

Title

Modernize the public sector through innovation?
A challenge for the role of applied social science and evaluation.
WORK IN PROGRESS

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Abstract:

The article will discuss the challenges related to the use of social science knowledge in innovation processes in the public sector, drawing on a case, an evaluation of the Program on Research for Innovation and Renewal in the Public Sector (abbreviated FIFOS) under the Research Council of Norway. The paper will discuss how to plan and execute research-based knowledge in innovation in the public sector. The paper discusses and criticizes the often-met linear thinking in the application of new knowledge, especially in relation to innovation. It also suggests, by the help of a model based on ideas from organizational learning, another strategy for organizing the use of social science research for innovation in the public sector. As a consequence the paper advocates new evaluation strategies, where learning and dialogue is in focus.

Keywords

Modernization of the public sector, evaluation models, innovation, applied research.

Introduction:

During the last two decades many countries have initiated programs to innovate the public sector through an increased use of social science research. The ambitions have been high but only rarely the research programs are evaluated and therefore we only have limited knowledge of the challenges and actual results of these programs. The article will discuss the understanding of the use of social science knowledge to problem solving often met in such programs as well as the understanding of the complexity of innovation. Are such programs actually helping to create a link between needed social science knowledge and public sector innovation and how should they be evaluated?

Two years ago the Norwegian Research Council initiated an evaluation of its large scale programs on Research for Innovation and Renewal in the Public Sector (FIFOS) and the associated activities on Value-adding Innovation in the Public Sector (VIOS). The purpose was to determine and assess how the efforts to promote research in public sector innovation in Norway have been carried out and to assess the results of the program.

Two of the authors¹ of this article were responsible for carrying out the evaluation for the Research Council. The evaluation was rather critical. Despite of the high ambitions of the government and the Research Council in Norway and despite the vast amount of resources that were devoted to the activities in the research program, only little has been achieved.

Lessons from the evaluation of FIFOS

Through the experience from an evaluation of the FIFOS it is possible to extract important knowledge on how a research programme should be formulated, established and implemented to be able to have an impact on the public innovation research agenda and on public innovation issues in general. The experience from the FIFOS evaluation will be discussed later in the article in this chapter from the perspective of a model in fig. 1.

The FIFOS programme, which ran from 2002 until 2008, was born out of the Norwegian government's resolve from the mid-1990s onwards to establish the

world's most competent public sector, created and run by the best educated public service employees, through innovation and renewal. Moreover, the government aimed to make Norway one of the top five exporters of expertise in advanced public services, administration and democracy.

FIFOS was one of the initiatives launched in order to promote innovation in the public sector. The objectives of the programme were very ambitious, namely to increase research and development to facilitate the development of a smarter and more efficient public sector, and to increase the quality of public sector services, administration and democratic processes. The programme should moreover support and develop outstanding research groups with the capability to improve and contribute to public innovation. In addition, through user involvement, the programme should increase public corporations' ability to apply research results in their work processes and services. Interdisciplinarity and the dissemination of project results to users in the public sector were also central aims in the programme. Finally, international collaboration should be sought out, and areas in which Norway seeks to be on the cutting edge of international developments were to be identified.

Though innovative in its scope and vision, and in spite of the fact that funded projects yielded a number of valuable results, the FIFOS programme is widely acknowledged as an unsuccessful programme. Failing to attract subsequent funding after its original allocation of funds, the programme channelled around 12 million Euro to just 19 research projects, predominantly smaller pilot projects. The Research Council was unable to find support for a continuation of the programme or its activities after 2008. Moreover, the programme was virtually unknown outside the Research Council and the projects that it supported. As such, the programme was unsuccessful in meeting the objectives set for its activities and impact.

The reasons for the failing of the program can be divided between what looks like more external factors and factors inherent to the specific construction of the program.

Part of the explanation can be found in shortcomings in the overall program design and ambitions, restricted funding and organisation of the programme, e.g.

- Small amount of funding but broad and ambitious goals
- Most of the funding was allocated early on to small projects and pilot projects, before the board of the programme had been formed and decided on guidelines for programme efforts (because the program organisation expected to attract additional funding but never succeeded in doing so). Therefore the programme did not contribute sufficiently to developing strong research groups and networks of high scientific standard
- Low programme visibility among stakeholders; little support from external stakeholders such as ministries and municipalities. The missing linkage between policy makers and research was also evident as the programme failed to increase public organisations' ability to apply research results in their work processes and services.

We propose that another less obvious but nonetheless important reasons for the lack of success of the programme is related to the understanding of innovation processes underlying the programme. More precisely, we argue that the FIFOS programme was built on a tacit assumption that innovation processes are linear, namely that social science research on public sector innovation can actually promote innovation in the public sector. In this paper, we furthermore argue that, in order to be effective, a program like FIFOS must recognise the complex, iterative and non-linear nature of innovation processes and use social science research as a knowledge base but also as a platform for interaction between e.g. researchers and the ultimate users of the research, in this case representatives of public sector organizations.

The lessons learned from the evaluation of the FIFOS program raise three important questions. First, how can social science come to play a role for a better and more effective public sector? The question is not a new one, but we have yet to generate a good answer to it. Second, how do different understandings of the

concept of innovation among the parties involved in FIFOS affect the final outcomes of the program?

Our discussion of the complexities related to the organization and use of social science knowledge in public sector innovation open up for what could be considered a third or related question, namely if solutions to the two questions can be found, how can we evaluate the result, taking into account that evaluation rely on social science methodologies and techniques. The challenge is if social science can contribute to open up the traditional discourses of evaluation from focusing on documented results to focusing on the processes, risk taking and potentials, the very core of innovation.

In this article we will discuss under which circumstances social science can contribute to public policy development, further what is really at stake when public sector institutions talk about innovation. Finally, on the basis of the lessons learned from the FIFOS program, we propose a number of new ways in which to proceed with the attempt to give social science a larger role in the development of the public sector. In the end of the article we raise the question of how to construct and organize evaluative procedures open for the risks related to innovation.

The use of social science in the public sector

The idea to use social science knowledge to better public policy and new administrative processes as well as developing specific programs to problem solving in the modern welfare state is not a new agenda. In the crises years of the 1930s, the concept of social engineering was developed as a means to formulate a radical welfare reform policy under economic restrictions (Hirdman 1992, 1994). Formulated as social engineering, the systematic combination of social science knowledge and reform policy gave a certain legitimation to policy and helped form a rational administration.

After the experience of state planning in the WWII economies, the systematic use of social science knowledge became widespread, and state planning with long time perspectives became popular and gave prominent space for the applied social

sciences². The rapid growth in the use of social science knowledge took many forms; besides collaboration with university departments, some of the more lasting results were the establishment of new research based units inside government, but noteworthy is also the growth of independent think tanks and independent applied research institutions. Research units in international organizations like OECD turned out to be very powerful in influencing policy making and agenda setting. Characterizing these new institutions was the fact that they combined in-house research and invited research through collaboration with universities.

In a now classic study of the uses of social science knowledge in policy decision-making, Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980) concluded that even if the boundaries for the use of this knowledge seemed to be clear and uncontroversial, this was because of the special authority surrounding this kind of knowledge.

"Social science research provides only one component of knowledge. Yet, as we have seen in this inquiry, it can carry a special authoritativeness, in part because it is presumed to have the systematic and objective hallmark of science and in part because its concepts provide a powerful vocabulary that shapes the definition of issues."(s. 276)

The special authority and the ability to formulate and frame problems rest to a large degree on the general trust in scientific knowledge, at the time widespread in society. But trust is also supported by confidence in a special kind of objectivity associated with the growing tendency to produce social scientific knowledge in quantified forms. This kind of trust has roots in the need for the non-expert to understand the experts, and it contains elements of a general mistrust toward expert knowledge when this knowledge was produced in forms that seems to be accessible only to experts (Wynne 2002). Producing knowledge by numbers or by quantification was then seen as the solution by social scientists to overcome this mistrust, as Porter (1990) has demonstrated it in his studies of the historical birth of major social quantification systems in policy and administration.

The seemingly unlimited growth of state regulation, including the use of social science knowledge, came to an end in the 1970s with the worldwide fiscal crises experienced by most western countries. Austerity policy and reforms to reduce or restrict state expenditures was the reaction, and it paved the way for what later became known as New Public Management. These new restrictions accelerated the need for much more elaborated, detail focused and specific use of social science knowledge, often as evaluations aimed at the development of more efficient and cost reduced public services (Pollit 2009). The recent and ongoing financial crises in Europe and elsewhere have only accelerated the need of the political and administrative systems to have more social science knowledge in order to produce quality public services more efficiently (including at lower costs).

As described above, there is a long history behind the tradition of using social science knowledge in policy and administration, and many things have changed since the early 20th century, not the least the frequency and extent with which social science knowledge is used. But strangely enough one thing seems to be stable; there is a certain type of linear planning or strategy thinking in the approach from the users, from policy and administration, to formulate the problem and then ask for research based answers, and quite often researchers accept this in other areas outdated model for communicating research results outside academia (Horst 2001, Irwin and Michael 2003). As a consequence, social science knowledge is either sought after to solve specific problems in existing programs and policies or, as in the social engineering model, applied by social scientists in the formulation of new programs and policies. Either way, the logic behind the application is still – albeit usually implicitly – the traditional linear understand of how to use applied scientific knowledge, described in shorthand as basic research produces general scientific knowledge and the application of the knowledge follows through a process of developing the knowledge into practical or useful elements, or applied research. The knowledge is subsequently applied to specific policies or administrative processes. When evaluation became part of public policy in the new public management concept of accountancy and efficiency, it tended to support the traditional understanding of the use of research based knowledge (Hansson 1998) if used at all (Pollit 2009).

Why not the linear model?

Critical voices problematizing the linear thinking using scientific knowledge came from different directions. Ulrich Bech and Wolfgang Bonss (1989) concluded from a study of the use of applied social science in Germany, that the borderline between science and praxis has changed, undermining the preconditions for the classic linear model. With a powerful metaphor, Beck and Bonss stated that “...facing the observed institutional, professional and everyday use of science it is not possible to think the use of social science from the point of view of a ‘missionary’. The ‘natives without social science’ has been missioned long ago; at some places they produce science themselves....” (1989, 212, authors’ translation). On a more general level, related to changes in the role and function of science systems in modern society, the same discussion can be found. The influential books by Gibbons, Nowotny and others³, *The new production of Knowledge* (1994) and its follow up launched the concept of Mode 2 science as different from traditional university based basic science, Mode 1, and produced in interaction with external partners and working across traditional disciplinary boundaries. The books initiated extended discussions and empirical studies of how important and deep rooted the changes in knowledge in modern society are, and to what degree it has influenced traditional modes of understanding the use of social science by policy makers and others.⁴ According to the mode 2 theory, social science research is no longer the prerogative of universities; other institutions, administrative bodies and not least private consultancy companies have acquired the competences and techniques earlier restricted to universities and a few other research institutions.⁵

Innovation in the public sector

The space does not allow for a review of the bulging literature on innovation theory in companies and public organizations. But from the evaluation of the FIFOS program, we can identify a couple of important challenges in relation to the understanding of successful public sector innovation programs. One is what is really meant by innovation in the public sector. In the FIFOS program, innovation is used side by side with concepts like renewal, efficiency and better resource

prioritization. It is easy to understand innovation in such a context as something like Schumpeter's famous description of innovation as 'creative destruction', a complete break up of earlier procedures and models, but in reality Schumpeter described the process as containing both gradual process and processes with discontinuities (Schumpeter 1911/1993, 1945/1975). Furthermore, for Schumpeter, the new elements are not necessarily ones to be imported from outside but also developed from inside. Recent innovation theory has changed focus from the dominating traditional linear innovation systems approach to focusing much more on the complex micro processes leading to innovative breakthroughs through collaborations with a wide array of actors. The result is an understanding of the broad complex of factors influencing the innovation process as an ongoing activity involving both internal and external actors.

New theories on innovation like user driven innovation, open innovation, systemic innovation or participatory innovation, have found their way into the understanding of how companies innovate in a modern global economy. The result is a situation where the understanding of innovation has changed, and the former more formalized and codified innovation models tend to open up to more informal learning and ongoing models for innovation.

In the public sector, dominated by services rather than physical products, innovation will often be based on more intangible items like new knowledge; therefore, it is interesting to note that in the recent literature on knowledge management in organizations, a parallel development can be observed. More or less the same process as we saw in relation to the innovation literature can be found in management and organization studies, where the understanding of the processes creating new knowledge has changed from a model of top down strategic planning to models for the continuous creation of new knowledge. Influential organization researchers like Nonaka (1994) stated almost twenty years ago that "organizational knowledge creation therefore, should be understood in terms of a process that "organizationally" amplifies the knowledge created by individuals" (1994, p. 17). The forceful arguments for understanding knowledge

creation as ongoing bottom up processes in organizations support the understanding of innovation as an ongoing and collective or collaborative process.

What we see in science studies, in new innovation theory and in knowledge management theory are signs of the limits in former understandings, the linear form previously described. The changed demands for leadership of innovation follow up on these changes and can be expressed by quoting the conclusions of a long study of the conditions for leading for innovation: by Hill and others (2009): “The business leader of today and the foreseeable future must know how to turn their organization into innovative communities instead of practicing what Gary Hamel has referred to as “creative apartheid” – a scenario where only a few “gifted individuals” are given responsibility for innovation, with the other members of the organization seen as unimaginative. It is time to recognize that creativity is widely distributed and that innovation comes from nurturing the slice of genius in everyone.” (646)

The recent situation where we witness a more continuous, co-operative or co-produced knowledge production with several actors and institutions involved, often network organized and not limited to certain institutions (universities), challenges the participating actors, not the least because of the element of risk included in any real innovation process and demanding a much more bottom-up approach to innovation.

An alternative model from organizational learning

The traditional approach to define what is scientific knowledge by such organizations takes us back to the problems of the linear model of application of innovation. Without an understanding of the changes in the landscape between science and society – and hence the complex interaction and learning processes now central in using expert knowledge to solve problems, including the knowledge produced by collaboration between the partners – it seems difficult to find ways ahead. In a more recent article reviewing the concept of national innovation systems, one of the theory’s founding fathers Bengt-Åke Lundvall (2007) underlines the importance of knowledge and learning as the basis for innovation.

Without going further into the discussion of innovation systems, the focus on dynamic organizational micro processes in innovation tell us that these organizational conditions are just as important when it comes to innovation through the implementation of social science knowledge.

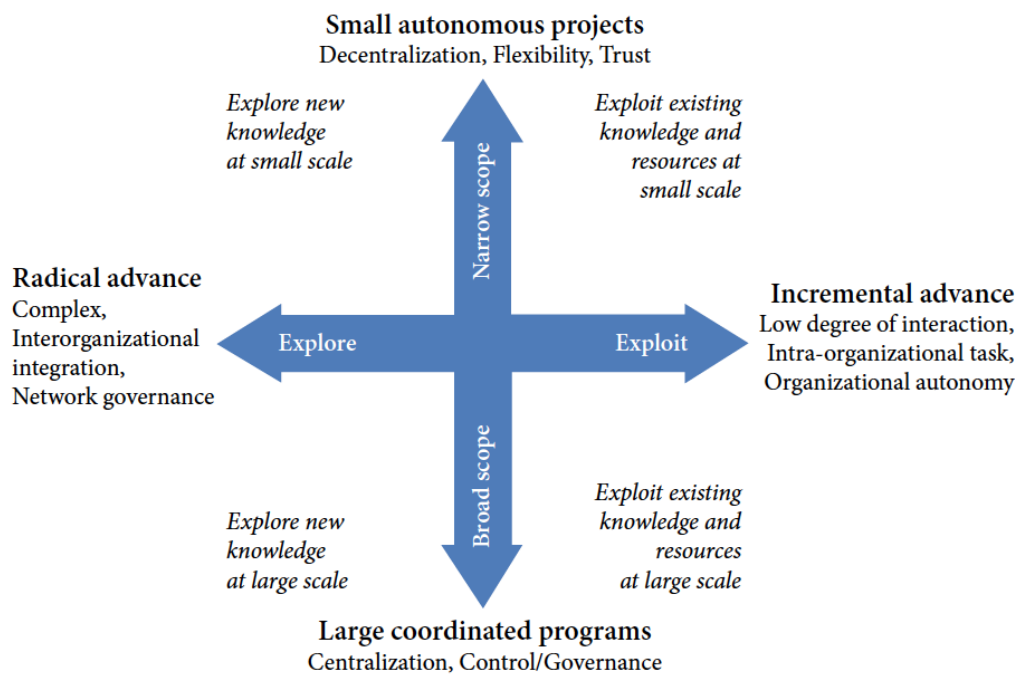
First and foremost, we need a conceptual scheme to distinguish between the many different types of scientific knowledge in use or to be put into use and the types of demands for problem solving knowledge. One obvious road could be to approach the problem from organizational learning and especially the dyadic concepts introduced by James March (1991), exploration and exploitation. March concluded his study of the complex learning processes in organizations and the conditions for development of new knowledge in this way:

“Learning, analysis, imitation, regeneration, and technological change are major components of any effort to improve organizational performance and strengthen competitive advantage. Each involves adaption and a delicate trade-off between exploration and exploitation. The present argument has been that these trade-offs are affected by their contexts of distributed costs and benefits and ecological interaction. The essence of exploitation is the refinement and extension of existing competences, technologies and paradigms. Its returns are positive, proximate and predictable. The essence of exploration is experimentation with new alternatives. Its returns are uncertain, distant and often negative.” (March 1991, 85) March’s point is in a sense simple to explicate, the need for new knowledge has to be critically evaluated from the point of view: 1) are existing knowledge useable in new settings with revisions, that is, through exploitation or 2) is it necessary to develop complete new knowledge, eg. to explore new possibilities

Shifting the perspective from formulating problems and implementing solutions from research to a more process based approach, where learning in and by organizations is in focus, and using the concepts of exploitation and exploration from March, we can set up a framework for how to organize learning based collaborations between social science research and the users, policy and administration.

The model was originally developed to analyze research collaboration and the implementation of innovation in sustainable energy research (Hansson, Brenneche, Mønsted and Fransson 2008), but it can just as well be used to model ways of setting up different scenarios for how, where and when to formulate new questions for innovation in organizations and when to use or reuse already existing research based knowledge in public policy and administration.

The model shall help to specify what kind of knowledge is needed, if it is new knowledge (explore) or existing knowledge (exploit), whether it is a small-scale change or a large one. Depending on the positioning of questions asked by policy and administration, different scenarios for collaboration with different partners, research groups and evaluators is needed. For example, when it comes to a situation, where policy and administrative reforms are thought to be incremental, f.i. in a case of implementing the use of handhold computers in the elder care to secure better care, the demand for social science research is about how to implement and use already existing and evidence based knowledge. Typically it will be through the use of consultants from applied research organizations or private consultancy companies. At the other end, we have a demand from stakeholders for a more radical change with a broad scope developing new programs or restructuring existing ones. This calls for another type of research collaboration with external researchers, often from universities and evaluators. In this case, the stakeholder's participation in formulating the problem as well as interacting in a network during research will be central to the whole project.

FIG. 1: Scope and purpose of collaborative research projects⁶.


What does these scenarios mean for the use of social science research?

Following the consequences of the discussion of new forms of knowledge production, the former linear mode of planning has to be disposed of and instead the organization demanding new knowledge in order to solve problems needs to act differently. Instead of formulating problems and demanding research based solutions, the public organization should co-operate with the assumed knowledge producers in order to construct a collaborative project, that is, a project where the research questions and the research process is a joint project. Key representatives of the organization should join researchers in the project, and the results should be understood as co-creation.

The discussions above on the recent major changes in relations between social science knowledge and its users, it follows that more traditional approaches to the evaluation of research often fail, approaches where the control and measurement

dimension is in focus and the constructive learning by experience, a trademark of the classic evaluation theory, is downgraded.

Obviously new ways of organizing the use and production of new relevant social science knowledge has to be developed through organizational learning processes. Therefore the case can provide valuable lessons for other policy initiatives to stimulate (research on?) public innovation, notably

- E.g. to stimulate good research/knowledge production, you need good research environments; if they don't exist, you have to start by building such environments
- Good research to solve large societal challenges need to be based on an understanding of research as a collaborative process, involving the researched participants or users,
- Related to this point: FIFOS ended up supporting existing actors and activities, particularly within sub-sectors such as IT and healthcare, but (1) there was no cross-fertilisation between these actors (perhaps new insights, collaborative ventures etc. could have been stimulated if the funding recipients had been brought together by the programme rather than left to their own) (no "joint platform", no "meeting spaces"), and (2) the programme funded few if any new activities (i.e. that could not have been undertaken in the absence of FIFOS funding)
- E.g. involvement of users was very limited: who, when and how should users be involved
- E.g. general insights on public sector innovation vs. sub-sector specific insights: The idea behind FIFOS was to address and stimulate knowledge production in regards to public sector innovation in general, not in specific sub-sectors (e.g. healthcare, education etc.); they wished to support projects that spanned sub-sectors but did not succeed in doing so, which raises the question: to which extent (and under which circumstances) is it possible for a programme to support research on public sector innovation in general (or across sectors) rather than in specific sector.

Some funding problems and the low visibility among stakeholders could probably have been avoided, if the program has been organized following the logic of the

model in fig.1. The model tells us that innovation depends on organizational learning – innovation in the public sector is very much about organizational learning, implementation and dissemination – and this learning has elements of both exploiting and exploring knowledge. Following this the wish to innovate in the public sector should not have been formulated as the need for external research based knowledge, but as the need for both new knowledge and certainly also for collaboration with users and exploiting their existing knowledge in order to push organizational learning processes.

Moreover, the funding of these research programs following the usual procedures used by the research council underscored - maybe not intentionally - the linear innovation model, because the new knowledge to produce innovation in the sector was understood as expert knowledge to be produced outside the public sector and then later imported in an implementation process.

As such, the results of the FIFOS evaluation point to several key challenges for policymakers seeking to stimulate public sector innovation. The results of this evaluation are therefore relevant for policymakers in other programmes and countries seeking to promote (research on?) public sector innovation, because the Research Council of Norway and the FIFOS programme were frontrunners in Europe in their efforts to stimulate renewal and innovation in the public sector. Policymakers elsewhere are increasingly turning their attention to (and investing funds in) public sector innovation; as such, the results of the evaluation of FIFOS can yield valuable insights and lessons that can inform the design, implementation and evaluation of current and future programmes to support (research on?) public sector innovation.

Applying organizational learning or evidence based solutions?

In a situation where the traditional linear way of thinking about the use of social science research to solve problems has shown itself to be inefficient and restricted in its problem-solving capacity, and where we have seen that the concept of science to be used is complex and covering many different dimensions of scientific knowledge, we have to turn to other ways of thinking about how to enhance societies' problem-solving capacities. One recent and rather popular solution to the question of using social science based knowledge in policy can be found in the

growing popularity of evidence-based policy solutions from the evidence-producing organizations. These organizations assess, select and summarize existing knowledge, but they also take part in making priorities and managing streams of knowledge utilization. The Campbell Collaboration and the Cochrane Collaboration are the best-known examples of such a worldwide organization providing data evidence through the use of meta studies on social, health and educational issues for policy makers. Both organizations have elaborated methodology guidelines for undertaking such meta studies, very often ending up with a few studies through their very restricted inclusion policy, raising the randomized trial experiment (RCT) to be the gold standard, with quasi experiments and longitudinal studies as second best. By using such a standard, a large number of social studies, including all types of qualitative social science studies are excluded beforehand.

Some years ago Breslau (1997a, 1997b) did an interesting study showing how changes in the governance of federal employment policy in the US not only changed the evaluation of the policy but more importantly, changed the construction of data, involved actors, study design and analysis. Evaluation employment efficiency was originally organized as a qualitative and local based evaluation with focus on selected impact and before and after effect of programs but was changed to a quasi-experimental evaluation system with random assignment and statistically measurement executed by federal employed economists. A consequence of these changes in the evaluation methods was that local business, unions and local government lost influence on the training policy and economists and federal agencies took over. The discussion or conflict over methods is not only a discussion or conflict on what constitute science as it sometimes is described by the evidence organizations but it is very much about what kind of knowledge can be certified as science and by whom, where the evidence organizations focus on randomization and quantification exclude a huge number of social studies.

In a recent review of the use of economic evaluations, Palfrey et.al. (2012) have shown how the two basic concepts, costs and utility, are extremely complicated to operationalize; costs can be direct, indirect, intangible, invisible and utility is just as complex to measure. Different economic models to overcome these problems

has not been successful and Palfrey et. al (2012) argue, that a more systems oriented perspective, combining cost and efficiency in relation to both micro and macro based variables is preferred to a return to the randomized controlled experiment, an approach almost impossible outside the health sector. “There is, however, an inherent danger that economic evaluation – and evaluation per se – employs a relative narrow perspective and fails to appreciate and consider the broader picture as reflected in the whole systems perspective. (Palfrey et.al. 2012, 137)

The ideal of the evidence approach seems to be to present science based knowledge on the social world in a way approaching the popular understanding of the objective natural science knowledge. But policy and the social world are, as Sanderson (2002) notes, very complex and build on ongoing or continuous change, reconstruction and learning. Lasting and stable or solid knowledge about social affairs is extremely rare. Sanderson concludes his discussion on evidence-based policy in relation to the field of evaluation by arguing for another approach to evaluation, by highlighting the “paradox in late modernity: that while increasing complexity of social systems progressively undermines notions of certainty in social knowledge it simultaneously raises the stakes in relation to rational guidance of those systems.” (Sanderson, 2002: 19)

In a recent study of the consequences of the evidence movement for the political and scientific use of the meta studies from these organizations, Hansen and Rieper (2009) follow up on Sanderson’s paradox and conclude: “In this respect the methodological debate related to systematic reviews is not only a technical question about how to produce valid knowledge. It is also an internal power struggle in the scientific community. The players who are able to influence and decide on methodological guidelines also authorize special types of knowledge. Evidence-producing organizations thus not only assess and summarize existing knowledge, but they also take part in making priorities and managing streams of knowledge..” (Hansen and Rieper, 2009)

The knowledge producing and governing processes by the evidence based organizations will if introduced into the field of innovation raise a question, which from the standpoint of innovation very much looks like a contradiction: if we demand evidence for the social science knowledge used is it then possible to assume risk-taking and innovation?

The evidence based approach has as noted already made its way into the field of evaluation, restricting the types of demands to evaluation following from the model, so new approaches to evaluation should be included. will changes accordingly and support process oriented and dialogue focused evaluations (Schwandt 2001, 2003).

A new role for evaluation?

By presenting us for a case where the things went wrong because of a too simple or restricted understanding of the complications in fostering innovation in the public sector, the paper has tried to show how a process and learning perspective on how to produce and implement new knowledge to innovate the sector is needed. Following the arguments in the paper there is a visible need for rethinking how to formulate research programs and who to involve as well as how to design the implementation. Evaluation can be seen as a special case of applied social science methods, but these methods are normally used to collect information on what worked well in the past. "Evaluation is good at pinpointing successes and shortfalls and identifying where changes must be made, but it is not always the best source of fresh ideas for tomorrow" writes Carol Weiss (1998, 28) and continue to stress, that major organizational changes in order to make a program work better need changes in the organizational conditions, that is facilitating learning in the organization as well as open up the boundaries toward society, that is include users.

The systems perspective as argued by Palfrey et. al (2012) is interesting as it point to the role of the context for implementing social science knowledge, evaluation results included, in policy decision making. But what are systems and what is context in relation to a specific evaluation? In each case it is a difficult question to answer and the risk is it ends up in a limited understanding of the boundaries of systems and context. The result can be fragmented policy-making processes "that

fail to encompass a whole-systems perspective therefore tend to focus on the system components that are easily observed and the output and outcomes that are easily quantified and assessed. The problem of these approaches is that the 'iceberg effect' is often ignored." (Palfrey et. al. 2012, 141)

In a recent article Schwandt and Dahler Larsen (2012) discuss how to use the concept of context based on two conceptualizations of the context for an evaluation., using two different interpretations of the same context in order to demonstrate the difficulties and necessities of incorporating a context based view in evaluations.

In the case presented in this article, the FIFOS case, an important part of the context is the recognition of how the new public management system of evaluating for accountability in all areas of the public sector influence the general will to risk taking in relation to innovative initiatives, but probably also how evaluative approaches related to innovation will be met in a world accustomed to accountancy based evaluations. Evaluations or evaluation machines (Dahler-Larsen 2012) constitute a certain view on the activities performed by an organization; most often an auditing based view (Power 1997) leaving a grey-zone of unintended or latent functions (Merton 1968) in the organization. The dominant element in evaluations to control and describe risks (Power 1997, Dahler-Larsen 2012) will obvious result in contradictions or conflicts in situations where another goal of the organization is to encourage innovation with the in-built element of risk.

This is a real challenge for the traditional role of evaluation. The evaluation literature has often discussed three major models of application or approaches to evaluation have often dominated the discussion (Hansson 2006):

- the social engineering model, aiming at direct intervention;
- the enlightenment model, stressing the importance of presenting knowledge to the public;
- and the interactive model (Bryant 1995),

which stresses the interaction between applied research and policy-makers and focuses on advocacy, policy and decision. Common to these models are a rather traditional model of how to use or apply expert knowledge. But none of these models can by themselves solve the contradiction between the inbuilt risk-adverseness in the evaluation system and the challenge introduced by the wish for large scale innovation with the associated risk-taking.

In an on-going learning and development perspective on innovation in the public sector evaluation should play a different and much more active role as a key sparring partner for the whole process. Having evaluators involved in the process to ask evaluation questions from the very start, an on-going dialogue between program, participants, users, researchers and evaluators can bring back evaluation to its classic role as a tool to learn and correct through dialogue instead of the controlling function too often associated with evaluation. The controlling elements in evaluation leave very restricted space for the risk-taking necessary in any innovation process. Therefore formative and dialogue-based organization of the evaluation set-up could be one strategy to focus evaluation in organizations on its original or classic element of learning without control, by reflecting on on-going activities from the perspective of innovation instead of measuring by indicators against a pre-set system of goals.

NOTES:

¹ Maria Theresa Norn and Torben Vad, both at DAMVAD at that time.

² This is demonstrated in the 900 page edited book by Lazarsfeld, P., W. Sewell, et al. (1967).

³ Gibbons, M., C. Limoges, et al. (1994). "The new Production of Knowledge. The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies." and Nowotny, H., M. Gibbons, et al. (2001). *Re-thinking science. Knowledge and the Public in an Age of Uncertainty*. Oxford,

⁴ A review of this discussion can be found in Hessels and a discussion of the challenges of the consequences for traditional research evaluation in Ernøe and Hansson . See Hessels, L. K., & Lente, H. V. (2008). Re-thinking new knowledge production, and Ernø-Kjølhede, E., & Hansson, F. (2011). Measuring research performance during a changing relationship between science and society.

⁵ During several years social science action research has developed a tradition for involving users and developing new knowledge through collaboration or co-production, especially in the fields of sociology of work and organization.

⁶ The model is from Hansson, F., Brenneche, N. T., Mønsted, M., Fransson, T. (eds.), SUCCESS Work Package 1 : Benchmarking Successful Models of Collaboration. Stockholm, 2008.

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