Chapter 1

WHAT IS DECENTRED ANALYSIS?

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Introduction

Policy analysis provides information, evaluation, advice and advocacy for policy makers and is typically a species of naturalist or 'scientific' or positivist social science. It has some distinguished proponents, including Yehezkel Dror (1968), Harold Lasswell (1971) and Aaron Wildavsky (1980). Among the multitude of definitions, Hill (2015: 5) is representative. He distinguishes between analysis *of* the policy process and analysis *for* the policy process. The former is descriptive and analytical seeking to explain the origins of policy and how it was implemented. The latter is prescriptive using the analytical techniques often associated with economics to provide information and evaluations for policy makers.

Naturalism refers to the idea that 'The human sciences should strive to develop predictive and causal explanations akin to those found in the natural sciences' (Bevir and Kedar 2008: 503). For example, evidence-based policymaking is the latest fashion in policy analysis. It favours randomised controlled trials (RCT). In brief, RCTs involve identifying the new policy intervention, determining the anticipated outcomes, and specifying ways of measuring those outcomes. Following this, the investigator chooses control groups, whether comprised of individuals or institutions. The policy intervention is randomly assigned to the

target groups with a designated control group. Using a randomly assigned control group enables the investigator to compare a new intervention with a group where nothing has changed. Randomization is considered appropriate to eradicate the influence of external factors and potential biases (Cartwright and Hardie 2012; Haynes et al. 2012). With its roots in clinical trials, the influence of the natural sciences' experimental method, and the ambition to be 'scientific', are clear for all to see.

This book rejects such naturalism and argues for decentred policy analysis rooted in an anti-naturalist epistemology. First, it rejects the naturalist thesis that we can explain actions by allegedly objective social facts about people. Meanings are largely irrelevant to mainstream political science and policy studies. Beliefs are, at most, intervening variables. Actions can be correlated with, and explained by, social categories such as class, economic interest, or institutional position. These analytical moves suppress or deny human agency. Second, it rejects the naturalist thesis that the relation between antecedent and consequent in political explanation is a necessary causal one – that is, it is law like as in the natural science. Political science seeks psychological or social laws, rather than historical narratives or understanding webs of meaning.

Naturalism has been widely criticised for its faith in pure experience. Political scientists recognise that we cannot approach objects from a theory-neutral position. They seem far less aware that the impossibility of pure experience also undermines the two theses just discussed. First, because people do not have pure experiences, they always construct their identities, interests, and beliefs in part through their particular theories. Therefore, political scientists cannot explain behaviour by reference to given interests or objective social facts.

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Second, because social facts do not fix people's identities, interests, and beliefs, we have to explain actions by referring to the intentionality of the actors. Therefore, political scientists cannot appeal to causal laws (and for a more detailed discussion see Bevir and Rhodes 2003; 2015b).

In sharp contrast, anti-naturalists argue that 'constitutive features of human life set it apart from the rest of nature to such an extent that the social or human sciences cannot take the natural sciences as a model'. Instead, 'the relevant features of human action are that it is meaningful and historically contingent (Bevir and Kedar 2008: 505). I develop these points in the next section.

Although naturalist policy analysis has paid some attention to narratives[1], anti-naturalism underpins most narrative policy analysis, which has existed in the study of public policy since the 1990s.[2] It is one of the few subfields of political science where interpretive approaches have had some traction. Wagenaar (2011) provides an authoritative overview of the field and there seems little point in covering the ground again. Instead, I focus on the key characteristics of our approach at Southampton: interpretive theory, decentring, and fieldwork, especially ethnographic fieldwork. I discuss each in turn.

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[1] See: Denning 2005; Dietz and Silverman 2014; Gabriel 2000; Jones and. McBeth 2010; Jones, Shanahan and McBeth 2014; Roe 1994.
[2] Early examples include; Bobrow and Dryzek; 1987; Dryzek 1993; Fischer and Forester 1993; Healy 1986; Hummel 1991; Jennings 1987; Van Eeten et al. 1996; and Yanow 1999. More recently, see: Bevir 2011; Czarniawska 2004; Fischer 2003; Fischer, Miller and Sidney, 2006; Hajer 2009; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Stone 2001; Wagenaar 2011. In the UK, there is also a dedicated journal, *Critical Policy Studies,* and an annual interpretive policy analysis conference.

The rest of this chapter outlines the specific interpretive approach developed by Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes. It explains what we mean by 'decentring', and unpacks the ethnographic toolkit we employ. It provides brief descriptive summaries of the individual chapters but focuses on how each relates to the overall themes of the book. Finally, it discusses what we can learn from a decentred approach. I suggest that it delivers edification because it offers a novel alliance of interpretive theory with an ethnographic toolkit to explore policy and policymaking from the bottom-up.

Interpretive theory

All political scientists offer us interpretations. Interpretive approaches differ in offering interpretations of interpretations. They concentrate on meanings, beliefs, and discourses, as opposed to laws and rules, correlations between social categories, or deductive models. An interpretive approach is not alone in paying attention to meanings. It is distinctive because of the extent to which it privileges meanings as ways to grasp actions. Its proponents privilege meanings because they hold, first, beliefs have a constitutive relationship to actions and, second, beliefs are inherently holistic. [3]

First, an interpretive approach holds that beliefs and practices are constitutive of each other. As Clifford Geertz (1973: 5) famously claimed, social science needs to be 'not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning'. For example, when other political scientists study voting behaviour using attitude surveys or

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[3] This section paraphrases Bevir and Rhodes 2003, 2006 and 2010; and Rhodes 2017.

models of rational action, they separate beliefs from actions to find a correlation or deductive link between the two. In contrast, an interpretive approach suggests such surveys and models cannot tell us why, say, raising one's hand should amount to voting, or why there would be uproar if someone forced someone else to raise their hand against their will. We can explain such behaviour only if we appeal to the intersubjective beliefs that underpin the practice. We need to know voting is associated with free choice and, therefore, with a particular concept of the self. Practices could not exist if people did not have the appropriate beliefs. Beliefs or meanings would not make sense without the practices to which they refer.

Second, an interpretive approach argues that meanings or beliefs are holistic. We can make sense of someone's beliefs only by locating them in the wider web of other beliefs that provide the reasons for their holding them. So, even if political scientists found a correlation between a positive attitude to social justice and voting Labour, they could not properly explain people's voting Labour by reference to this attitude. After all, people who have a positive attitude to social justice might vote Liberal if they believe Labour will not implement policies promoting social justice. To explain why someone with a positive attitude to social justice votes Labour, we have to unpack the other relevant beliefs that link the attitude to the vote. To explain an action, we cannot merely correlate it with an isolated attitude. Rather, we must interpret it as part of a web of beliefs.

Third, human action is historically contingent. It is characterized by change and specificity. We cannot explain social phenomena if we ignore their inherent flux and their concrete links to specific contexts. Such historicist explanations work not by referring to reified correlations, mechanism, or models, but by describing and locating contingent patterns

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of meaningful actions in their specific traditions. Historicists argue that beliefs, actions, and events are profoundly contingent because choice is open and indeterminate. They question the possibility of either a universal theory or ahistorical correlations and typologies. In addition, they argue that if we are to understand and explain actions and beliefs, we have to grasp how they fit within wider practices and webs of meaning. Historicism promotes forms of understanding and explanation that are inductive studies of human life in its historical contexts. Its explanations are not only temporal in that they move through time; they are also historical in that they locate the phenomena at a specific time.

Proponents of an interpretive approach incline to bottom-up forms of social inquiry. They usually believe people in the same situation can hold different beliefs because their experiences of that situation can be laden with different prior theories. No abstract concept, such as a class or institution, can explain people's beliefs, interests, or actions. Such a concept can represent only an abstract proxy for the multiple, complex beliefs and actions of all the individuals we classify under it. So, for these reasons, practices need bottom-up studies of the actions and beliefs out of which they emerge An interpretive approach explores the ways in which social practices are created, sustained, and transformed through the interplay and contest of the beliefs embedded in human activity.

Interpretive theories come in several guises (see Bevir and Rhodes 2015a: chapters 2-10). This collection of essays draws on the approach developed by Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes. Their key concepts are summarised in Table 1.1

INSERT TABLE 1.1 ABOUT HERE

Table 1.1 **The Interpretive Approach**

Concept	Definition
Beliefs	Beliefs are the basic unit of analysis, in that they are the interpretations of individuals of their world and their surroundings.
Practices	A set of actions that often exhibits a stable pattern across time. Practices are the ways in which beliefs and traditions manifest themselves in everyday life.
Traditions	Traditions are 'webs of belief', and form the background of ideas in which agents find themselves. Agents will adopt beliefs from traditions as a starting point, but may amend them.
Situated agency	Individuals are situated in wider webs of beliefs, or traditions, which largely shape their beliefs. Yet they keep a capacity for agency in that they respond to traditions, beliefs and dilemmas in novel ways
Dilemmas	A dilemma is an idea that stands in contradiction to other beliefs, posing a problem. Dilemmas are resolved by accommodating the new belief in the present web of beliefs or replacing old beliefs with new beliefs.
Narratives	Narratives are a form of explanation that works by relating actions to individual beliefs and desires that produce them..

Source: Geddes and Rhodes (2018)

Decentring

To decentre is to unpack practices as the contingent beliefs and actions of individuals. Decentred analysis produces detailed studies of people's beliefs and practices. It challenges the idea that inexorable or impersonal forces drive politics, focusing instead on the relevant meanings, the beliefs and preferences of the people involved. A decentred account of public policy is distinctive in seven ways.

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Table 1.2 **Decentred Analysis**

1. It represents a shift of *topos* from institutions to *meanings* in action.
2. Institutions whether a policy network or a prime ministerial office or a policy do not have essentialist features, only *family resemblances* that are *constructed, contested, and contingent.*
3. Decentred analysis explains shifting patterns of policy and policy making by focusing on the actors' own interpretations of their *beliefs and practices*, not external causes such as a global financial crisis.
4. The everyday practices arise from agents whose beliefs and actions are informed by *traditions*.
5. It explores the diverse ways in which *situated agents* are changing policies by constantly remaking practices as their beliefs change in response to *dilemmas*.
6. It reveals the *contingency* and *contestability* of policy narratives. It highlights both the importance of local knowledge and the diversity of policymaking and its exercise.
7. It provides instrumental knowledge expressed in *stories*.

Sources: Rhodes 2017.

A core technique of decentring is recovering stories. Policy narratives are non-fiction stories with characters and plots. Decentred analysis identifies the beliefs and practices of the characters. The plot is the reasons the characters give for their actions. Storytelling can be seen as an exercise in academic whimsy. However, Van Eeten et al**.** (1996) distinguish between storytelling by administrators and storytelling by scholars to make the important point that this academic fashion has its feet firmly on the ground. In both public and private organisations, managers use stories not only to gain and pass on information and to inspire involvement but also as the repository of the organisation's institutional memory (Czarniawska 2004; Hummel 1991; Rhodes 2011).

So, recovering stories can be treated as a technique like a survey; a means for acquiring data for policymakers. It is about providing information for policymakers so they can make rational decisions (Van Willigen (2002: 150, and chapter 10). For example, Torfing et al. (2012: 156-9; and chapter 7) argue that network governance requires new skills in managing the mix of bureaucracy, markets and networks. Such meta-governing involves devising policy narratives that span organisational boundaries and build collaborative leadership.

Writing a story is about inscribing complex specificity in its context (Wolcott 1997). Inscribing means recovering, recounting, and reviewing the stories. We recover the stories told to us by politicians, public servants and citizens. We systematise these accounts, telling our version of their stories, and recounting them. Our version is reviewed jointly by storywriter and storyteller to identify errors, divergences, and lessons. The aim is a fusion of horizons that covers both agreement and where we agree to disagree. Both are reported. We

derive practical lessons from lived experience; an interpretive equivalent of evidence-based policy making (and see Rhodes and Tiernan 2014).We can choose to be servants of power and help the state win consent, but it is not required. We can choose to contribute to debates that will enhance the capacity of citizens to consider and voice differing perspectives in policy debates. It is an alternative normative choice.

Bricolage

Given the actor-centred character of decentred analysis, it favours fieldwork and methods that focus on the beliefs and practices of actors. An interpretive approach does not necessarily favour particular methods. It does not prescribe a particular toolkit for producing data. Rather, it prescribes a particular way of treating data of any type. It should treat data as evidence of the meanings or beliefs embedded in actions. However, the interpretive approach with its emphasis on recovering meaning does have implications for how we collect data. It leads to a much greater emphasis on qualitative methods than is common among naturalist political scientists. It favours ethnographic fieldwork.

The ethnographer studies people's everyday lives. Such fieldwork is unstructured. The aim is to recover the meaning of their actions by deep immersion, whether looking at a Congressional district or a government department. For Wood (2006: 123), it is 'research based on personal interaction with research subjects in their own setting', not in the laboratory, the library or one's office. It is intensive immersion in the everyday lives of other people in their local environment normally for a substantial period. Such 'deep immersion' or deep hanging-out has been challenged. In sociology, ethnographers have long practiced 'partial immersion' (Delamont 2004: 206). In the anthropological 'culture wars' of the 1980s,

the contributors to Clifford and Marcus (1984) denied deep hanging out's claim to ethnographic authority in representing other cultures. It was said to produce colonial, gendered and racist texts with a specious claim to objectivity. The classic immersive study was challenged by 'hit-and-run ethnography' (Geertz 2001: chapter 5). So, today, we 'study through' by conducting 'yo-yo-research' in multi-local sites. 'Studying through' refers to following events such as making a policy through the 'webs and relations between actors, institutions and discourses across time and space' (Shore and Wright 1997: 14). 'Yo-Yo research' refers to both regular movement in and out of the field and to participant observation in many local sites (Wulff 2002; Marcus 1995: 6-7). Marcus (2007a) describes the current practices of ethnography as 'baroque' as even partial immersion becomes dispersed over several sites.

We do not dismiss the value of an immersive approach to ethnography. Rather we stress there is a menu of ethnographic tools.

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Table 1.3 **Bricolage**

Ethnographic methods	Definition	Potential sources of data	Examples
Hit-and-run fieldwork	Repeated, short bursts of intensive observation as researchers move in-and-out of the field	Legislatures, constituency offices, campaign events	Crewe 2015; Rhodes 2011.
Ethnographic interviewing	Repeated, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with the same participant	Recently retired politicians and public officials	Corbett 2015; Reeher 2006.
Memoirs	First-person reflections on governing	Auto-biographies and authorized biographies; radio and television interviews	Rhodes 2017; Richards and Mathers 2010.
Elite focus groups	Group reflections that encourage elites to flesh out and challenge each other's claims	Recently retired politicians and public officials	Rhodes and Tiernan 2014
Para-ethnography	Ethnographic interviews with a decision maker to explain a specific decision or event (see Holmes and Markus 2005)	Focused on particular legislative documents, departmental files	Novel in political science but see Holmes and Marcus 2005.
Visual ethnography	Using video recordings as a form of remote observation (see Pink 2013)	C-SPAN (and similar footage elsewhere); press conferences, parliament live	Novel in political science but see Pink 2013

Source: Boswell, Rhodes et al. 2018.

The choice of tools will depend on the access the researcher can negotiate. For example, elite ethnography is difficult because we attempt to enter a closed and secretive world, a hidden world, occupied by people who are more powerful than the researcher. Access can be denied. We have to find other ways of 'being there' (see also Nader 1972: 306-7). For example, focus groups can give access to a group of elite actors. We can observe them in action when observation is not possible at the workplace, especially when the relevant individuals are no longer in office. They are another way of 'being there' and sidestepping the problems of access and secrecy (see Rhodes and Tiernan 2014).

The several ways of 'being there' are not stand-alone methods. Ideally, we would supplement each method with shadowing. Most important, the data generated by focus groups and other methods require an 'ethnographic sensibility' for interpreting the conversations (Agar and McDonald 1995; Schatz 2009). The various ethnographic methods suggested in Table 1. 3 are still about recovering meaning and locating that meaning in its broader context. So, focus groups are an ethnographic method because ethnography is now a diverse set of practices linked not by a shared method - participant observation - but by a shared focus on the recovery of meaning – the ethnographic sensibility.

Just are there are many tools in the toolkit, there are many field roles that the researcher can play. For example, Adler and Adler (1987) distinguish between peripheral, active and complete roles. Thus, peripheral members observe but do not participate in core activities of the group under study. Active members take part in such core activities while complete members become group members; they 'go native'. Each role opens up its own opportunities and imposes its own constraints. For example, complete members are emotionally engaged

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with the group and find it hard to detach themselves. Within each role there are also choices to be made. Kedia and Van Willigen (2005: 11) distinguish between 'policy researcher or research analyst; evaluator; impact assessor, or needs assessor; cultural broker; public participation specialist; and administrator or manager'. Applied ethnography can serve many masters, and in identifying the role to be played a key question is for whom is the research being done.

As ever dichotomies mislead. They can become straitjackets. We do not see deep hanging out and hit-and-run fieldwork as mutually exclusive. That is why we talk of 'bricolage' - that is, constructing research from diverse methods and materials (Denzin and Lincoln 2011: 4; and Table 1.3) - and bringing an 'ethnographic sensibility' to bear on the data, however collected (and for a more detailed account see Rhodes 2017: chapters 3-5).

The chapters

The remainder of the book examine policies through the eyes of the practitioners. We start with the beliefs and practices of national governing elites before moving through the state governmental to local government before, finally, we turn to citizens. We introduce a different angle of vision on the policy process; we look at it from the standpoint of the individual actor, not institutions, In other words, we look at policies from the other end of the telescope. I provide a short descriptive summary of each chapter but focus on drawing out the relevance of each chapter to the book's themes of interpretation, decentring and bricolage. I explore what the chapters tell us about a decentred approach.

Harry Annison decentres the UK Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in Chapter 2. Using some 80 research interviews conducted with senior policymakers, supported by the analysis of relevant documents, he traces the four traditions that underpin the department and the four dilemmas policy participants encounter. The four Ministries of Justice are: a liberal MoJ centred upon justice and fairness; a MoJ determined to achieve the rehabilitation of offenders; a MoJ obsessed with public protection; and a MoJ that is steeped in new managerialism. They collide around the four dilemmas of: judicial representative vs. government minister; Departmental coherence vs. the autonomy of its parts; policy vs. operations; and patient Implementation vs. political Responsiveness. Decentring reveals that we are faced not with a monolithic institution but *Ministries* of Justice. The label 'Ministry of Justice' is a convenient reification and that decentring reveals the combination of, and competition between, contrasting traditions.

In Chapter 3, Heather Lovell and Jack Corbett uncover the different meanings of a 'zero carbon' housing policy. Drawing on some 60 interviews and site visits, they show that contest over meaning was a strong feature of the ZCH policy. It enabled the deep green environmental advocates to challenge the dominant framing of housing policy as a form of ecological modernization. The case highlights a housing sector that includes environmentalists, architects, large and small house builders, and private contractors, among others, each with their own problem definition, and their own (often bespoke) solution.. When, in mid-2015, the UK government abolished the Zero Carbon policy, it signalled the end of the formal policy but not the end of the policy, which continues to attract support from diverse organisations. The case demonstrates the value of a decentred approach because it addresses perennial public policy concerns about multi-actor policy arenas and implementation delays and failures; the problem of too many hands.

Tony McNulty, was a former Minister of State under Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. He draws on his insider experience as the lead minister for the Counter-Terrorism Bill (2008), and on interviews with over 50 MPs, ministers, civil servants, special advisers, and other public officials. He examines the parliamentary scrutiny of the Bill, which sought to extend the period of pre-charge detention for terrorist suspect from the existing 28-days to 42-days. He argues that to understand parliamentary scrutiny, we need to explore the traditions, beliefs, and practices each set of actors in the process. He argues that there are hidden dimensions to parliamentary scrutiny, and we need to understand such 'ghosts in the machine'. Decentring reveals a novel, multi-dimensional narrative that unearths these hidden dimensions.

In Chapter 5, Ingi Iusmen explores the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The EU has endorsed the promotion of children's rights, and she focuses on how EU institutions interpreted and misinterpreted 'child participation' and 'the best interests of the child'. She examines the extent to which institutional narratives, beliefs and practices shaped the meanings attached to these two principles and how these meanings affected policy instruments and implementation. She shows that the Commission drove a protection, needs-based approach, which marginalised children's voice, rather than prevention and child empowerment approach. The Commission's narrative was not a shared narrative. It was not persuasive among children's rights stakeholders and activists because EU policy-makers preferred their interpretation rather than listening to the voices of the children and their spokespersons. As a result, the Commission ended up paying only lip service to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In Chapter 6, John Boswell examines those present-day practices of democratic governance that require policy actors to engage across many settings. Some, like the media, are adversarial. They reward simple messages and emotive rhetoric. Others, like expert committees, are more consensus-oriented. They reward sober analysis and technical mastery. Yet in practice, it is often the same actors participating across these diverse settings. Theories of democratic governance typically presume that policy actors advance their best interests at all points of the policy process. However, given this complex patchwork of settings, it is not at all clear how they ought to go about doing this. How do actors negotiate divergent settings to best promote their policy claims? How do they go from publicly demonizing adversaries to privately deliberating with them? The chapter explores these questions through a decentred analysis of the obesity debates in Britain and Australia. It is an example of bricolage in that it draws together over 40 interviews with policy actors, 25 hours of video footage of hearings and meetings, and thousands of documentary sources. It presents a decentred account of how individuals act in a network, and shows that all actors are not equally capable of advancing their cause across policy debates. The most experienced political operators refer to back-stage practices of 'orchestrated conflict' that enable them to pursue their interests without harming personal relationships. The most inexperienced and peripheral actors—mostly in the public health lobby—can be naïve, and their naivety can be exploited to mask conflict. They either remain adversarial and peripheral in influencing networks. Decentring reveals another way in which the 'dark side' of networked governance can exacerbate asymmetries access and influence.

In Chapter 7, Karen Anderson explores how narratives, beliefs and practices shaped pension reform. Existing accounts of pension reform processes in Sweden emphasize the impact of

political partisanship, institutional constraints, and demographic and economic pressures in shaping the direction of policy. It focuses on how the beliefs and practices of policymakers in specific historical contexts shaped the actions associated with pension reform and the reform packages that resulted. To capture the beliefs and practices of key actors, the analysis draws from six semi-structured interviews with relevant policymakers undertaken in May 1994, March 1995, and February 2000, and on documentary sources such as memoirs, published interviews, and official documents. The chapter shows how important pension reform struggles in the past shaped policy-makers' beliefs and shared narratives about the appropriate design and role of the pension system. Outcomes were much more open and contingent than existing research allows shaped by the legacy of previous conflicts and hinging on such events as the abstention in the Second Chamber of one Liberal MP.

In Chapter 8, Anne Tiernan presents an 'insider's account' of working with the Queensland state government in Australia to explore the consequences of successive waves of public sector reform for the Queensland core executive. From 2007 to 2015, the author was an 'active member researcher', participating in the social activities of the group. She took 'part in the core activities of the group'. Instead of merely sharing the status of insiders, they interact as colleagues: co-participants in a joint endeavour' (Adler and Adler 1987: 50). Therefore, she worked closely with the members of the political-administrative networks at the centre of Queensland government. Her roles included a member of the Board of the Queensland Public Service Commission; a consultant; a professional educator; a researcher; a confidante; and now a 'critical friend'. The chapter draws on documentary and interview data, as well as informal conversations and observational data, collected in the course of her evolving relationship with Queensland's elite decision makers. She demonstrates that fieldwork data can be collected in many ways other than those commonly employed by the

academic researcher. She explores the implications of frequent, discontinuous change on the beliefs, traditions and practices of central core executive networks and for the quality and efficiency of governance. She shows how it destroyed trust, policy capacity, and the 'storage locations' of institutional memory. Reform destabilised the senior ranks of the State's public service and Tiernan became the one constant. She watched ministers and public servants come and go. She taught, mentored, supported and consulted to officials, ministerial staff and occasionally ministers. She offered a plank of continuity (once the *raison d'être* of a career civil service) from her position at the University.

In Chapter 9, Kevin Orr and Mike Bennett explore how local government chief executives use storytelling to cope with policy dilemmas in the complex arenas of policy networks. It employs a relational perspective that directs attention to communicative practices, such as stories and narratives, through which policy 'realities' are constructed. It employs a decentred approach that collects and learns from the stories of front-line actors. The stories are drawn from 80 interviews conducted with local council chief executives between 2008 and 2016 during which time Bennett was also the director of the chief executive's professional association; he was a complete member researcher. For many years, researchers and practitioners have observed how the policy process has become more decentred - pluralistic or fragmented - involving communities groups, think tanks, media, and business groups. In turn, public leaders changed the ways in which they operated. Storytelling emerges as a facilitative resource in policymaking that enables actors to understand the everyday dilemmas of local government actors. The authors suggest that networks are significant for understanding the policymaking practices of local government chief executives. Decentring these networks shows how chief executives frame their accounts of the dilemmas posed by:

political values; officer-member relations; relations between members of the council and wider stakeholder, including central government departments and inspectorates. Focusing on the practices of chief executives shows them as actors responding to the flux embedded in policy networks, as they interpret and respond to the competing expectations, actions and experiences of others.

In Chapter 10, Jenny Fleming explores the response of police officers to evidence based policing. The 'What Works' initiative in the United Kingdom aimed to improve the way government and its agencies create, share and use high quality evidence. *What Works* is based on the principle that good decision-making should be informed by the best available evidence. This evidence should be 'translated' into practical insights that police officers can use. The chapter discusses police officers' response to this evidence-based agenda and the organisational change that would result from its implementation. The chapter draws on data from all ranks, across four police organisations in the UK. The data were obtained through focus groups conducted in 2014, which were attended by 160 police officers from the ranks of constable, sergeant and inspector. The silent voices were not so silent in the focus groups. They were cynical about what they saw as the relentless cycle of change and the senior officers whose careers were based on its implementation. Fleming decentres the inherited beliefs and practices about hierarchy and shows how the divide between the rank and file and management undermines reform. Identifying such bottom up narratives allows for an understanding of the webs of belief that drive their practices. They unearth the dilemmas and unintended consequences that beset reform and shed light on how existing beliefs are continuously created and sustained even when continuously challenged.

In Chapter 11, Anna Killick asks what UK citizens understand by 'austerity'. At the height of austerity in the UK, many writers argued that the public accepted painful debt reduction policies because they chimed with 'common sense' experience of personal debt. However, while surveys showed public acceptance of austerity, there was little political research asking people what they believed. This interpretivist study is based on interviews with 60 residents of a southern city. It finds that the political economists were right about the 'common sense' of higher income participants but that lower income participants did not share such views. They do not believe personal and government debt are comparable, that debt is caused by profligacy, or that debt can be reduced quickly. Above all, the chapter demonstrates that social scientists should not assume that they know the beliefs of citizens or that surveys provide an adequate picture of those beliefs. There is not a single dominant version of economic 'common sense'. It is context dependent. People know what they need to know. They learn from their everyday economic experiences. We should always explore particular voices, especially the silent voices of the more marginalised members of society. Moreover, we need an ethnographic sensibility and detailed interviews, not surveys, to draw out such beliefs.

Conclusions

Previous sections of this chapter explain interpretive theory, decentring, and bricolage. The summary of the chapters identified the specific contribution of a decentred analysis to several, diverse policy areas. A further summary would try not only the reader's but also the writer's patience. Table 1.4 provides a brief reminder of the advantages of using decentred analysis.

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Table 1.4 **Advantages of Decentred Analysis**

1. It provides data not available elsewhere.

2. It identifies key individuals and core processes.

3. It identifies 'voices' all too often ignored.

4. By disaggregating organisations, it opens 'the black box' of internal processes.

5. It recovers the beliefs and practices of actors.

6. It gets behind the surface of official accounts by providing texture, depth, and nuance, so our stories have richness as well as context.

7. It lets interviewees explain the meaning of their actions, providing an authenticity that can only come from the main characters involved in the story.

8. It allows us to frame (and reframe, and reframe) questions in a way that recognises that our understandings about how things work around here evolves during the fieldwork.

9. It admits of surprises - of moments of epiphany, serendipity and happenstance - that can open new research agendas.

10. It helps us to see and analyse the symbolic, performative aspects of political action.

Source: Modified from Rhodes 2017: 209

The decentred approach delivers edification; that is, 'new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking about' policymaking and policy analysis (Rorty 1980: 360). It does so because it is actor centred. It sees policy as enacted by individuals and explains the actions of policymakers by appealing to their beliefs and preferences. In this sense, it is a bottom-up approach. In addition, it has a distinctive toolkit. Bricolage is not a standard part of the toolkit of either political scientists or policy analysts. As Kapiszewski et al. (2015: 234) concluded that 'political science has yet to embrace ethnography and participant observation wholeheartedly'. Indeed, there is a '*double absence*: of politics in ethnographic literature and of ethnography in the study of politics' (Auyero and Joseph 2007: 2, emphasis in the original). Therefore, decentring offers a novel alliance of interpretive theory with an ethnographic toolkit to explore policymaking and policy analysis from the bottom-up.[4]

Storytelling is also practical. Inscribing complex specificity in its context provides information for policymakers so they can make rational decisions. Recovering, recounting, and reviewing the stories are all practical techniques. Although practitioners will not use these labels, they will be familiar with the practices because in many instances they will be part of their everyday life.

This collection shows that decentred analysis can be conducted in a wide range of policy areas across several countries. It travels well. In addition, it shows that it can produce studies both *of* the policy process and *for* policy makers. For example, Anderson (chapter 7) shows that conventional institutional accounts of welfare policy in Sweden leave out far too much, not allowing for such contingencies as one abstention. Boswell's (chapter 6) account

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[4] It would require another chapter to discuss the strengths and weakness of both interpretive theory and of ethnographic methods. See, for example, Rhodes 2017: chapters 2, 3 and 12; and Turnbull 2016.

of policy network in obesity policy arena reveals the dark side of that network. Indeed, by producing new accounts of the policy process, decentred analysis opens new possibilities for the policy makers. It suggest different ways of acting for the practitioner. For example, Tiernan's account (chapter 8) of continuous reform in Queensland highlights the adverse consequences of losing institutional memory and the importance of the public service for continuity. The policy prescriptions arising out of her account are blindingly obvious. Similarly, Orr and Bennett (chapter 9) highlight the centrality not only of storytelling but also of the facilitative skills of local authority chief executives in managing networks.

What does this approach add? It identifies the silent voices. At the heart of the storytelling approach is collecting the several voices in a policy arena; in effect, increasing the voices heard. It does not exclude evidence-based policymaking. It treats it as another way of telling a story alongside all the other stories. Proponents of evidence-based policy making in the UK cannot present themselves as neutral scientists with objective evidence. Rather, they must become protagonists in a political game – *partisan evidence advocates* (cf. Schultze 1968: 101) or policy entrepreneurs, but *not* bearers of truth. Like any other actor in the policy process they must persuade, negotiate and compromise; be political actors, not scientists. By recording, recovering, and reviewing our version of their stories, decentring encourages the forensic interrogation of these different stories. Such an interrogation focuses attention on the criteria for choosing between stories. It seeks to make the tacit criteria for evaluating and comparing stories transparent. It challenges the notion that efficiency or cuts or austerity are is the most appropriate criteria for, adjudicating between policy options.

In short, decentred analysis offers novel theory and methods with a clear practical application.

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