

MODULE 8 – BRIDGING THE FRAMEWORKS: CREATING EFFECTIVE DIALOGS

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Well, if we're going to really bridge these two frameworks and create effective dialogues, how do we improve communication between policymakers and researchers? If we accept that the development of public policy consensus on an identified problem establishes the basic framework for policy-related social and economic research within which research priorities can be set, how do we create that frame to bridge the gap?

We know that evidence can be used to inform policy and practice. We know that policy has relied upon and asked that research be conducted to drive policy and practice. However, the crux of the matter may be what information is needed to support decision making.

Unlike research, which allows the continuing questioning existing scientific truths, changes in policy are reviewed and re-evaluated based upon the outcomes of those decisions across social, economic, and political sectors. Perhaps what is more necessary is a way to restate the concepts that drive decision making away from certainty and more to a public health perspective of adequacy, plausibility, and probability. And that requires language change and a higher level of a theoretical framework than we are prepared to offer in this course. So let's look at some practical applied solutions.

We have three solutions that we think are good starting points for a larger discussion. First, create personal contact between researchers and policymakers. There is nothing like face-to-face conversation where questions can be asked and answered, whether it is in informal settings or in formal meetings and workshops.

Second, research should be timely and relevant to the issue at hand. Too many times, a policy brief will bring in older studies that, yes, are important in the history research but have no relevance to the current day and the presentation of the issue. Finally, all research should have an understandable summary with clear actionable items or recommendations that provoke dialogue and assist the decision making process.

While there are a number of communication strategies we could discuss, one of the most effective strategies that I have seen firsthand was the use of a facilitator who worked with the Public Policy Commission comprised of practitioners, policymakers, persons with behavioral health problems and their family members, advocates and researchers to create shared definitions of things, of actions, and of process. Not only did this help to bring all the participants together into the conversation, but the commission was able to create meaning from the information.