underpins evaluation makes it a political process because data always requires interpretation.
4. Because actions and decisions follow from evaluations, and such decisions affect the allocation of resources and distribution of power, politics are involved.
5. The fact that programs and organisations are involved in evaluations makes them political. Organisations allocate power, status and resources and evaluation affects that.
6. The involvement of information in evaluations makes them political because information leads to action and the accumulation of power.

Notably, Patton’s (2008) second and third points above regarding data manipulation relate to the work of the researcher and evaluator, thus inferring that the researcher and evaluator themselves unwittingly bring politics into the arena of evaluation. This is where the issue of ethical drift raised by Jenlink and Jenlink (chapter 4) may arise. Patton’s other points relate to the stakeholders and participants. Stakeholders involved in allocation of resources and distribution of power for higher education researchers include their employing institutions, government policy makers and funders of research (Brown, chapter 2; Normand, chapter 3; Viseu, chapter 5; Doyle & McDonald, chapter 8; Bendix-Petersen, chapter 10).

Markiewicz (2008) views the links between politics and evaluation as being all-encompassing. She argues that political influence begins from the moment that decisions to evaluate are made when discussions about the purpose and role of the evaluation occur. Further political decisions are then made with respect to budget, timelines, scope, detail, findings, recommendations and dissemination of results. In addition to these considerations are discussions about what is methodologically necessary to ensure that an evaluation is credible, what is pragmatically appropriate, and what is politically desirable. While Pawson (2006) acknowledges the politics that impact on evaluation work, he suggests that their contribution to the policy and program development process is overstated because evaluation takes place after program design and implementation cycles. All evaluation takes place in a social context and political overtones are generally present in all branches of evaluation research. The politics involved may be at a small group, wider organisation, national or international level (Barlow, 2005). The policy agora and its influence on evidence based decision-making were discussed by Brown in chapter 2.

The agency that has responsibility for the policy or program is generally the agency that commissions the evaluation (Weiss, 1993), so it has ownership of the program as well as the product of the evaluation. At the conclusion of the evaluation, the findings are reported to those who commissioned the evaluation, i.e. the decision-makers and managers. The extent to which attention is given to an evaluation is often dependent upon the political attractiveness of the findings to decision makers (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) and it is likely to be taken more seriously when its findings confirm the already-held beliefs of the decision-makers (Weiss, 1993). Decision makers can also distort or only partially use the findings of evaluations to their own ends (Barton, 2002) and can select to publicise only those findings that support desired policy directions (Guenther, Williams & Arnott, 2010). If the findings are negative or politically sensitive, the report may be buried and the findings ignored in any future decision making (Guenther, Williams & Arnott, 2010). Alternatively, findings may be released with the decision-makers’ own facts and interpretations (Schram & Soss, 2001). A number of these issues were experienced and discussed by Gower and Partington and Chen (chapters 12 & 14). Sometimes, it is not even the outcome which is considered to be important, but simply the mere process of conducting an evaluation or research into a policy or program which can be used by decision makers to legitimise actions (Glass, 1987; Gorard, 2010) or pre-empt research or evaluation of other sensitive issues (Doornbos, 2012). In a recent study in the United States, it was found that education district leaders did not utilise research in relation to policy decision-making, but often utilised research to legitimise and substantiate a policy decision that had already been made, even where there was not a good match of context (Coburn, 2015). Gower and Partington (chapter 12) provided examples of how this pressure arises in the context of commissioned research conducted by academic researchers, and they and Chen (chapter 15) considered the changes in purpose and policy position of departments commissioning research throughout the research or evaluation process. Farwell (Chapter 14) provided an example of where policy development has occurred in isolation of related research to become disconnected to evidence that may have informed the process.

Even while evaluations are underway, political pressures can affect them. If evaluations or research are lengthy, other changes may be occurring so that the political climate at the completion of an evaluation may not be the same as it was at its commencement. For example, the programs and policies being evaluated may also be subject to influences such as budget cuts, administrative changes, varying government support, public appraisal, media coverage, and the implementation of additional or competing programs. (Pawson, 2006; Weiss, 1993; Chen, chapter 14). As examples of the changing landscape that can affect evaluation work, Pawson’s (2006) personal experience involved:

* A program being declared dead by one government department in the same month that funding for its evaluation was announced by a difference government department;
* A large-scale restructure of programs and services being announced at the same time as evaluators were still in the field collecting data;
* A research team reporting to four different managers as a consequence of the commissioning organisation undergoing restructuring during an evaluation.

In Chapter 15, Chan provided a taxonomy to analyse how these uses and outcomes of evaluations may be categorised and how this focus can change during the course of the research or evaluation. Guenther, Williams and Arnott’s (2010) experience while working with Charles Darwin University demonstrated how an evaluation can have no impact in a political environment. In 2005, Guenther and his team were engaged by the Northern Territory Government to conduct an evaluation of the territory government’s family violence strategies. Just after the completion of the report, a number of staffing changes took effect as did a restructure of the entire section responsible for the management and implementation of the policy supporting the strategies. The management responsibility for the policy was then transferred to a different government department. Subsequent to this, all staff previously involved with managing the policy and strategies left the department and the entire initiative lapsed.

Any political tension that arises during an evaluation is due to differing value systems between the evaluator and the policy-maker (Weiss, 1993). Evaluators and researchers view their work as being objective, unbiased and non-political whereas policy-makers see their work as clearly anchored in a political arena and the products of evaluations are seen as political tools. Many researchers experience pressure, both subtle and unsubtle, in the conduct of evaluation activity even to the extent of producing findings that substantiate existing policy or support a policy favoured by the funding or commissioning body (Gorard, 2010; Winch, 2002). Pressures may be felt at any stage of an evaluation. During the design phase, pressures may be exerted by sponsors and stakeholders. During the data collection and data analysis phases, pressure is most likely to come from stakeholders and at the end of the evaluation when findings and recommendations emerge, pressure may come from sponsors and stakeholders (Chelimsky, 2007; Markiewicz, 2008). While those pressures may be felt at any stage of the conduct of an evaluation, they are often particularly highlighted during the stage of formulating findings and recommendations (Markiewicz, 2008). Managing those pressures and aiming to maintain a neutral, independent and objective orientation to the evaluation work can be challenging for the evaluator (Markiewicz, 2005; Slattery, 2010).

Trade-offs between evaluators and stakeholders are often involved in evaluations and the scope of evaluations if often constrained as a result of limitations relating to mandate, resources, time and methodologies (Slattery, 2010). Evaluators and researchers need to recognise that the purposes, roles and uses of evaluation are subject to change, but still remain legitimate, and that they themselves may need to change in response to government change (Slattery, 2010). However, in doing so they need to remain conscious of the influences acting upon them and how this may impact the rigor and ethics of their work (Jenlink & Jenlink, chapter 3; Calzoni, chapter 10).

**Case Studies of political influence and associated strategies for research and evaluation**

The literature cites various examples which demonstrate the intersection of politics and research and evaluation (Brandon, Smith, Trenholm & Devaney, 2010; Duckett, Sixsmith & Kagan, 2008; Guenther, Williams & Arnott, 2010). In particular, Chelimsky (2007; 2008), who managed the Program Evaluation and Methodology Division (PEMD) within the US Government Accountability Office during the 1980s and 1990s, offered a range of examples where political influence made its presence felt at various stages of evaluations she was asked to undertake.

* Issues arising during the design phase – The PEMD was commissioned to undertake an evaluation with the evaluation question “To what degree has the secretary of education distorted the evaluation findings on bilingual education?” The highly politicised evaluation question was responded to by the PEMD though adopting a fair and unbiased methodology, including unbiased selection of participants.
* Issues arising during evaluations in progress – With some evaluations in the area of defence regarding weapon system testing, the PEMD was often deprived of negative test measurement data by the US Department of Defense. The Department released favourable test results but kept the unfavourable results invisible. The PEMD responded to this situation by using a flexible methodology, refraining from answering questions using distorted test data, and publishing honest arguments about why evaluation questions could not be answered objectively.
* Issues arising during the final stages of evaluations – When the PEMD examined the extent to whether American businesses were sustaining an increased burden of paperwork, the findings showed no change. The sponsor of the evaluation requested the evaluators to maintain the data without adjustments for changed procedures so that he could argue business mistreatment as a consequence of government procedural change. The PEMD responded by refusing to change its findings, citing a lack of credibility that would ensue from doing so.

Chelimsky (2007; 2008) contends that being flexible with a choice of methods but also having methodological persuasiveness is the key to maintaining credibility with respect to findings that may not be palatable to sponsors and stakeholders. The following two case studies relate to evaluations of education initiatives undertaken within a State government department in Australia.

**Case Study 1:**

In this case a trial was announced by the Minister to explore school-level issues relating to an educational option for students that was of current interest for potential future policy development. Whilst the key aim was to contribute evidence and advice to the relevant department, the announcement of the trial included invitation of five schools based on their positive response to an offer of specific, and generous, funding to conduct a trial. No project parameters were set for the year levels, courses or format of classes at this stage. The request to conduct an evaluation of the trial came following the announcement which then did not allow any selection process or flexibility in proposed methodological approach.

The implementation of the trial and its evaluation therefore commenced at a stage where planning of an appropriate and rigorous methodology was restricted by circumstances already in place. Each school determined their own individual proposal regarding how they would conduct the trial and implemented the initiative in different ways. Different year groups, subject areas, and pedagogical approaches were used in each school. A case study approach and an empowerment evaluation process (Fetterman & Eiler, 2001; Fetterman & Bowman, 2002) was therefore adopted to address the different monitoring and evaluation requirements of each school. In addition, a set of ‘Agreed Measures’ was developed that outlined the monitoring requirements for each school for each year of the Trial. The Agreed Measures allowed interim feedback to be provided to each school in each year of the trial, hence enabling schools to use the collected and analysed data to iteratively adjust their trial program consistent with the empowerment evaluation process.

Whilst this evaluation approach provided some positive outcomes for the participating schools, a consequence of the design was that there were a range of issues that impacted on the rigor of the evaluation. These included:

* A wide variation in the approaches taken by the participating schools.
* Schools were not provided with guidelines regarding the use of financial resources provided to fund the trial and therefore allocated the funding in vastly different ways.
* Staff changes within schools impacted on the continuity of the trial programs.
* Teachers’ access to professional development varied widely according to school circumstances and staff changes within schools.

Whilst the empowerment process ensured outcomes were attained within each participating school, there was no possibility to be able generalise findings and limited capacity to provide sound evidence in relation to the conditions that supported learning in relation to the educational initiative or a policy direction that may be applicable across schools.

The researchers within the government department in case study one had severe limitations placed on the research methodology imposed by the political circumstance prior to the development of clearly defined research questions or a consistent approach or direction for the education initiative being investigated. This created a dilemma in trying to develop a methodology that was rigorous and could meet stated outcomes for the project. Whilst the research team adopted an approach, within the limitations, that provided a way forward in assessing the effectiveness of the initiative there were problems that could not be fully overcome and a subsequent impact on the veracity of the conclusions that could be drawn at the conclusion of the research.

Researchers and evaluators aim to approach their roles in conducting evaluations with independence and objectivity. In adopting a high level of independence, researchers and evaluators aim to produce neutral and unbiased results, and this ensures the credibility of their findings (Chelimsky, 2008; Markiewicz, 2008). Their independence arises from a freedom to pursue rigorous evaluation without submitting to political pressures that might compromise the quality of the work. Their objectivity relates to an impartiality with regard to methodology, conduct and interpretation of findings (Markiewicz, 2008). These aims were not able to be met in this case study and caused significant dissonance within the team, and between the team and the executives commissioning the research project.

While evaluators have strong methodological backgrounds that equip them to pursue unbiased research, they also need to be aware that their work is carried out in politicised contexts and that the outcomes of their evaluations have a high level of application to the positions of individual stakeholders (Chelimsky, 2008; Markiewicz, 2005). By understanding and acknowledging the political context of their work, evaluators need to select approaches and methods that will maximise the benefits of their evaluations (Slattery, 2010) and attempt to preserve their independence and objectivity (Markiewicz, 2008). The adoption of the case study methodology and empowerment evaluation approach were the option that this team took to achieve this in this instance.

The literature offers few strategies to evaluators working strictly inside agencies and government departments to address the politics that infiltrate evaluations they undertake. A few authors (Chelimsky, 2008; Simons, 1995), though, have suggested various strategies that can be employed by researchers and evaluators undertaking contract work for such agencies and departments.

Chelimsky’s (2008) strategies for evaluators working within a political context are suggested as a means of preserving the credibility of their evaluations. She suggests the following.

1. Expand the design phase.

 Including an analysis of program histories and values, past and present political controversies, and an account of probable stakeholder positions with respect to the evaluation can highlight any elements of the evaluation design that may be considered politically or methodologically weak. It also enables the evaluator to focus upon the elements of the evaluation design that they can defend its credibility both politically and technically.

1. When relevant, include public groups.

The credibility of an evaluation is enhanced when the perspectives of public groups are included, especially when they possess important knowledge that helps to inform the evaluation questions. There may be occasions when there is stakeholder conflict within a program, however this is the very time when the opinions of a diversity of public groups needed to be included, thereby averting the risk that some views may overwhelm others.

1. Lean heavily on negotiation.

 The ability to negotiate enables the evaluator to overcome things such as vagueness about evaluation issues, unclear work feasibility, and uncertainty about the dissemination of findings and use of the final report. Sometimes in the face of political pressure, the willingness to negotiate represents an unwillingness to be intimidated.

1. Never stop pursuing credibility.

 An evaluation needs to be technically transparent, defensible, and objective and needs to be perceived by others as such. These can be achieved through: the selection of appropriate methods; an honesty of reporting the confidence in the data and analysis; the clarity of how findings flow from the data and do not exceed them; and neutrality in the language and presentation of the report.

1. Develop a dissemination strategy.

 Ensure that the evaluation report is focused and free of jargon and able to be understood by policy makers as well as members of the public. Prepare an individual dissemination strategy for every evaluation that may include: articles in journals; simple statements of findings to relevant interest groups; and briefings to reporters and other organisations. When the findings are especially politically displeasing, the dissemination strategy helps to ensure that the findings are heard.

These strategies are more effective when the evaluator is contracted to undertake the work, is outside the organisation commissioning the work, and the work is conducted, ostensibly, to inform the public. If the evaluation is to provide information for policy use, there may be no need for a dissemination policy. Greater difficulties arise when the evaluator works inside the organisation, especially when it is a government agency. Because of the nature of some evaluation contracts, evaluators may be powerless to disseminate or publish findings of their work without agency permission (Chelimsky, 2008). Evaluators of government programs or policies must also be cognisant that some reports may not even be acted on due to the political landscape into which the report is forwarded (Schram & Soss, 2011). This was the scenario that impacted on the evaluators who conducted the rigorous, longitudinal study described in Case two.

**Case Study 2**

This evaluation, in contrast to the previous case, was a longitudinal study that utilised a scientifically rigorous methodology to critically investigate the impact of an educational initiative on a broad range of school and student outcomes. This methodology incorporated large samples across multiple cohorts using control groups that were matched across a range of factors identified as influencing student outcomes, so that effects of these variables could be minimised. Multiple quantitative and qualitative measures were used at an individual, rather than aggregated, level to allow for corroboration of data and outcomes analysed across sub-groups of students to determine if there were differentiated effects for some groups.

This educational initiative was of key strategic import for the current government in regard to shaping future educational strategy and promotion of standards. Significant funds had been invested over a number of years into infrastructure to support the initiative on the basis of a worldwide educational trend that had not been rigorously researched. The resulting report and subsequent Ministerial briefings challenged the current strategic direction and provided information that could be interpreted as in opposition to preferred Ministerial strategy. Initially the methodology was questioned with a suggestion that the findings were not rigorous or reliable. However, as this was not the case and could not be sustained, the report was subsequently shelved for over twelve months rather than being published. As a consequence the sound evidence was unable to be considered for the development of policy related to the initiative. Given the complexity of issues surrounding the initiative and related initiatives, the report was eventually released 18 months later with caveats regarding its interpretation on related initiatives that it was not commissioned to evaluate or inform. It was then able to be utilised to inform strategic policy in education in regard to the specific initiative investigated.

Two strategies offered by Simons (1995) address evaluations conducted for government and non-government agencies, especially with regard to the publication of findings. First of all, she suggests that when politics become involved in evaluations conducted for government agencies the evaluator could simply accept the agency’s requests entirely and do the work, and not be at all concerned about whether the findings will be published. This is a position that is accepted by many, however it does not ensure any professional check on the quality of the work or ensure that mechanisms are in place to allow access to or publication of the findings. In this case, whilst the evaluation team accepted the requirement not to publish, the professional check on quality was countered via delivery of an unpublished paper at a national conference that discussed the methodology but omitted all results. The paper was highly commended by peers and won an evaluation award which confirmed the veracity and rigour of the work.

Simons’ (1995) second strategy may be considered extreme by some and relates to the publication or release of findings. She suggests that evaluators take on evaluation work and sign contracts where necessary. Then, regardless of any contractual restrictions on the release of findings, employ various mechanisms to ensure that this occurs. She suggests using tactics such as leaking findings, seeking to have questions raised in parliament, and sending anonymous letters and articles to the press. Such tactics involve a high degree of risk for those working within government in regard to job security, and Gower and Partington (chapter 12) indicate in that this is not without risk for a university tenderer as it can result in not being considered for future work. Since Simons’ (1995) original writing, there is now much greater scope to publish online and create online or social media discussion on various matters.

Mohan and Sullivan (2006) contend that evaluators need to recognise the various political pressures present in the milieu of their work, identify the key sponsors and stakeholders, and have an understanding of the interactions among those key players who often have competing and conflicting interests in the outcomes of evaluations. They argue that evaluators need to have a measure of both impartiality and responsiveness. It is the impartiality of evaluators’ work that gives their reports prestige and credibility, and their responsiveness to stakeholders’ perspectives and positions that help to ensure that evaluation reports have some usage.

Mohan and Sullivan (2006) suggest various strategies for addressing the politics present in evaluations as means of maximising impartiality and responsiveness. These strategies include:

* Consulting extensively with policymakers to identify their evaluation questions and other information needs;
* Considering the political context, such as agency sensitivity to issues that form the focus of the evaluation;
* Identifying and understanding the relationships among key stakeholders;
* Managing the project’s scope to ensure the feasibility of work completion within the designated time frame;
* Responding to sponsors’ and stakeholders’ needs for information;
* Carefully assessing the pros and cons of obtaining certain information, if required, through exercising statutory authority of appropriate evaluation offices; and
* Using professional standards to guide the evaluation work.

Brandon et. al.’s (2010) congressionally mandated evaluation of Title V abstinence education programs being delivered in US schools won an American Evaluation Association Best Evaluation Award in 2009 due to its balance of impartiality and responsiveness to stakeholders. Both the program and the evaluation took place in a politically and ideologically contentious climate, but the evaluation contained a number of features that contributed to its consideration of being a model of exemplary practice. A higher profile and significant circumstance, but similar situation to Case Study 2 above.

With respect to independence and impartiality, the methodology of Brandon et. al.’s (2010) evaluation and Case Study 2 were technically sound and the evaluators included a large sample. In both cases during the term of the evaluation, the evaluators themselves recognised and considered several potential threats to the integrity of the study and they took immediate steps to mitigate them. When the work of the evaluation was labelled as being biased or flawed, the evaluators addressed such criticisms immediately. As a means of being responsive to stakeholders, the evaluators established a technical work group which operated as a reference group and consisted of people who were trusted by the community and represented a range of perspectives and expertise. The evaluators engaged in constant contact with the reference group and ensured that all members of the group clearly understood and appreciated the evaluation design and the program outcomes that were being measured. The technical work group was also provided with ongoing evaluation briefings as well as preliminary results. At the conclusion of the evaluation, the team of evaluators worked with a government deputy secretary or senior executive officer whose communications and public relations skills were used to help facilitate the release of the report.

The issues of evaluator impartiality and responsiveness are also addressed by Vestman and Conner (2006) in their model of three positions in which politics and evaluation are connected, and the strategies they offer to address each position. Their model relates to whether it is possible and/or desirable to separate politics from evaluation.

Vestman and Conner’s (2006) first position is that it is desirable and possible to separate politics and evaluation with the aim of producing objective and neutral evaluation findings. In pursuing this objective, they suggest that evaluators:

* Determine who has commissioned the evaluation and the motivation and reasons for the undertaking of an evaluation;
* Uncover all aspects of the policy or program and involve participants who are officially as well as unofficially involved in it;
* Develop peer review procedures;
* Utilise expert panels and/or outside consultants in the entire evaluation process;
* Wherever possible, use established and credible testing and assessment instruments;
* Include a ‘limitations’ section in the report that discusses any political influences and critical decisions made during the evaluation that may impact on the findings.

The second position as viewed by Vestman and Conner (2006) relates to it being desirable and possible to separate politics and evaluation with respect to the provision of information but not with respect to the provision of judgements. In this position, the authors suggest that evaluators seek to understand the political context in which the policy or program is situated and the information needs of those commissioning the evaluation. Vestman and Conner’s (2006) third position is that it is neither desirable nor possible to separate politics and evaluation, in which case the evaluator is unable to adopt a neutral perspective because judgements are involved. In this instance, the evaluator accepts the involvement of politics. This was clearly the position accepted by Gaitskell (chapter 11) in relation to evaluation of Boards.

**Conclusion**

Researchers and evaluators seek to deliver neutral and unbiased results about the work they undertake through adopting technically sound methodologies and work practices. The reality is, though, that evaluation operates in highly politicised and interests-driven environments and is inevitably influenced and affected by them.

Evaluators should be encouraged not to ignore the politics or pretend to be immune to politics involved with their work, but to face the reality that politics are present (Mohan & Sullivan, 2006) and be armed with strategies to deal with the intersection of those politics and their undertaking of evaluation.

This and the preceding chapters have discussed a number of ways in which the researcher and evaluator can encounter the incursion of politics on their work. It has also offered a range of perspectives, issues and strategies for the researcher and evaluator to consider and to implement to guard against any potential political inroads and to address any political trespass that may occur during the conduct of a piece of research or evaluation. Ultimately, it is up to the researcher and evaluator to be mindful of the potential of politics to become involved in their work, recognise when politics is becoming involved, and to take steps, as necessary and appropriate, to constructively address any political encounter.

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