The respective roles of technical and generalist policy specialists in the policy process

Allan Dale Putland
Southern Cross University

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THE RESPECTIVE ROLES OF TECHNICAL AND GENERALIST POLICY SPECIALISTS IN THE POLICY PROCESS

Allan Dale Putland

B.Sc. (Murdoch University)
Masters of Environmental and Business Management (Newcastle University)

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I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Allan Dale Putland

22\textsuperscript{nd} February 2013
Abstract

This research is intended to explore the actions of bureaucrats as they engage in policy work, as active shapers of government policy. Importantly, it is intended to identify where in the bureaucracy policy work is conducted, and to identify those who are in effect the key policy actors in government. This research highlights the importance of technical policy specialist advice in the creation and implementation of public policy.

The research examines the role of professional specialist officers in the development and implementation of public policy. The term “professional specialist” is used to describe a person who has a high level of technical expertise and professional qualifications in the a particular field other than public policy; such as environmental science, social science or land use planning. The research examines the ability of specialist professional officers to influence policy processes in order to improve implementation, and investigate the extent of their role in the development of new government policy. It also identifies the role and influence of professional specialist networks in the Western Australian public sector, with particular reference to development and implementation of land use planning policies within the Western Australian regulatory system. While consideration is given to the role of policy officers within specialist policy departments, the main focus of the research is on the work that is conducted in the “line agencies” of government.

A qualitative methodology was chosen focusing on a single case study, development of a regional planning framework, within the wider context of issues-based policy development within the Western Australian government. The research uses practitioners’ own accounts of their work to examine how technical specialists go about their work, the level of influence that they exert, and how they differ from “policy officers” whose qualifications tend to be more generalist nature, and who seldom have expertise in the specific area for which they are developing policy. Some effort has also been made to determine a professional specialist perspective on how important specialist expertise is to developing good policy, and determine the extent of cooperation between technical policy specialists and policy officers in the development of issues-based policy.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is the result of my attempt to understand the policy processes that I encountered when I entered government in Australia nearly a decade ago. My entry into government was as a middle manager in charge of a small department within a mid-sized local government authority. As a relatively experienced middle manager, but with little experience in policy, I struggled to understand the policy processes that I experienced.

Having completed undergraduate and postgraduate degrees with substantial components of public policy, economics and law, I nonetheless felt unprepared for a ‘policy’ role in government. This was compounded by the differing, and at times contradictory, explanations of the policy process contained in policy textbooks; most of which bore little semblance to the processes that I encountered in practice, and so offered little to aid my meaningful comprehension of policy in practice. Many of my colleagues seemed to have little, if any, knowledge of policy literature or the processes outlined within policy texts. More bewildering, there did not appear to be a shared understanding amongst my colleagues of what policy was, or the processes by which it was made.

In undertaking this research I set out to find out where policy was made and who shaped it. The research comprises a collection of practitioner accounts of policy processes. These accounts span a wide spectrum of practitioners, in terms of both level and role. The views of government ministers were collected and compared with those of junior officers. However, the majority of accounts are those of middle level public servants, the technical policy specialists whose advice significantly shapes government policy.

The research highlights the importance of technical policy specialist advice and proposes that technical specialist officers within agencies are tasked with developing implementation strategies for new policies and with the review of existing policies, and they are at times also tasked with development of new policies as agencies seek to address issues within their realm of responsibility. The roles of relatively junior policy officers who are located within government departments have often been neglected. I am investigating their role in policy implementation to answer the following three questions. Firstly, how does our understanding of policy officers affect our understanding of policy and implementation processes? Secondly, how does new policy arise in government? And thirdly, what are the roles of respective actors in the policy process?
**The role of Bureaucrats in Policy**

The role of bureaucrats in the shaping of public policy has been a contentious issue amongst policy academics for many years. Seminal works written by Lasswell (1936, 1956), Lindblom (1968), Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989) and others, have explored aspects of the policy process, and the role of public servants in policy. Notwithstanding that public policy has been extensively studied for many decades, there remains disagreement between academics over the amount of influence that bureaucrats should, may or do exert (for example, see the recent debate over public value in: Rhodes and John, 2007, Wanna et al., 2010, Colebatch, 2010).

There appears to be a disconnect between some public policy analysis (for example: Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Wanna et al., 2010), which suggests that bureaucrats should not seek to make policy, and empirical evidence (see for example: Gill and Colebatch, 2006, Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006) which suggests that they actively do so. However, policy literature seldom specifies precisely which bureaucrats actually do the shaping.

**Background to the Research**

Adams (2004:30) has written that “knowledge is the modern currency of public policy”, noting that creation of meanings that guide actions are the most important feature of knowledge. However, knowledge can take many different forms and may be interpreted through different lenses, depending on the epistemological perspective through which it is viewed. Sabatier (2007) stated that policy actors who look at things from different perspectives are quite likely to see different things, pointing out that “What they see will depend on the lens of simplifying suppositions they use” (Sabatier, 2007:5).

Dunleavy (1980) and Hill (1997) believed that professions often adopt a unified view of the world. This position was supported by Croker (1986:2), who argued that growing professionalism within the public service, and structuring of agencies around professions, have tended to intensify the influence of professional disciplines on related areas of policy. Thus, policy officers working in different departments will approach an issue from differing perspectives, and can possibly be working toward different outcomes.
It is likely that professional ideals and personal values shape the policy options that are presented to decision makers. It is also likely that the policy actor who has an understanding of the processes at work, and their relationships to other stages in the overall process will be in a position of relative power, compared to those to whom this knowledge is unavailable.

However, there are different forms of policy knowledge: knowledge of the policy process, and knowledge of policy issues. Page and Jenkins (2005) noted that many of the ‘policy’ professionals interviewed during their research in Britain had only limited knowledge of specific policy areas; they were ‘generalists’, and were experts in the field of ‘policy’ or government processes. In contrast, Hoch (1994) in his study of planners in the United States, noted that planners needed to possess both technical and policy expertise in order to influence policy.

It is noted that governments employ large numbers of policy workers in both central coordination agencies and policy units, and in government line agencies. Central agencies are generally those associated with the centre of power: such as Departments or offices reporting directly to the head of state or Cabinet. Line agencies are tasked with delivering government services such as health, education or social services, or regulating activities in areas such as environment, land use planning or law and order. The role of policy actors working in government, whether working in line agencies, central agencies or ministerial offices, is to provide ‘balanced’ policy advice to their Minister, and through their Minister to government. An understanding of policy practitioners, the diversity of views held by them, their varying levels of knowledge and their relative positions in government, is fundamental to understanding how policy is delivered.

**Purpose of this research**

The purpose of this research is to examine the roles of policy actors in the development and implementation of public policy. In particular, the research examines the role of technical policy specialists within the Western Australian public sector with respect to land use planning policy, the aim being to identify some of the broader implications for policy research.

The research examines the role of bureaucrats as policy actors. Although previous research has examined the role of bureaucrats in policy development (for example see: Page and
Jenkins, 2005, Ramesh, 2008, Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006) and implementation (e.g. Lipsky, 1980), there has been limited examination directed towards identification of the role and influence of the relevant actors within government agencies. Policy development arising from implementation, or from the development of implementation strategies, remains an area that is largely unexplored in academic literature.

The primary research question to be addressed is: **What is the role of respective actors in issue-based policy?** The research examines the roles of policy-related public servants: bureaucrats working in line and central agencies that are tasked with development of new policies and the shaping of strategies to implement them. Consequently, the research also examines the nexus between policy development and implementation: exploring the extent to which policy creation arises from implementation. It also explores the roles that policy workers in line and central agencies can play in this process.

This research explores the actions of bureaucrats as they engage in policy work, as active shapers of government policy. It seeks to identify the roles of policy specialists in line agencies, to identify where policy originates, and who the key policy actors are. This research highlights the importance of technical policy specialist advice. The research also examines critical aspects of policy work and identifies several emergent issues that have the potential to influence the policy effectiveness of government agencies and governments in Australia.

The research is based on 47 in-depth interviews (Details of interviewees are included in Appendix 3). It explores the role of technical policy specialists including planners and other technical specialist officers who work in local, state and federal government agencies, to examine their respective roles in policy. It also examines differences in the way that policy options are presented to decision makers within Western Australia. Specifically, the research examines the experiences of policy work that occurs within local government, line agencies and central agencies in state government and in ministerial offices.

In addition to the primary research question described above, seven secondary research questions examine specific aspects of policy work and the (perceived or real) ability of respective actors to shape or influence policy:
1. Who are the policy workers in government, where are they located, and what roles do they occupy?
2. Are there any traits or attributes that characterise effective policy workers?
3. What skills make policy workers effective policy actors? How important are influencing and negotiation skills to their role?
4. How important are policy networks to policy actors in government? What is the significance of policy networks in their work?
5. Is there a positive correlation between the formation of strong networks between policy actors and effective policy?
6. To what extent does new policy arise from within the government line agencies commonly tasked with implementation?
7. To what degree are new policies driven by implementation?

The role of bureaucrats and public servants involved in the creation and development of new policy through implementation is the focus of attention of this thesis.

**Positioning the research**

Examination of the role of bureaucrats in public policy has commonly been from “top-down” (for example: Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989) or “bottom-up” (for example: Lipsky, 1980) approaches. Less attention has been given to “middle-out” approaches to policy (although notable examples do exist, for example: Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006, Winter, 1990). Specifically, limited attention has been given to the role of bureaucrats working in middle echelons of line agencies, or technical specialists.

There has been some recent debate over the role of bureaucrats as promoters or shapers of policy; some academics arguing that this should not be the role of bureaucrats (for example: Wanna et al., 2010), other academics arguing that bureaucrats do have a legitimate role in promoting policy options and shaping government policy (for example: Colebatch, 2010). This thesis does not suggest that either approach is correct, or otherwise. However, it is noted that the view of policy practitioners themselves may differ from those of the academics who are engaged in this debate.

The thesis is intended to further understanding of how the policy practitioners working in the public sector view their various roles, giving particular attention to policy specialists working in government line agencies.
The thesis begins with an examination of public policy literature, positioning the research topic within the field of public policy. Locating implementation research within its parent field, the thesis examines how differing views of public policy have led to development of a number of approaches to implementation research. Policy implementation is then examined from within the Australian context, leading to an explanation of where this research proposal fits within the policy development and implementation fields and its relevance to existing implementation literature. This is followed by a closer examination of the relationship between policy development and implementation. Also considered are the intrinsic links between policy formulation and implementation, and the way in which the implementation process itself may be a significant driver of the formulation of new policies. Some of the underlying paradigms and assumptions that have shaped the differing approaches to implementation, and their influence on public policy theory, are considered. Also considered is the possibility that these assumptions may have led to a top-down approach to implementation research.

**Research Methodology**

A single qualitative case study was chosen for the research design. The case study, development of a significant land use planning policy in Western Australia, examines the behaviour and interactions between policy actors, their role and function within government organisations, and the role and effectiveness of policy officers’ networks. The research addresses the work of policy actors, their understanding of the policy process, their relative influence and position in the organisational structure, and the work they undertake to implement government policies, within a land-use planning context.

The primary source of information comprised a series of in-depth interviews to identify where views or orientations were commonly held or shared between bureaucrats in respect to the policy process. During a series of 47 in-depth interviews with public servants, interviewees were asked to describe their experiences in policy implementation and development. Interviewees were also asked to discuss how, in their experience, policy is implemented, and shaped, in government. A full list of interviewees is included in Appendix 3.

The research has uncovered several commonly held views amongst practitioners on the policy process; it also identified where the policy work is currently being done and where the
majority of policy advice originates in line government agencies. Interviewees also discussed the importance of several aspects of policy work: effective networking, engagement in collaborative partnerships, education and experience, and understanding of the policy process. It was noted by interviewees that these aspects of policy work are as important to successful implementation of policy as they are to its creation. Attention was therefore given to their influence in the shaping and implementation of policy.

Evidence collected during the interviews was analysed to identify key themes, and identify where similar or contrasting views were expressed. Interview evidence was then compared with published data where this was available.

The majority of interviewees were employed in the Western Australian Public Service at the time of interview. The remainder were employed in the Australian Public Service, in local government or in the private sector. The interviewees were selected because they were able to demonstrate considerable experience in government policy processes. Interviewees included public servants who were nominated by the heads of government agencies to assist in preparation of the South-West Framework (WAPC, 2009), a major Western Australian State Government policy initiative. In addition, interviewees included bureaucrats and politicians who were influential in the South-West Framework endorsement, encompassing government ministers, ministerial policy advisors (including several chiefs of staff), policy advisors in central agencies and heads of government authorities.

Interviewees articulated their experience of policy processes, many relating instances where they had personally been involved in the formulation of policies or influencing policy change through the implementation process. Most interviewees related instances where certain policy initiatives had been particularly successful, or where ‘good’ policy initiatives had failed. They described some of the circumstances that had led to the success or failure of policies in these instances. The majority of interviewees were able to relate experiences of situations when they had personally been involved in the creation of new policy. Most were able to describe the issue in detail and explain why a change in policy was necessary. Most also related examples of occasions when their efforts to effect policy change had been unsuccessful.
Conclusion
The research provides substantial evidence that technical specialists are active participants in shaping government policy. The term “professional specialist” is used to describe a person who has a high level of technical expertise and professional qualifications in a particular field other than public policy; such as environmental science, social science or land use planning. Technical policy specialists are the initiators of the vast majority of government policy, responding to critical and emerging issues within their portfolio. In particular, technical policy specialists in middle management and senior technical roles were identified by interviewees as being the initiators of most government policy. These technical specialists are well educated and experienced in their specialist field however, they commonly lack formal training in policy.

Notably, technical policy specialists were found to have different roles in policy; some working in areas of policy implementation, while others worked almost exclusively in policy development. A surprising amount of policy work was found to be undertaken in line agencies, the majority of interviewees describing line agencies as the principle drivers of policy in government. The findings also strongly suggest that policy development and implementation are more closely linked than is suggested by much of the policy literature.

While the role of technical policy specialists and the influence they exert on policy is an area deserving further research, these technical policy specialists are both difficult to identify and to access. Specifically, these officers are often employed deep within the government bureaucracy, and may be constrained from speaking openly on government policy by bureaucratic convention. Notwithstanding these difficulties, examination of this relatively unexplored area of research is important to bring about improved understanding of policy processes that occur within government agencies. This comment has particular relevance to the policy education needs of the practitioners in the public service profession.

This research is intended to explore the actions of bureaucrats as they engage in policy work, as active shapers of government policy. More importantly, it is intended to identify where in the bureaucracy policy work is done, to identify those who are in effect the key policy actors in government. This research highlights the importance of technical policy specialist advice. However, technical policy specialists interviewed in this research noted that as ‘policy’ has become more of a specialist area in its own right (see for example: Page, 2006, Page and
Jenkins, 2005, Scott and Baehler, 2010), their advice is increasingly being challenged or ignored. The majority of technical policy specialists who were interviewed noted that policy is increasingly being shaped by people who have little understanding of the issues. Commonly, generalist understanding is based on limited research conducted within very tight timeframes by people who have no prior exposure to the issues, or any other expert basis, on which to evaluate the potential for unintended impacts.

Many of the interviewees noted that the apparent shift from ‘technical specialist’ to ‘policy specialist’ advice was increasingly leading to suboptimal policy outcomes. This research heralds academics and governments alike to find the correct balance between technical specialist and policy specialist advice.
Chapter 2: Public Policy and the Policy Cycle: Positioning Implementation

Introduction
This chapter positions policy implementation within the field of public policy. It begins by presenting some general definitions of the term ‘public policy’ as provided in standard policy texts. This is followed by a discussion of some variations in definitions arising from differing ontological positions adopted by policy researchers, these differences relating principally to the primacy of politicians in the decision-making process. Subsequent paragraphs examine the policy cycle model that has been used to explain policy processes and locate implementation within its parent field. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the relevance of implementation studies in aiding understanding of the public policy process.

Politics and public policy are inextricably linked. Public policy refers to the actions (or inactions) of governments while politics is the process of negotiation that leads to these actions. While politicians are not the only people who engage in politics, they are elected by their constituents to make decisions on public policy. Two features distinguish public policy as a field within the broader discipline of political science: concern about the outcomes resulting from politics; and consideration of processes in broad terms, rather than focusing on specific circumstances (Weimer, 2008:490). Public policy influences every aspect of every life in modern society and so its debate is commonly an expression of competing interests (Considine, 1994).

Adams (2004:40) stated that early authers on public policy were “enthused by the prospect of a 'science' of public policy that could bring the rigour of positivism to the judgments of politics to create a new discipline”. Writers such as Lasswell (Lasswell, 1936, Lasswell, 1956, Lasswell, 1951) and Lindblom (Lindblom, 1959, Lindblom, 1968) attempted to define the frameworks within which policy processes took place. Policy development was seen as primarily a political exercise, with policies being implemented by the bureaucracy. Later writers on policy implementation pointed out that implementers also were often subjected to pressures, and exercised discretion in the ways in which they applied policy (Lipsky, 1980).
Policy processes are often complicated, involving multiple stakeholders, without clearly defined procedures, within strict time limits and in an arena subject to intense political pressures (Bridgman and Davis, 2004, Prasser, 2006). As Michael Hill (1997:88) cautions, “Political activity is not just a game played within rules, it also involves efforts to renegotiate the rules”. Policy therefore involves complex processes and is conducted within a changeable environment. Indeed, the political environment within which the policy process occurs has changed significantly from the days of Lasswell and Lipskey, and the task of modelling public policy has grown a lot more challenging (Howard, 2005).

**Differing Views of the Policy Process**

Much of the discourse around public policy continues to revolve around exactly who should exert power, and whether the actions of people who participate in the process of influencing those in positions of power are well enough understood. It is interesting to note that although a manual to guide a prince was produced almost 500 years ago (Machiavelli, 1513), contention still exists over the way in which policy is produced, the relative power of policy actors and how policies should be applied. It is interesting also to note that several of the more recent articles on public policy refer the current public policy environment as ‘post-Machiavellian’ (Howard, 2005, Radin, 2000), while earlier writers such as Lindblom and Lasswell are now considered to be ‘Machiavellian’ in their approach (Howard, 2005).

The differing views of the policy process often appear to centre on: the primacy of politicians in the decision making process and how closely the implementation of policies should adhere to the views of the ‘executive’; the role that public servants do, or should, play in the policy process; and the amount of influence that those outside of the government are, or should be, able to exert. Although the general view of public policy is that it is an exercise in the powers of government, the processes of government exercising its powers, there is much less agreement about the way in which it does so and the influences that act upon it. The making and implementing of policy can therefore be seen to be a strategic issue; policies can be created for a variety of reasons and can be both a means to an end and a means in itself (Stewart, 1999).

Other authors, such as Allison (1971) and Le Grand (2003) have attempted to explain the processes of decision making, linking it to the motivations of the policy makers themselves.
Allison is notable for his “rational Actor”, “organizational process” and “bureaucratic politics” models, through which he attempted to explain the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Discourse on public policy that attempts to analyse the policy process or simplify it through the use of models and frameworks is complicated by the sheer complexity of policy processes and the intransience of many issues that public policy seeks to address. The complexity of policy processes has been well recognised for a number of years. Considine (1994:2) noted that while the term ‘public policy’ is deceptively simple, it conceals very complex activities, and is one of the central processes through which communities respond to major social, economic and environmental problems.

Considine and others have proposed frameworks or models to better understand the policy process (Lasswell, 1956, Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984, Considine, 1994, Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Sabatier, 2007, Cerny, 1990, Stewart, 1999, Hill, 1997, Hill and Hupe, 2002, Hill and Hupe, 2007) and these models, or variants thereof, are often included within policy textbooks (see for example: Fenna, 2004, Bridgman and Davis, 2004, Bridgman and Davis, 2005, Davis et al., 1993). As stated earlier, the authors of these models do not propose that the process itself may be simplified; rather that the process is often too complex to be understood in its entirety and can be better understood if broken down into its component parts. Sabatier (2007) for instance has noted that policy processes are of ‘staggering complexity’ and policy analysts need to simplify this process in order to have any chance of understanding it. Notwithstanding that there exist levels of disagreement on the policy process, policy textbooks attempt to outline the fundamentals of the policy process and contain both definitions of the term and simplified outlines of how the policy process works. Many of these are currently, or have previously been listed as reference materials for public policy courses in Australian universities (Hill, 1997, Bridgman and Davis, 2004, Davis et al., 1993, Fenna, 2004, Howlett and Ramesh, 1995). While the definitions of public policy that are used in the texts are generally similar, it is important to understand that the texts contain differing views of how the policy process works (or should work), and of the roles that each actor ought to play in the policy process. Indeed, the policy process or policy cycle that is often outlined in the textbooks has itself been subjected to criticism for being too simplistic and promoting a rationalist approach to policy-making (Sabatier, 2007, Everett, 2003).
It is important to understand that policy textbooks can be expected to constitute the main source of written information that is available to new professionals entering the policy arena, and will likely also inform policy processes, simply because information from textbooks will typically form the basis for short courses in policy development, or will be identified as sources of information about public policy. Much of the information contained in professional journals is not freely available to persons outside of academic circles, while specialist books on public policy may be too detailed or technical in nature to inform neophytes for whom reading time is short and whose main objective is finding a solution to a particular issue. Thus, the simplified models contained within policy textbooks provide a simple reference for persons new to policy development and allow them to rapidly form an (somewhat flawed) understanding of how the process works. Thus, the policy cycle of Althaus, Bridgeman and Davis (2007) occupies a place in policy literature.

**Stages Heuristic: “The Policy Cycle”**

The ‘stages heuristic’ theoretical framework or ‘policy cycle’ as it is more commonly known, originated with the work of Harold Lasswell. Lasswell, one of the most influential writers of his age, is credited with the first use of the phrase “policy sciences”, perceiving that the study of public policy should be undertaken from a “scientific” viewpoint (Farr et al., 2006). Lasswell (cited in Muth 1990:17) expressed his aim as being to contribute to the systematic theory of the policy sciences, stating:

> My ultimate objective in the field of science is far from modest. I propose to contribute to the systematic theory of the policy sciences. The policy sciences include the social and psychological sciences; in general, all the sciences that provide facts and principles of direct importance for the making of important decisions in government, business and cultural life (Muth, 1990:17, cited in Farr et al., 2006:580).

Lasswell (1956), did not work in isolation, but within a group of talented policy scientists (Farr et al., 2006). Lasswell was also influenced heavily by the earlier work of the philosopher John Dewey, particularly Dewey’s work on practical problem solving (Turnbull, 2005). Lasswell adopted a scientific approach to public policy, devising a rational or scientific approach to policy making; he identified seven discrete stages of the policy process, which he termed as intelligence, recommendation, prescription, invocation, application, appraisal and termination.
Most students studying public policy, and many practitioners attending public policy courses, will be introduced to some variant of Lasswell’s (1956) policy cycle. Importantly for implementation researchers, by identifying a stagist approach, and including implementation (Lasswell termed this ‘application’) as a stage in the policy process, Lasswell established the context within which implementation research is conducted, and also set the scene for the protracted top-down versus bottom-up debate on policy implementation that is described in the next chapter. Therefore, an understanding of the policy cycle is essential to the understanding of policy implementation, as it is the model within which implementation fits.

By the late 1970’s, the concept of a ‘policy cycle’ had established itself within policy literature, although more often with a lesser number of stages (Barkenbus, 1998). Although as many as seven stages were proposed by some writers, more commonly, only four stages were identified, namely: Agenda Setting, Policy Formation, Policy Implementation and Policy Evaluation, with the stages of evaluation and agenda setting being linked by a feedback loop, and other stages often being linked by one or more feedback loops (Barkenbus, 1998). The policy cycle was also appearing within texts other than public policy; including books on the economy (for instance see: Terry et al., 1985) and natural resource management (for instance see: Savory and Butterfield, 1999).

The policy cycle model is based on the premise that a distinction can be made between relatively discrete stages in the policy process, generally listed as: Issue identification, Policy formulation, Policy Implementation and Evaluation. Models that include a larger number of stages in an attempt to demonstrate the complexities of the process are simply splitting some of the larger stages into subsets. It can be seen that the models of Lasswell (1956), Stewart (1999), Bridgeman and Davis (2004), Johnstone (2003) and Hodge and Davies (2006) contain these four basic stages in the policy process.

While Lasswell (1956) had proposed a sequential model of policy development, others later began proposing variants that included more intricate feedback loops. Stewart’s (1999:29) variant on the policy process, which he described as a “strategic approach” to policy, was modelled on a “strategic approach to business”. This process began with a circular policy formation stage, however it progressed through the implementation and outcomes stages in a linear fashion. Stewart (1999:38) developed this simple model into his ‘strategic policy life
cycle’ model; a circular model comprising the stages of evaluation, strategic planning, formulation and resource allocation, and strategy implementation. This cycle corresponds with the policy models addressed in policy textbooks (Fenna, 2004, Bridgman and Davis, 2004), however it appears to differ slightly by placing policy evaluation as the first stage of the policy process, rather than as the last stage in the policy cycle, prior to the cycle recommencing. Having proposed this model, Stewart (1999:139) then suggested an alternative ‘strategic framework process map’ that places corporate and strategic planning between the stages of policy development, policy and service outputs.

Lindblom (1959) proposed that the vast majority of policy development is incremental in nature, arguing that faced with a choice of selecting a policy whose outcomes were unknown and one whose effectiveness could reasonably be predicted, policy makers would chose the latter. Lindblom likened the process of developing policy as one of “muddling through”.

As with Lindblom, Howlett and Ramesh (1995:198) linked policy processes to problem solving and they pointed out that the stages in the policy cycle correspond with the five stages in applied problem solving: problem recognition, proposal of solutions, effecting solution, monitoring and evaluation. Howlett and Ramesh believed that there are two types of policy change: normal change, where change is incremental and where policy problems are dealt with within the context of the current approach (1995:185); and paradigmatic change, where a dramatic change in policy style occurs (1995:188). They stated that the key actors in both types of policy change are found within the policy sub-systems, and that members of policy subsystems develop a common episteme (1995:193). They also noted that a comprehensive policy model “must be capable of identifying the actors in the policy process and the interests that they pursue” (Howlett & Ramesh 1995:13).

There is often little understanding of the process by people who are involved in policy-shaping or who are policy makers themselves (Bridgman and Davis, 2003). This is particularly the case for people who are new to policy-making. Some text books have been produced in an attempt to inform those seeking to enter the profession of policy making, as well as those who may seek an academic career in this field (Bridgman and Davis, 2003). Bridgeman and Davis modified what they termed the “Lasswell Cycle” (2003:99) into their version of the policy cycle (2003:100).
Some academics have argued that the policy process cannot be simplified into a simple, stagist model (Colebatch, 2005, Colebatch, 2006a, Prasser, 2006, Everett, 2003, Sabatier, 2007). Everett (2003) suggested that imposing a normalistic view of the policy process distorts it to the point where it is no longer reflective of actual processes. This view is not totally unjustified; particularly in light of the growing complexity of policy processes involving increasing numbers and diversity of policy-making participants (Colebatch, 2006a, Howlett, 2007). Stewart (1999:8) noted that the policy process has now become so complicated that it may have no integrity or coherence at all: “government policies often contradict each other….One cause of complexity and major reason for the lack of coherence between policies and policy makers is the complicated nature of demands that are now being made of governments”.

Attempts to simplify these extremely complex and dynamic processes have provided theorists and analysts with “grist for the mill” in the ongoing debate on how policymaking and implementation can be improved. This debate is exacerbated by: the intransience of many issues, for which solutions may not readily be available (e.g. climate change); differing ideologies regarding the relative powers of politicians, bureaucracies, the private sector and the general public; and opposition by those who see themselves as disadvantaged (or who seek advantage).

**Usefulness of the Stages Heuristic to Practitioner Understanding**

If academics cannot agree and debate is vigorous, it is understandable that this leaves practitioners somewhat bewildered. Policy practitioners may also find that their own accounts of policy processes vary widely from the models proposed by academic literature (Edwards et al., 2001, Howard, 2005, Colebatch, 2005, Colebatch, 1998, Colebatch, 2006a, Page and Jenkins, 2005). As Sabatier (2007:5) has noted, policy analysts (and policy makers) viewing things from different perspectives will quite likely see different things; what they see will depend on the lens of simplifying suppositions they use. It seems likely then, that as policy partitioners are drawn from differing specialist fields, they will tend to view the policy process through the "lens" of their own professional paradigm, and compare what they are experiencing with their own prior experiences. It is also likely that physical scientists and practitioners working in fields where normative values are prevalent may see the policy cycle as a valuable tool that depicts the policy process; while social scientists and
others working within less normative fields are less likely to accept what they may perceive as the imposition of a "normative" view on what are essentially non-normative processes. That these differing views exist within the academic world is evident from the literature (Lasswell, 1956, Bridgman and Davis, 2004, Bridgman and Davis, 2003, Everett, 2003, Sabatier, 2007). Some authors can even be seen to have changed their views over time (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Sabatier, 2007, Sabatier, 1986, Sabatier, 1991, Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1979, Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1980).

Hodge and Davies (2006) have noted that the policy process is iterative and that each stage of the policy cycle contains many sub-cycles. They found the policy cycle of Bridgeman and Davis (2003) useful to explain the historical sequence of events. Their model, while based on the Bridgeman and Davis model, included these sub-cycles at each stage to “to explore the bargaining between participants that occurs at each stage” (Hodge and Davies 2006:6). While Colebatch has argued that the context of the policy process is more important than the ‘notional’ stages of a policy cycle (Colebatch, 2005, Colebatch, 1998, Colebatch, 2006a), the policy cycle remains a useful model to assist in understanding the policy process.

It is important to note here that although Bridgeman and Davis are often cited in respect to their use of a simple model of the policy cycle to describe the policy process, the arguments against the use of the policy cycle can be applied to any of the stagist models. It is also important to note that writers such as Bridgeman and Davis are not trying to explain every aspect or nuance of the policy process, but instead seek to provide a model that simplifies it so that it can be better understood. So, while Bridgeman and Davis’s policy cycle model has been subjected to criticism (Colebatch, 2005, Colebatch, 2006a, Edwards et al., 2001, Howard, 2005), such simple models are useful, provided their limitations are clearly understood. Similarly, these simple models may also provide the basis for more complex models of policy development:

Models are our tool for simplifying and explaining reality, and so for constructing proposals based on a plausible understanding of causation. Models are heuristics, shortcuts for comprehension and calculation. (Davis et al., 1993:158)

When confronted with complex phenomena, however, models...can be useful in giving us a resource for cognition, allowing us to identify some important features that can serve as the basis for seeking patterns among the complexity. (Weimer, 2008:491)
The simple model of the policy cycle may assist the policy practitioner to make sense of what they are experiencing. It provides some guidance that there are usually a number of stages in the policy process: ideas are formulated; the policy is made; the policy is implemented; and ultimately, the policy is evaluated. Debates about who usually has the idea first, or where the policy is drafted, or even how much power the implementer is able to exert do not necessarily negate the value of a stagist model. It is more important to recognise that any model has its limitations, and will not fully explain the process that it is used to simplify.

Within the stages of the policy cycle there may exist a number of sub-stages that are linked by a complex network of feedback loops and co-relations, with the stages themselves being linked by similarly complex networks (Howlett and Ramesh, 1995). The policy cycle model can therefore be seen as a simplified model of what may be a very complex structure; the complexity being determined by a range of factors, not the least of which is the complexity of the issue being addressed. By segmenting the policy process into a number of discrete stages (while recognising that these stages may not be discrete in actuality), policy researchers are able to focus their research into particular areas of public policy.

Although it is useful to segment the policy process into discrete stages, the limitations of the policy cycle model must be clearly recognised and understood. Firstly, the policy cycle model does not adequately explain the complexities of the policy process and it is merely a simplification of what may be very complex processes. There may be processes and cycles that occur within each of the stages, and there may exist relationships between the stages that are not well explained by the model. Second, although the model assumes a number of discrete stages, in practice the lines between these stages may be blurred, with policy formation and even agenda setting occurring during the implementation phase. There may be a continual cycle that occurs as policy is defined and re-defined as it is implemented. This appears to be particularly the case where policy development is incremental and policies appear to ‘evolve’ over a period of time. Finally, the making of policy and its implementation are processes of debate, negotiation, and exercises (or testing) of power and political determination (Kingdon, 1995, Lindblom, 1959, Lindblom, 1968). Stagist models that seek to explain how policy is made and implemented must therefore recognise that these processes occur during every stage of the policy cycle.
In 2003 Sophia Everett (2003) sparked a brief, but heated debate when she published a paper criticizing the writings of Edwards (2001) and Bridgeman and Davis (2000), refuting their contention that the policy cycle was a key factor in the creation of good policy. Everett referred to the writings of Lindblom (1959) and others to argue that policy making is too complex to be examined in the rationalistic manner proposed by Lasswell (1956). Everett argued that the more recent writings of Edwards and of Bridgeman and Davis were a part of a return to the rationalist paradigm proposed by Lasswell and his proponents and ignored the complexity of the social and political forces at play. Everett felt that policy development was primarily a political contest and the policy process itself should be described as a series of the power plays, with the policy cycle describing events that occurred after these decisions had been made. She did, however, concede that the policy cycle could be used as a mechanism to handle ‘uncomplicated matters’ (Everett 2003:69).

Bridgeman and Davis (2003) have defended their use of the policy cycle, stating that they had developed their policy cycle in response to a request from a junior public servant who had been given responsibility to quickly develop a nutritional strategy. The policy cycle that they consequently developed to provide practical guidance to public servants involved in policy creation was based on the set of ‘logical’ steps proposed by Howard Lasswell. Bridgeman and Davis (2003:99) argued that the policy cycle assists in understanding of the policy process by disaggregating complex phenomenon into manageable steps. However, they also pointed out that a series of sequential steps is nothing like a rational model and that Everett had mistaken form for substance (2003:101). Further, they argued that process and content are not contending opposites, but are intertwined within the policy process, stating that “Policy is a series of interlocking steps, a dialogue between procedures and substance, between public debate and private analysis” (Bridgeman & Davis 2003:102). Bridgeman and Davis suggested that the policy process can be described as being a series of “closed continuous cycles” (2003:102), acknowledging the complexities of the process and the interrelationships between processes and power plays.

Howard (2005) compared the experiences of senior public servants working for the Australian Government. While finding that many did not feel that the policy cycle proposed by Bridgeman and Davis accurately described the complexities of policy making, most, but not all, felt that it provided a useful model to aid understanding of the processes at work. Howard stated that the majority were of the opinion that the policy cycle represented an
‘ideal’ model of policy making: what policy making would look like in an ideal world (2005:11). However, most thought it important to remind inexperienced officers that reality was more complex than implied by the model (2005:10). Howard reported that most experienced policy makers felt that the policy cycle was too simplistic a model to be of practical use and concluded that one should be “very cautious” when using the policy process to describe actual practice (2005: page??). Basing his work largely on the literature of Radin (2000), Howard mapped the evolution of public policy from the early 1950’s to the current time, observing that the policy environment is much more complicated than that which existed in the 1950’s, and hence it is now much more difficult to describe with simple models.

Sabatier, once a leading proponent of the policy cycle (Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983), has since become one of its critics (Sabatier 1991; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, Sabatier 2007). Sabatier (2007) stated that although the policy cycle served a useful purpose and stimulated some excellent research within specific stages, and particularly within agenda setting and implementation, it had served its purpose and needed to be replaced by better theoretical frameworks. The criticisms of the policy cycle listed by Sabatier (2007:7) are: that it is unable to be recognised as a causal theory; that the proposed series of stages are often descriptively inaccurate; that it is seen to have a top-down bias; and that it is based on the assumption that there is a single piece of legislation that needs be considered at any one time.

Adams (2004:30) observed that “knowledge is the modern currency of public policy” with creation of meanings that guide actions being the most important feature of knowledge. This form of guidance includes an explicit or implicit theory of action - that is, what causes something to happen. While Adams was not referring to the policy cycle, surely this definition of knowledge as currency must extend to knowledge of the policy process itself. The policy actor who has an understanding of the processes at work, and of their relationships to other stages in the overall process, will be in a position of relative power in comparison to those to whom this knowledge is unavailable. This highlights an important issue, that is, that many public servants who are actively engaged in the policy process may not possess even the most basic understanding of the simplified policy process that is mapped out in the policy cycle and described in policy textbooks.
Colebatch, while acknowledging that the policy cycle may be of limited use, has questioned its ability to educate neophyte policy workers about how policy is made (Colebatch, 2005, Colebatch, 1998, Colebatch, 2006a). However, Colebatch and other authors who are critical of the policy cycle may have failed to acknowledge that no model is able to completely explain the complexities of the policy process. Other models of the policy cycle also suffer from their own particular limitations; they may be too simplistic, focus on a particular aspect of the process, or may be too complicated for practitioners to understand. Thus, concepts such as Kingdon’s (1995) account of policy entrepreneurs as the central players in the policy process does explain one aspect of policy development, but it does not explain how or why the process occurs. The existence of so many models of the policy process is likely to bewilder policy practitioners attempting to find meaning in the complex world of policy development. However, if explained within the context of a simplified, stagist policy process, the concept of policy entrepreneurs may be better able to be understood.

Authors on policy implementation such as Lester and Googin (1998), de Leon and deLeon (2002) and Hill and Hupe (2002) believed that there are benefits to a continuing role for the heuristic approach to simplify policy processes and that consideration of other approaches can be incorporated into a stagist framework. Indeed, Hill and Hupe expressed the belief that the stagist approach must be broadened to incorporate consideration of other approaches in order to retain its relevance (Hill and Hupe, 2002:6).

The stagist approach to policy development has primarily utilised a top-down viewpoint (DeLeon and DeLeon, 2002, Lester and Goggin, 1998), which in the view of the DeLeon and DeLeon has limited its role in aiding an understanding of implementation processes (2002:468). While this topic will be discussed further in the next chapter (pages 31-36), it should be noted here that this top-down perspective has led to many criticisms of the policy cycle (Everett, 2003, Sabatier, 2007).

The literature suggests that the stagist approach to policy assists in understanding the processes that are being observed, and is most effective when used in conjunction with other frameworks. Its ability to break down the policy process into discrete stages, that can then be observed directly, will ensure that implementation research remains lively and relevant to studies of public policy. After all, a policy that is made but not implemented is unlikely to achieve the outcomes desired by the policymakers. The establishment of implementation as a
A great deal of writing on public policy is dominated by writers who believe that government operates (or should operate) in a deliberative and structured way to make policy, and that the role of the public service is to unquestioningly put these policies into practice. The stagist approach found favour with many writers who were concerned over the amount of influence that bureaucrats were able to exert over policy formation, and the amount of discretion they were able exercise in its implementation. Other writers sought to examine the role of bureaucrats to find out what was actually occurring.

A commonly perceived failing of the stagist approach, and one that has elicited a degree of criticism (noted above), is the assumption that the policy process can be broken into a number of discrete stages. Such criticisms are based on observations that policy processes often involve a considerable amount of interrelativeness between stages, and that the stages themselves may be hard to define. This appears to be particularly the case within the implementation stage of the policy process, where bureaucrats and other policy actors may engage in both agenda setting and policy formulation processes while trying to implement policies. Rather than discard the policy cycle as being too simplistic, it may be more appropriate to consider that mini-policy cycles are likely to occur within each stage of the policy cycle as policy efforts are evaluated, refined and re-implemented. Such a view would see the policy cycle as a simple model.

Other writers have commented that the policy cycle does not fully take into account the ways in which policy actors interact to develop and implement policy. A number of alternative frameworks have been proposed that offer different insights into the policy process, each describing a particular aspect of the policy process, and each with its own strengths and weaknesses. While some policy researchers believe that these frameworks explain policy processes better than the policy cycle and should replace it, no consensus yet exists that there is one framework that fully explains the policy process.

An alternative view may be that all frameworks are merely simplifications of very complex processes, with each of the frameworks explaining one aspect of the policy process and none explaining the process completely. In this view, the policy cycle can be seen as a model that
assists researchers by breaking down the policy process into quite discrete stages, with frameworks aiding understanding of the processes that occur within each stage. Rather than alternatives, the different frameworks can be seen as complementary to the stagist model. However, the question of how well these explain implementation has largely been ignored, with discussion largely concentrating on policy formulation. Also largely missing is discussion of how the process of implementing policy often includes a process of continual evaluation and revision of the policy itself. This relatively unexplored area of policy may arguably be the one of the most important components of the public policy process.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has considered the arguments put forward by proponents and opponents of the stagist heuristic. Opponents of the stagist approach to policy development have argued that it does not accurately reflect, nor explain, actual policy processes so better theories are needed (Sabatier, 1991, Sabatier, 2007; and others). Proponents of the stagist heuristic have argued that a simplified model is easier for policy neophytes to understand, and offers advantages to researchers who may wish to focus on particular areas of the policy process (Bridgman and Davis, 2005; and others). Breaking down the process into a number of discrete stages allows researchers to focus on how policies are implemented, using policy implementation as a discrete (but intrinsically linked) stage of the policy process. As discussed, the implementation stage may also include mini policy cycles as implementation efforts are evaluated and policy is refined. Thus, the stagist heuristic sets the scene for the next chapter on policy work and implementation.

Introduction

The previous chapter identified the emergence of public policy as a discrete research area, and the relevance of the stagist heuristic as a tool to assist in understanding the policy process. It was noted that there exists debate about the ability of the policy cycle to explain policy processes, that the processes are much more complicated than the model suggests. Implementation was also identified as a discrete stage in the policy cycle.

This chapter will examine implementation research in more detail. The chapter will identify some of the underlying paradigms and assumptions behind differing approaches to implementation and explain how these have influenced the understanding of public policy, policy making and policy implementation over the last few decades. It will also consider the intrinsic links between policy formulation and implementation, examining the way in which the implementation process itself may be a significant driver of the formulation of new policies.

The chapter begins by examining how prevalent views of public policy have led to the development of a top-down approach to implementation research. The chapter then examines the development of the bottom-up approach to policy. This is followed by an examination of some attempts to synthesise these two approaches. Finally, the chapter provides an explanation of research into the role of bureaucrats in policy development and locates the central research concerns of this thesis within the policy and implementation fields, asserting its relevance to existing policy literature. The role of bureaucracies and the role of public servants involved in the creation and development of new policy through implementation are the focus of attention of this thesis.

Differing Views of the Policy Process

Top-down Approach

Considine (1994) proposed that two views of public policy should be considered. The first was ‘a standard view’ where public policy was seen as: “an action which employs governmental authority to commit resources in support of a preferred value” (Considine, 1994:3). From this perspective, public policy was the deliberate exercise of power by
governments whereby political decisions are translated into policy. The assumptions explicit
in this view were that a government chooses the policies that were developed, how the
policies were to be implemented, and that implementation itself was always connected to
specific policies that were a response to problems in society (Hill and Hupe, 2002:5). Similarly, Sabatier (2007) argued for a top-down, rational approach to policy development,
and he stated that:

In the process of public policymaking, problems are conceptualized and brought to
government for solution; governmental institutions formulate alternatives and select policy
solutions; and these solutions get implemented, evaluated and revised. (Sabatier, 2007:3)

Policies may sometimes be announced by political parties or governments, but not
implemented. Implementation may also be delayed due to financial or other considerations.
Nevertheless, until revoked or replaced by updated policies, these unimplemented policies
retain their status as current public policies. Government agencies may also adopt positions,
whether stated or unstated, with regards to services, public values, regulations, or other
measures that impact upon the public. These positions may be adopted in respect to the way
in which a government policy will be implemented. Decisions may also be made as to how
agencies will take action to address a critical issue within their area of responsibility. In these
instances it can also be seen that the government has adopted an (unstated) public policy.

Fenna (2004) described public policy as an exercise of the sovereign power of a government
when it is backed by legitimate force. He stated that policy was:

…the disposition and deliberate action of government on any and every matter over which it
exercises authority. This includes the stated and unstated; action and inaction; the choice of
ends and the choice of means. (Fenna, 2004:5)

Considine (1994:3) considered that such policies may be expressed as any or all of these
three things: clarification of public values and intentions; commitments of public money and
services; or the granting of rights and entitlements.

The ideal of a controlling government, or of a government that is in control, has generally
encouraged the adoption of a stagist approach to policy development. Indeed, most policy
literature has been premised on the supposition that politicians create policy and bureaucrats
implement it, if imperfectly. The top-down, bottom-up debate that dominated policy
literature from the 1970’s to the 1990’s was essentially an argument over the level of control that politicians are able, or should be able to exert over the bureaucrats who implement policy. This intense and protracted debate on implementation lasted from 1973 until the end of the 1980’s (Hill and Hupe, 2002), and was, at least partially, the cause of implementation research being discarded by policy researchers (Saetren, 2005:572).

The stagist framework was, however, a key component of both the top-down and bottom-up approaches to public policy implementation, and was central to both approaches. In general, disputes in the literature focussed on what should occur during each stage of the policy cycle and the level of control that could be exerted by politicians during this process (Ryan, 1995, Ryan, 1996, Hill and Hupe, 2002).

The top-down versus bottom-up debate was initiated by Pressman and Wildavsky’s book entitled “Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland” (latest edition Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984). Expressing concerns that policies were often not implemented as intended by policy makers, the book detailed how federal policies conceived in Washington were often “derailed” by state bureaucrats. The authors proposed a set of conditions that, if present, would improve policy implementation, at least from the federal perspective. Pressman and Wildavsky’s book was followed by other publications outlining ways in which policy makers could better ensure that policies were implemented as conceived (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975, Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1979, Hogwood and Gunn, 1984, Younis, 1990). These publications can broadly be grouped into a top-down approach to implementation.

The stagist approach to policy development has primarily emerged from top-down literature (Lester and Googin 1998; de Leon and deLeon 2002), and this, in the view of deLeon and deLeon, has limited its role in understanding the implementation processes (2002:468). The process has primarily been considered from the perspective that politicians, with input from a variety of policy actors, create policies, which are then implemented by the public service, with varying degrees of interference from bureaucrats. Indeed, some former proponents of the top-down approach began to criticize the stagist approach as an oversimplification that did not reflect actual policy processes (Sabatier, 1991, 2007).
Of the writers who criticised the stagist approach as too simplistic, Sabatier and Mazmanian (1989) were among the most influential. These authors stated their belief that policy decisions should be made by elected officials rather than civil servants (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989:43). The authors proposed a set of six conditions that, if met, would ensure that policies were implemented as intended. The main intent was to provide a series of recommendations to policy makers that, if adopted, would ensure that policies were effectively implemented. These authors appeared less concerned with the effectiveness of the policies than ensuring that they were implemented as intended by elected officials.

Croker (1986:2) found that the clear distinction between the elected legislature and the administrative bureaucracy was both artificial and misleading, and he argued instead that bureaucrats were influential in forming policy. Other writers also argued that top-down models wrongly assumed that the political executive controls all agencies within a tight band of accountability (Stewart, 1999:35). Cerny noted the reasons why this was often not the case:

The truth is, the political executive simply does not have the capacity to exercise top-down control; in any case, public servants operate beneath the political executive with quite a different set of rules. They have their own agencies to protect, and their own robust dialectic of stasis and change within the public service itself to acknowledge. (Cerny, 1990:45)

Stewart (1999:134) argued that although public servants were thought to be administrators and not policy makers, this was often a mistaken belief. Public servants influenced policy by actively advising on policy implementation and aligning agency strategy and policy priorities with strategic capacity, both inside the agency and with the government as a whole (Stewart, 1999:7). Both Cerny (1990) and Stewart (1999) were critical of the top-down approach, noting that public policy studies have clearly demonstrated that control and accountability tends to be the other way around. Furthermore, service agencies within the public service are more likely to take the lead role in development of policies and strategies. Stewart (1999:139) proposed a model that incorporated elements of the policy administration model, but also accounted for the role of the public service in developing policy. Stewart’s work can therefore be seen as a synthesis, although it also suggested that the development of policy actually occurs within the upper echelons of bureaucracy. This concept will be explored further later in this chapter.
Lane (1987) explored issues of responsibility and trust, arguing that top-down models tend to emphasise responsibility, while bottom-up models emphasised trust (Hill and Hupe, 2002). Lane also found that policy-making and policy implementation could be approached from either an actor-oriented basis or structural theory basis. He believed that there was no single policy model that would guarantee complete policy implementation and so he endeavoured to find linkages between the two approaches (Lane, 1990). Lane’s exploration on how responsibility and trust influence policy implementation resonates with Raadschelders and Stillman’s (2007) analysis of authority. These authors found that trust, and in particular, erosion of trust in bureaucracy, was central to the top-down approach to policy implementation.

Other writers cautioned that the power of government was not absolute, that actors from outside of government influenced policy making, and processes could be subject to interference from outside agencies (Davis et al., 1993, Considine, 1994, Hill and Hupe, 2002, Dye, 2004). This was consistent with Considine’s second view that the public policy process was essentially the movement of people and programs around common problems (1994:3), and that policy consisted of “the continuing work done by groups of policy actors who use available public institutions to articulate and express the things they value” (1994:4). This view recognised the role that policy actors, located outside of the executive, play in the policy process. In supporting this view, Dye suggested that much of the policy formation process actually occurs outside of formal government processes (2004:56). However, he also cautioned that these processes are limited to a select group and consequently, public policy is dominated by the ‘elite opinion’ of those close enough to government to be able to influence decision making (Dye, 2004:56). Davis et al. (1993) expressed a view, more recently expressed by Sabatier (2007), that policy is a process through which values are expressed, and the policy process itself is essentially “the interaction of values, interests, and resources, guided through institutions and mediated by politics” (Sabatier, 2007:15).

Sabatier, one of the early proponents of the top-down approach, initially disregarded the bottom-up approach to implementation (Sabatier, 1986); although more recently he has questioned the relevance of the stagist approach itself (Sabatier, 2007). Sabatier’s most recent work has been on advocacy coalition frameworks, that are essentially top-down in nature and focus on policy making as opposed to policy implementation. Sabatier (1991,
2007) has maintained the view that there is little scope for policy making by bureaucrats, other than being something that is generally undesirable and needs to be controlled.

**The bottom-up approach - bureaucrats exercising discretion**

While the top-down writers were primarily interested in how elected officials could ensure that their policies were implemented as intended, other writers such as Lipsky (1980), Hjern and Hull (1982), and Barrett and Fudge (1981) were more concerned with what was actually occurring during the implementation process. These writers experienced a different perspective of the policy process. They described processes where bureaucrats implementing policy were able to exercise discretion in the way they applied policies and, by doing so, were effectively creating policy. Lipsky (1980) did not see these people as engaging in deliberative policy processes that were then adopted as formal policy. The process, instead, was relatively ad-hoc as individual bureaucrats exercised the discretion that was available to them within the limits of their responsibly (Lipsky, 1980). This view of policy is, in many ways, consistent with Lindblom’s (1959) view that the vast majority of policy development is incremental in its nature.

Other bottom-up writers such as Hjern (1982) and Barrett and Fudge (1981) expanded on Lipsky’s (1980) work and found that deliberative policy development occurred throughout the implementation stage. That is, bureaucrats working to implement policies often revised existing policies, or created new policies to address critical issues that were not addressed in the initial policy. Hill and Hupe (2002) have, however, suggested that the work of Barrett and Fudge could amount to a case against the study of implementation as a distinct stage of the policy process. Nevertheless, the view that policy creation occurs during the implementation phase nevertheless remains consistent with the findings of others who have examined the matter of how policy is created (see for example: Page and Jenkins, 2005, Elmore, 1980).

**The synthesisers - balancing top-down and bottom-up approaches.**

A third group of writers have attempted to synthesise top-down and bottom-up approaches. Early writers such as Sabatier (1986, 1991, 2007), Lane (1987, 1990), Winter (1990) and Goggin (1990) developed models that incorporated elements of both top-down and bottom-up approaches. However, the views of these ‘synthesisers’ were not uniform; although many

Sabatier sought to bring about more balance in the top-down model that he developed with Mazmanian (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1980) by developing with Jenkins-Smith (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) what he identified as an “Advocacy Coalition Framework” (Sabatier, 1986, 1991, 2007). Sabatier’s Advocacy Coalition Framework assumed that, although the majority of policymaking involved negotiations among specialists within a policy subsystem, the behaviour of specialists within a policy subsystem was affected by broader political and socio-economic factors (Sabatier and Weible, 2007:191, 193). Sabatier proposed that the Advocacy Coalition Framework would deal with “wicked problems”, which he defined as “involving substantial goal conflicts, important technical disputes, and multiple actors from several levels of government” (Sabatier and Weible, 2007:189). While Sabatier and Weible (2007:192) noted that these specialists within the policy subsystem would include members from outside of the “traditional iron triangle” of legislators, agency officials and interest group leaders, they did not define exactly who these specialists were, how they came to their roles, or how they undertook their work. Sabatier and Weible concluded that this was an area where further research was needed (2007:209).

Through more recent work, Sabatier has rejected the stagist heuristic, on the basis that it did not adequately explain policy processes (Sabatier, 2007). Instead, he has developed a network-based approach to policy development, although this has retained elements that hint at his top-down past. This more recent work has predominately addressed policy-making rather than implementation, focusing on how coalitions of like-minded specialists could work together to achieve policy outcomes, but he has made little reference to how these coalitions might interact with the bureaucrats tasked with implementing, and refining, policies. Nevertheless, the Advocacy Coalition Framework helps to explain how specialists come together to effect policy change and represents an advancement on actor network theory (Hill and Hupe, 2002, Hill, 1997).

Winter (1990, 2003) is considered one of the seminal writers in policy implementation, primarily for his attempt to synthesise the top-down and bottom-up approaches. Finding that implementation had been analysed from different perspectives, which could broadly be grouped into top-down and bottom-up approaches, Winter (1990:20) sought to identify the
most promising elements that could be integrated into a more general theory of policy implementation. In doing so, he did not set out with the deliberate intention of synthesising top-down and bottom-up approaches, but rather, identified important factors affecting implementation, irrespective of where they were in the hierarchy (Winter, 2003).

Elmore (1980) was more concerned about establishing methodologies to study implementation than finding the means to control it (Hill and Hupe, 2002:58). He differed from many of the ‘top-down’ synthesesers such as Sabatier. Elmore (1980) developed a process that he termed “backward mapping”, to explain how policy decisions often derive from problems with policy implementation and could lead to development of new policies. Elmore proposed a bottom-up approach to explain how some policy decisions went far beyond the role of “street level bureaucrats” examined by Lipsky (1980). Elmore (1980) believed that much of the impetus for a new policy was initiated at the end of the policy cycle, and that it was often the policy implementers and end-users who proposed new policies to address issues identified during the implementation process.

The top-down bottom-up debate has in turn been followed by ongoing debates concerning: the relevance of implementation research; whether implementation research is actually occurring; and the relevance of the stagist heuristic. Hill and Hupe (2002) have noted that there was widespread criticism of Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) for stating that there existed little or no literature on policy implementation. Critics argued that there were several seminal works on public policy that included discussions on implementation (Hill and Hupe, 2002).

While the debate over top-down bottom-up approaches to policy implementation continued, other researchers were studying the way in which policy makers went about making policy. Some researchers, for example Paul Sabatier, have contributed both to the top-down debate (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Sabatier, 1986) and to developing an understanding of how policy actors come together to influence policy making itself (2007, Sabatier, 1991, 1999, Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

**The state of implementation research**

Research into policy implementation appeared to decline during the 1980’s and 1990’s as some contemporary scholars began to dismiss implementation research (Lester and Goggin,
The focus of research shifted to policy formation and study into implementation appeared to lie dormant for some time (Lester and Goggin, 1998:1). In recent years, some scholars, notably Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, Sabatier, 1991), arrived at the belief that the stagist heuristic was no longer useful. Sabatier (2007), once a proponent of the top-down approach to policy implementation, rejected the stagist heuristic altogether on the basis that the heuristic was too simplistic to describe complex policy processes.

Saetren (2005), on the other hand, believed that the reasons for the decline in implementation research were found in other, more complex causes, namely:

- the protracted debate that existed between the top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy implementation;
- changing state-society relations;
- the pronounced failure bias that featured many implementation studies;
- concerns over the ability to segment the policy process into discrete stages; and
- increasing difficulty finding new things to say that would add substantially to the debate (Saetren, 2005:573).

Saetren (2005) found that, although implementation research appears to have become unfashionable, there was evidence that a great deal of ongoing research into policy implementation continued to occur. He suggested that much of this literature was being published outside of the public policy journals (Saetren, 2005). Saetren also found that a great deal of the most current research was published in dissertations, and believed that a revival, and perhaps refinement of implementation research, was required. Hill and Hupe (2002) agreed that implementation research was still being undertaken. They argued that the literature had moved beyond the debate over the relative merits of the top-down and bottom-up approaches to consider new complexities. Further, they argued that it was the very complexity of the issues facing government that made implementation research so vitally important (Hill and Hupe, 2002:198).

DeLeon and DeLeon (2002) have provided a ‘defence’ of the stagist approach, stating that implementation remains a critical part of public policy studies. They also reiterated an opinion expressed by Lester and Goggin (1998) that implementation remained a stumbling
block in the policy process and this area of research still attracted the attention of policy researchers (DeLeon and DeLeon, 2002).

Public policy is a well-studied field; numerous studies have been undertaken in the area of policy implementation (Ryan, 1995, Ryan, 1996, Saetren, 2005, Hill and Hupe, 2002) and these studies have encompassed research from several differing perspectives. However, as noted earlier in this chapter, the focus of most research has been to determine factors within the implementation process that have assisted or hindered the policy makers in accomplishing their intended outcomes.

The role of bureaucrats in policy implementation

The ability of bureaucrats to assist or impede policy implementation has also been recognised (Hill, 1997, Lane, 1990, Dye, 2004, Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Lipsky, 1980, Winter, 1990, Stewart, 1999, Hill, 2004, Hill and Hupe, 2002, Sabatier, 2007, Younis, 1990). Bureaucrats may also influence policy by their association with policy networks (Davis et al., 1993, Sabatier and Weible, 2007). However, research that has been conducted into the role of bureaucrats has commonly focussed on evaluating their impact on the effective implementation of policy, and understanding the impact of their actions within the broader stakeholder groups or actor networks (Wallace and Wallace, 2008) that act to achieve certain policy outcomes or promote policy ideas (Zahariadis, 2007).

Less research has been conducted into the role of policy specialists, and the ways in which they create their own policy networks within the public sector in order to promote new policies or implement policies more effectively. Research that has been undertaken in this area includes both empirical accounts of policy workers (for example: Page and Jenkins, 2005), examination of the context in which policy work occurs (for example: Gill and Colebatch, 2006) and examination factors that shape the influence of policy workers (for example: Hoch, 1994). This latter work in this area carried out by Hoch is based on empirical studies to determine how the actions of individual planners shape planning policy in the United States, and the factors that make them effective. Notably, Hoch (1994) found that planners can be, but are not always, highly influential both in shaping decisions and in being drivers for new policy.

The role of implementation processes in policy creation
While a typical policy cycle describes the policy process as beginning with the formulation of policy direction in the legislature and ending with “on-the-ground” implementation of policy by Lipsky’s (1980) “street-level bureaucrats”, a great deal of policy work actually occurs between these two points. Policies are refined, revised, and at times, completely re-written by agencies as they develop implementation strategies. Policy making does not begin and end in the legislature. Implementation may involve the refinement, and even complete rewriting, of policy (Elmore, 1980, Page, 2006, Page and Jenkins, 2005).

Ramesh (2008), after investigating several examples in local action in India, questioned whether there is a growing role for “implementation as policy making” and he suggested that a change in the policy paradigm was needed. The work of Ramesh (2008) clearly establishes the role of implementation as policy making; as opposed to the top-down view that implementation should only occur as policy makers intended. It is noted that much of the research into policy making and policy implementation concentrates on what people “should be doing”. However, Croker (1986:25) noted that the emphasis on policy formation and implementation should be on what people actually do.

Dye (2004:53), in describing policymaking in the US, noted that the legislature itself may shift responsibility for many policies to the bureaucracy. Governments may also create new agencies to translate laws into operational rules and regulations. However, translation of these laws requires decisions to be made by bureaucrats that effectively determine policy, with the implementing agencies receiving only broad and general policy directions. The agencies themselves must decide on the important details of the policy and what rules to impose. These implementation tasks, that are undertaken by the bureaucracy, are central to the policymaking process (Dye, 2004:54). As Dye has pointed out: “Bureaucrats make policy as they engage in the tasks of implementation – making regulations, adjudicating cases, and exercising their discretion” (Dye, 2004:57). Dye did not see this as a negative, in the sense of bureaucrats interfering with the intended outcomes of policy makers, because he reasoned that bureaucrats generally believe strongly in the value of their programs and the importance of their tasks. However, Dye (2004:55) also acknowledged that bureaucrats, like other people, are also motivated by other, less altruistic motives like job security, higher pay, and greater power and prestige, and may occasionally act in ways that do not support intended policy outcomes.
Bureaucrats – working in a contested field

Researchers, studying policy processes within British civil service, found that bureaucrats were actors who operated relatively independently of the political system, working best in situations of political consensus, and would even often try to create consensus in situations where it did not exist (Hill, 1997:82). This, known as the Whitehall model, has been challenged by more recent writers, who have suggested that it does not accurately reflect the role of the public service (Hill, 1997). The view that bureaucrats are a powerful and potentially united elite whose characteristics and allegiances are of great importance, can be contrasted with other views that perceive the public service to be weak and divided (Hill, 1997:84). Hill has noted that, in Australia, the ability of the public service to deliver effective policy outcomes has been weakened by the rise of economic rationalisers, stating that “there has been a systematic effort to ensure that economic rationalisers have advanced to dominate the civil service” (Hill, 1997:83).

Hill (1997:84) warned of the dangers of treating public servants as a unitary group or class, pointing out that there will be differences of interest, experience and culture within the bureaucracy and, in particular, between staff within different departments. He also noted that organisational factors play an important role in determining the influence that a policy actor can exert over the development of policy, and in influencing the direction of policy (1997:86).

Edwards (2001) noted the importance of recognising the competing interests of different agencies. Of considerable importance were the existence of inter-organizational rivalries or where ambiguous areas of responsibility exist. These were of particular concern in instances of “complex and independent cross-portfolio policy making which demands that the relationships between policy areas be assessed before ministers take decision” (Edwards, 2001:9). Management of these relationships has often been seen as the responsibility of senior bureaucrats and ministerial staffers. However, this approach ignores the possibility that many, if not the majority of the interactions that occur between agencies, occur at a much lower level through individual networks of policy officers.

Stewart noted that “policy practitioners work in a complex, dynamic process where there are few predictable steps and many surprises” (1999:5). The policy process itself begins with a policy practitioner drafting some objectives (Stewart, 1999:32). However, Stewart (1999)
also believed that the degree to which the practitioner can exercise control over the policy process is critical to the success or failure of the policy. As Cerny (1990) suggested, the policy practitioner is not the only influence at play: “The policy practitioner competes with other actors, also acting strategically and technically within the same game, with perhaps different perceptions of the game, different uncertainties, and of course, different objectives” (Cerny, 1990:92).

Stewart also identified the need for effective communication, both within and between agencies:

The main thing is that senior people, wherever they are placed in the public service, communicate across non-traditional lines about what each is doing and keep a dialogue going about whether policies are consistent or contradictory, and about how, why and what are the costs and benefits of the current situation and of moving to a new situation.... But to have informed decision making, senior managers need to have effective information systems, not just within their own agencies, but across agencies. There must be information sharing across agencies and to the political executive. (Stewart, 1999:143,144)

Stewart (1999), however, did not appear to consider that it is not only the senior officers who need to maintain lines of communication to coordinate policy making, and implementing activities. It is likely that even junior officers engaged in policy writing or implementing activities could benefit communicating with officials from other agencies. These lines of communication will commonly be through informal lines of direct communication, such as email, telephone or face to face meetings. Meetings may or may not be pre-arranged and may or may not include more senior staff. While some meetings take place in formal settings in the workplace, other, informal meetings occur outside of the workplace. The point was made by Bridgeman and Davis (2005) that their book was in response to an approach by a junior public officer; on that occasion, the method used was a telephone call (Bridgman and Davis, 2005:ix).

Dunleavy (1980) and Hill (1997) believed that professions often adopt a unified view of the world. This position was supported by Croker (1986), who argued that the growing professionalism within the public service, and the structuring of agencies around professions, has tended to intensify the influence of professional disciplines on related areas of policy
(Croker, 1986:2). Thus, policy officers working in different departments will approach an issue from differing perspectives and might be working toward different outcomes.

Page and Jenkins (2005) studied a group of “middle ranking” bureaucrats to examine their views of policy making and the influence they exerted; they noted that this group exerted considerable influence and that they conducted their work into policy development under limited direction, often with only a vague direction as to what was required. Page and Jenkins referred to broad directions as a “steer”. Noting that many of the bureaucrats studied did not have technical expertise in the areas for which they were “developing” policy, the authors found that the middle order bureaucrats relied on talking with other officials, going to conferences and learning about the policy area (Page, 2006, Page and Jenkins, 2005). This approach to policy making is consistent with Barkenbus’s view that the transmittance of experience, rather than specialized knowledge, is the critical dimension of decision making (Barkenbus, 1998:9). Page (2006) pointed out that this situation, while common in Great Britain, is less common in European governments where there is less movement of public servants, and where higher order public servants commonly have significant expertise in their area of responsibility. It is most likely that the situation in Australia is more similar to that of Great Britain than with European countries.

Raadschelders and Stillman have stated that the influence that public servants exert on policy may be far greater than has been acknowledged thus far, and that even junior officials may exert significant influence (2007:14). Noting that the study of public administration is mainly concerned with making public organizations more efficient, they believed that the interactions between organizational members warranted more attention than their relations with external stakeholders (2007:16). This phenomenon is largely ignored in studies of networks, which have tended to focus on the elected members, the bureaucratic executive and policy actors from outside of government. Raadschelders and Stillman believed that further research was needed to clarify the degree of administrative authority that is actually exercised by public servants (2007:32).

Although this question was to some extent explored by Page and Jenkins (2005), their research was limited to discussions with “middle order managers” who, while capable of exerting a degree of influence, may not be actually doing the bulk of the policy work. Research has also been conducted in fields other than policy. For example Hoch (1994)
examined the influence of planners in policy, Gill and Colebatch (2006) examined the role of women working in the area of gender and education. Notably, while these researchers examined different areas of policy and focused on different aspects of policy work, they shared a common finding: the motivation for policy workers to influence policy arises from their professional or policy values.

**Top-down view extending into studies of bureaucratic processes**

The differing approaches that are characteristic of much implementation research are evident in studies into policy making and it is relatively easy to characterise researchers as being either top-down, bottom-up or synthesisers. The power of bureaucrats remains a critical issue, although their role in both making and implementing policy is not well understood. A central argument of this thesis is that, in a field as complex as policy it is important to understand what a policy actor actually does, before deciding whether or not they should be the one to do it.

Page (2006) noted that academics tend to have a top-down view about how policy is formulated, so are apt to examine the interactions occurring at the “top”. Although there has been extensive research into the broad field of public policy and its sub-fields, much of the research into policy implementation has been from the viewpoint that policies are created by politicians and implemented by bureaucrats (Dye, 2004, Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Lane, 1990). Studies into policy workers have generally focused on the middle and upper echelons of bureaucracies (Page and Jenkins, 2005, Edwards, 2001), while in practice the work will often be performed by public servants at much lower levels. Evidence of the role of relatively junior bureaucrats has also been provided by Bridgeman and Davis (2004), who noted that they had been approached by a junior public servant for help in developing a policy.

The work of Page and Jenkins (2005) suggests that policies are often developed by middle order bureaucrats who possess limited understanding of the issues to be addressed, and with little or no expertise in the policy area. If a large amount of policy development is being conducted, or controlled, by people without specialist expertise in the policy area, it raises the question of how well policies can be expected to address the issues for which they were seemingly formulated. Alternatively, the actual policy work may be carried out by the specialists that report to the middle level bureaucrats interviewed by Page and Jenkins. It is
not uncommon for people, bureaucrats included, to take credit for the work of others, and it is arguably ethical for a manager to take credit for the work of their team. Two questions are raised by the Page and Jenkins research. First, how involved were the middle level bureaucrats in actual work to develop the policy and how well did they understand the policy making process? Second, did these managers present the policy as proposed by the specialists on their staff, or did they ‘filter’ or alter it to make it more palatable to, or gain favour with, their superiors? If either were the case, then it is likely that more junior staff would hold differing views of the policy process, and the veracity of the policy position that reached the executive.

**Respective roles of policy actors**

The policy process is not only extremely complex, but differs for each issue being addressed, each policy process having a unique process and set of policy actors. Policy processes are often heavily influenced by the resources available to those working on policy development and the individual preferences of the policy actors involved in the development and implementation of each policy initiative.

Policy actors are a diverse group of people, working at different levels in government and in government organizations to create or to influence policy. The approach they adopt and the methods they apply will depend on what they are seeking to achieve, the resources available, their relative position of power, and their ability to influence decision makers. Each policy actor will have a different perspective on what is desirable or achievable and each will operate within a unique operational sphere. Intrinsic to the study of policy implementation, therefore, is the study of policy actors, policy networks and the policy making process itself. While policy workers have been studied (Page and Jenkins, 2005, Colebatch, 2006b, Edwards, 2001), research has often been directed at middle and senior levels of management (Page and Jenkins, 2005), or senior ministerial advisors (Edwards, 2001). It is suggested in this thesis that public service managers may hold a different view of an issue to that held by specialist policy officers whose role is to address policy problems.

Hoppe and Jeliazkova (2006:42) noted that policy workers relied on two different sets of knowledge and skills: knowledge and skill in the specific problem to be addressed by the policy; and knowledge and skill in the policy process itself. Further, policy workers were influenced by two types of loyalties: professional- analytical loyalties relating to their
specific profession or education; and political loyalty. Using these two sets of criteria: knowledge/skill and loyalty, Hoppe and Jeliazkova (2006:39-41) identified five types of policy functionaries in the Dutch civil service: the process director; the policy philosopher; the policy advocate; the neo-weberian and; the expert advisor. While no attempt was made to classify the public servants who were interviewed during this research using the typology of Hoppe and Jeliazkova, it was noted that many interviewees appeared to utilize elements of each typology, appearing to move between the elements at different times in the policy process.

Bromell (2010) described three distinct functions that are performed by policy workers: analyst, advisor and advocate. Bromell proposed that the challenge for policy workers is to live creatively within and between these functions, maintaining appropriate distinctions and exercising sound judgement, and to do so within imperfect democratic institutions and processes (Bromell, 2010:62). Further, that these processes, corresponding to an inescapable interplay between information, interests and ideology, can be distinguished without separation or division (Bromell, 2010:62). In much the same way that stages in the policy cycle, although identifiable as discrete components of the policy process, are linked and intertwined through a complex interplay of interests, values and ideals.

While pointing out that moving into an advocacy role may be a risky strategy for a public servant to adopt, Bromwell (2010) also noted that there also exists a convention for the public service to offer “free and frank” advice. Bromwell critically questions how public servants are to balance the requirement (and their personal desire) to do the best for the community, with the need to conform to the often narrow policy objectives and short-term fixes demanded by political parties. At what point is the boundary between advice and advocacy crossed?

**Policy streams, policy windows and policy entrepreneurs**

Kingdon (1984) identified that there were three aspects to policy, and termed these policy streams: the problem stream; the policy stream; and the politics stream. Arguing that issues reached the policy agenda when there was a confluence of the three streams, he termed these confluences ‘policy windows’. Kingdon believed that these streams could be coupled through crisis, or the presence of a ‘policy entrepreneur’, or through windows within
political cycles. Kingdon focused on the role of the policy entrepreneur, a person who initiated and drove change, and around whom policy networks formed.

Croker (1986) adapted the model developed by Kingdon (1984) to explain how policy formation occurred within the organisation that he was studying. Kingdon’s model rejected the supposition that policy formation begins with identifying a problem before progressing to a systematic search for a solution. Instead, he proposed that the process is created by those involved in it, and who, through negotiation, develop a shared understanding. Of particular interest, Croker found that the role of entrepreneur was critical to the formation policy that took place in that organisation. He also proposed that staff in the organisation were actively involved in the policy process and were able to reject, resist or undermine policy changes that they did not support (Croker, 1986:29-36).

More recently Exworthy and Powell (2004) merged the work of Kingdon (1984) with that of Wolman (1981) and Challis et al. (1988) to “form a new policy streams approach”, arguing that “successful implementation will be more likely when the three policy streams are linked across three dimensions: central-local (vertical); central-central (horizontal); and local-local (horizontal)” (Exworthy and Powell, 2004:263). These authors found that successful implementation requires a coincidence of confluence of streams at all three levels.

Page (2006) has criticised the work of Kingdon (1995) for being too focused on a top-down “garbage can” approach to policy development that considers lower level bureaucrats as subordinate and effectively limited to implementation. Kingdon’s (1995) top-down view is also reflected in work of Exworthy and Powell (2004), who believed that the vertical dimension is based on a good hierarchical chain of command that is essential to successful implementation. Page argued the opposite in noting that “the production of policy involved a group of people initially assumed to be rather routine workers in bureaucracy” (Page, 2006:4).

Page (2006:6) has proposed that policy can be categorised into four components, namely:

1. Principles – views about how public affairs should be conducted;
2. Policy lines – specific strategies aimed at specific issues;
3. Measures – specific instruments that give effect to policies; and
4. Practices – behaviour of officials normally expected to carry out policy measures.
Earlier it was noted that Bromwell (2010) proposed that the functions of analysis, advice and advocacy needed to be distinguished without separation or division. Further, Page (2006) and Bromwell (2010) rejected the top-down notion of policy, noting that policy development occurs within the bureaucracy. These points are important as they provide the context in which to examine the roles that individuals play in the policy process. They also provide the context to examine the question of whether “specialist” advice is ‘filtered’ or distorted by the time it reaches the ears of elected officials: the filtering being done by managers or policy analysts who have only limited understanding of the issues. This filtering may influence how policies are implemented, or it may shape new policy proposals; potentially altering also the way the results of policy implementation are reported to elected officials.

Hoch (1994) and O’Leary (2006) have described the use of ‘guerrilla’ strategies by public servants who continued to work in government while seeking to achieve their own policy outcomes. O’Leary has asserted “that guerrilla government happens all the time in the everyday, often mundane world of bureaucracy” (O’Leary, 2006:3). Further, O’Leary has noted that bureaucrats can, and do, engage in clandestine guerrilla activities at many different levels: from expressing unwillingness to implement policies that they believe are unfair, to actively undermining the public’s trust in government or government policy. Although the actions of policy actors that were described by Hoch (1994) accord strongly with the activities described by O’Leary (2006), Hoch nonetheless had a more moderate view. Hoch did not use the term “guerrilla” to describe the actions of policy actors; and the actions he described were not as extreme as some of the “guerrilla” actions described by O’Leary (2006).

**Policy networks and policy communities**

Hill (1997:71-72), in describing the relatively strong links between policy actors who combine to form policy communities, proposed that pressure groups and state institutions are co-dependent and need to trade knowledge, expertise and influence over other actors. Thus “State institutions and non-state institutions can be seen as linked by both reciprocal connections and more complex network relationships” (Hill, 1997:72). Hill also believed that policy networks and policy communities function in a relatively integrated way throughout the policy process from agenda setting to implementation. This differed significantly from the view of public servants that had been adopted by writers such as
Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989), Sabatier (2007) and others who had promoted a top-down approach to public policy. It must be noted that writers such as Mazmanian and Sabatier were referring to what should occur as opposed to what actually occurs when they proposed that the legislature should exercise more control over the bureaucracy; hence they did recognise that public servants were influential throughout the policy process. The views of Hill (1997), Dunleavy (1980) and Croker (1986) also differed somewhat from the findings of more recent research that has indicated that a large degree of influence is exerted by the middle layers of bureaucracy.

The politics of bureaucracy

Some policy analysts have suggested that the policy process is essentially a political exercise (Colebatch, 2005, Kingdon, 1995). However, it is argued that more attention needs to be given to the political processes that occur within bureaucracies, which are often evident in the interactions between policy officers working within agencies. Although researchers such as Page (2006), Page and Jenkins (2005), Gill and Colebatch (2006), Hoppe and Jeliazkova (2006) and others have sought to explain the processes of policy work, the ‘politics of bureaucracy’ has been less well studied.

Recently in Australia, the emergence of ministerial staffers has created another layer of policy workers. Anderson (2006), in writing about his own personal experiences, stated his belief that he and other early ministerial staffers were “carving out a new public sector career path and inserting a new layer of administration” (2006:167). Anderson also argued that this new layer of bureaucracy forged greater links with the media. He suggested that “just as the policy cycle cannot be immune from politics, politics in turn cannot be immune from the media” (Anderson, 2006:181). This new layer of policy makers then formed a link between bureaucrats within government agencies and their ministers, and between ministers and the media. These actors were able to influence both the way in which information was provided to ministers, and the way ministerial statements reached the public through the media.

The staff within ministerial offices may also comprise “term of government” staffers and public servants who are seconded from positions within government agencies for a period of time. These people normally are usually appointed for their policy expertise and often remain within ministerial offices through changes in ministers and changes in elected governments. However, there is also continual movement of policy specialists within and
between agencies, and between agencies and the ministerial policy offices. The influence of the personal and professional networks that exist between these policy specialists is not well understood. Less well studied are the ways in which these networks are formed, and the ways in which they are able to influence policy making and implementation. This area warrants further research.

**Researching the role of policy actors in bureaucracy**

Policy literature recognises that making policy does not begin and end in the legislature. Implementation may involve the refinement of policies, establishing programs and budgets, and sometimes the complete rewriting of the policy for it to be effective (Elmore, 1980, Page, 2006, Page and Jenkins, 2005). However, policy literature is often ambiguous about the influence of bureaucrats in policy implementation and development. Writers such as Lasswell (1936, 1956, 1951) and Lindblom (1959, 1968) applied themselves to the study of public policy processes and attempted to define the frameworks within which they operated. These authors saw policy as primarily a political exercise, created by elected representatives working in the political system, whose policies were then implemented by the bureaucracy.

Croker (1986:2) found that the clear distinction between the elected legislature and the administrative bureaucracy was both artificial and misleading, and he argued that bureaucrats were also influential in forming policy. Stewart (1999:134) noted that public servants influenced policy by actively advising on policy implementation and aligning agency strategy and policy priorities with strategic capacity both inside the agency and with the government as a whole. Although public servants were commonly thought to be administrators and not policy makers, Stewart (1997:7) asserted that this was a mistaken belief. Everett (2003:69) further argued that policy development was primarily a political contest and the policy process was best described as comprising a series of the power plays, the policy cycle describing events that occurred after political decisions had been made.

Lipsky (1980) identified “street-level bureaucrats”, public officers who exercised discretion as they applied policy and in doing so, effectively created policy. However, Lipsky (1980) did not believe that these people were engaging in a deliberative policy process, but were reacting according to their professional or personal norms, and responding to the pressures of their work. The policy process described by Lipsky appears to be relatively ad-hoc insofar as
individual bureaucrats can exercise discretion within the limits of their responsibility (Lipsky, 1980).

Raadschelders and Stillman (2007:14) stated that the influence that public servants exert on policy may be far larger than has been acknowledged thus far, and that even junior officials may have a significant influence. A number of public servants interviewed during this research also described their, at times successful, efforts to bring about more radical policy change.

Empirical studies that have examined public servants who are engaged in policy (Page and Jenkins, 2005, Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006) have found that policy workers number in their thousands, if not tens of thousands, in the countries that have been studied (Britain and the Netherlands). Policy work in these countries is conducted outside of the top tiers of government, and is often the role of specialist policy officers. Consistent with these studies, Scott and Baehler (2010) found that public policy professionals appear to form a large cohort within the Australian public service, and they noted that policy work was a professional field in its own right.

Page and Jenkins (2005) found that middle ranking officials in policy bureaucracies have considerable influence in both shaping policy and directing its implementation. Often the officials tasked with developing policy were given little more than a ‘broad steer’, with few specific instructions from politicians (2005:79); with actioning of the ‘broad steer’ often being based on the bureaucrat’s interpretation of what the Minister intended. Page and Jenkins (2005:81) noted that their empirical findings were not consistent with some policy literature; that the processes were not subordinate and detailed, but encompassed negotiation and formulation of the policy itself.

Page and Jenkins (2005) also noted that while the middle order bureaucrats they studied exerted a considerable degree of discretion, they did so within the strict bounds of what they thought would be most acceptable to their minister. Similarly, when politicians make policy decisions they often rely on advice and guidance from the public service. As noted by Scott and Baehler: “They (governments) rely on public service policy professionals for assistance in designing and evaluating policy options, and for help in understanding the likely impacts, costs, risks and consequences of government intervention” (Scott and Baehler, 2010:1).
Arguably, policy professionals are not the only element of the public sector that provides such advice. In any case, the quality of the advice provided by generalist policy officers will be contingent on the individual’s understanding of both the issue and of the necessary policy processes. How these generalist policy officers come to this understanding is also the subject of some conjecture; although they probably rely heavily on the expertise of specialist professional officers for an evaluation of the relevant issues.

The top-down approach to public policy promoted by authors such as Lasswell (1936, 1951, 1956) and Lindblom (1959, 1968) is based on the premise that policy is primarily made by elected politicians, their advisors and by those in the upper echelons of bureaucracy. Lipsky (1980) also suggested that most policy development occurred within the central offices of agencies but was shaped by “street-level bureaucrats” in their day to day interactions with the public.

Several policy writers in Australia and Britain have noted that many “specialist” policy officers are “generalists” and do not have specific or technical expertise in the area for which they are developing policy (Page and Jenkins, 2005, Scott and Baehler, 2010). However, it is also likely that the “policy specialists” they describe rely heavily on others who do have specific technical expertise. As such, the opinions of specialist policy officers are likely to be influenced by the public servant who provides information or advice. Therefore it is conceivable that officers working to shape a public policy may each have a different understanding of the policy process, and that these differences in understanding may lead to some conflict.

The role of technical specialists and the extent of the influence they exert on policy is an area that is deserving of considerable research. Unfortunately, these policy workers are often buried deep within the layers of government bureaucracy, creating difficulties for academics seeking to undertake such research. Notwithstanding the difficulties, examination of this relatively unexplored area of research is essential to improve the understanding of policy processes that occur within government agencies.

Some policy analysis literature (Scott and Baehler, 2010) appears to suggest that while policy analysis is undertaken in many agencies, policy advice is commonly formulated in specialist policy units that are located in central agencies. However, they have also noted that
the work of policy analysts and policy advisors includes many activities, and these activities are conducted in many types of organisations (Scott and Baehler, 2010:21). Page and Jenkins (2005) suggested that many policy decisions are made by middle to upper level managers, located in central agencies, who commonly have limited understanding of the specific policy area.

Scott and Baehler (2010) distinguished between policy analysts and policy advisors. The work of policy analysts is to break down the issue into its component parts, while policy advisors stitch the picture back together to “create a coherent picture of the situation so sound policy options can be designed and recommendations developed” (Scott and Baehler, 2010:23). Scott and Baehler noted that there is significant overlap between the two functions and that both are essential. They proposed that the adoption of a systemic approach to policy work will assist policy makers in their efforts to develop appropriate responses to complex policy problems.

Scott and Baehler (2010) also suggested that policy specialists, while having specialised knowledge of analysis techniques and the policy process, may be generalists in terms of their overall expertise, often lacking specific expertise in the area for which they develop policy. This accords with the findings of Page and Jenkins (2005), who noted that policy specialists in the British public service seldom had expertise in the specific area for which they were developing policy. However, Page and Jenkins also noted that in many European countries, policy specialists were more likely to have expertise in the specific policy area than their British counterparts. Page and Jenkins believed that this lack of expertise provided an advantage as it avoided situations where bureaucrats with specific expertise adopted strong positions on a particular issue. However, they also identified the potential for disadvantage when the policies that were adopted had been developed without sufficient understanding of the issues (Page and Jenkins, 2005).

Colebatch (2006c) observed that there has been a marked growth in the number of policy specialists and dedicated policy specialist units in the Australian public service. Colebatch has also noted that policy specialists were mobile and so were likely to move between functional departments and central agencies during their career (2006c:5). The role of these specialist officers is not only to implement policy; often it includes creating the instruments of policy itself.
Howard (2005), after examining the experiences of senior public servants working for the Australian Government, noted that most experienced policy officers felt that the policy cycle was too simplistic a model to be of practical use, the majority were of the opinion that the policy cycle represented an ‘ideal’ model of policy making: that is, what policy making would look like in an ideal world. Most thought it important to remind inexperienced officers that reality was more complex than implied by the model.

Howard (2005) has previously observed that the policy environment is a much more complicated place than that which existed in the 1950’s, and consequently is now much more difficult to describe with simple models.

**Research Question**

The review of policy literature outlined in this and the previous chapter suggests that the role of public servants in policy development remains an area where further research is needed. The processes by which new public policy arises from implementation or the development of implementation strategies is not well understood, and remains an area of research that is largely unexplored. It appears that little consideration has been given to the likelihood that relatively junior specialist officers within government departments are central to the creation of some government policy, their actions commonly arising from activities associated with implementation. The link that exists between the development of implementation strategies and the shaping of new policy is central to this thesis.

As noted earlier in this and the previous chapter, discourse around public policy is often focused on a largely theoretical debate over where policy decisions should be made. Empirical research commonly examines policy creation during the inception and development stages (see for example Page and Jenkins, 2005). Policy development that arises from implementation in line-agencies has been less well researched. Empirical accounts of policy not only differ from some policy theory, empirical accounts of the policy process also vary. As Colebatch has pointed out:

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So in our investigation of the nature of policy work, we are confronted by a diversity of accounts, including divergent accounts of the policy process itself of the problem being addressed and of the practices of policy workers. In particular there is a divergence between ‘official’ accounts, which focus on the putative outcome and emphasise clarity and instrumentality, and accounts which focus on the process and stress its interactive and
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interpretive character; accounts from experience are much more likely to be in the second category than the first. (Colebatch, 2006e-b:318)

Colebatch and Radin (2006) have noted that additional research is required in the following areas:

1. Empirical research on the nature of policy work in specific contexts, including: how policy workers get a place at the table, how the question is framed, what discourse is accepted as valid, and how this work relates to the outcome at any point in time; and
2. Identification of the types of activity that practitioners see as policy work.

(Colebatch and Radin, 2006)

Middle order and senior managers within bureaucracies who have been the subject of some research (Page and Jenkins, 2005), by their own admission have limited knowledge of the area in which they are working. More research is needed to establish if relatively junior officers hold similar views to those of their managers, or if in fact these managers act to ‘filter’ policy initiatives.

As noted earlier, this research explores the actions of bureaucrats as they engage in policy work, as active shapers of government policy. It seeks to identify the roles of policy specialists in line agencies, to identify where policy originates and who the key policy actors are. The research also examines critical aspects of policy work and identifies several emergent issues that have the potential to influence the policy effectiveness of government agencies and governments in Australia.

The research highlights the importance of technical policy specialist advice and proposes that technical specialist officers within agencies are tasked with developing implementation strategies for new policies and with the review of existing policies, and they are at times also tasked with development of new policies as agencies seek to address issues within their realm of responsibility. The development of implementation strategies can result in the development of new policy positions by the agency, and often also by the government itself. This work is frequently undertaken by relatively junior specialist officers, who seek to form networks both within their own organisation and with officers from other organisations to assist in these processes. At times they may act as policy entrepreneurs and lead the creation of new or substantially revised policies. These networks require both a vertical and horizontal dimension to succeed. The vertical dimension is critical to limit the amount of
‘filtering’ that may be imposed by differing layers of management, and to ensure that sufficient resources, including their own time, are allocated to the task. The stronger the networks, the more robust the policy initiative is likely to be, the more effective its implementation, and the more likely is the initiative to succeed.

The roles of relatively junior policy officers who are located within government departments have often been neglected. I am investigating their role in policy implementation to answer the following three questions. Firstly, how does our understanding of policy officers affect our understanding of policy and implementation processes? Secondly, how does new policy arise in government? And thirdly, what are the roles of respective actors in the policy process?

To do this it is necessary to identify and characterise the group of people who research and write policy, and then examine how they go about their work. The study must explore relationships within and across organisations, and the role that managers play in facilitating (and filtering or blocking) the development of policy initiatives. Finally, an effort must be made to establish the proportion of these efforts that are driven by a desire to improve the implementation of existing policies, or improve those existing policies that have failed to address the problem for which they were created.
Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

The last chapter has developed the research question for this thesis: “What is the role of respective actors in issue-based policy?” To address this question, the work of policy officers must be examined to develop an understanding of their role, and explore their contribution to policy development. Using a single case study as the basis for research, a qualitative, inductive approach was used in this research to examine work of policy actors in government.

Research questions

The research examines the links between policy development and implementation to determine to what extent new issues-based policy arises from implementation; and the respective roles that policy actors play in these processes. The primary research question is “What is the role of respective actors in issues-based policy?”

The following questions also relate to this research on the role of policy workers in implementing government policy and their (perceived or real) ability to shape or influence policy itself:

1. Who are the policy workers in government, where are they located within government agencies, and what kind of positions do they occupy?
2. Are there any traits or attributes that characterize effective policy workers?
3. What particular skills make these policy workers effective? How important are influencing and negotiation skills to their role?
4. How important are strong policy networks to effective policy actors? What role do policy networks play in the work of effective policy actors?
5. Is there a positive correlation between the formation of extensive policy networks and effective policy?
6. To what extent does new policy arise from within the government line agencies commonly tasked with implementation?
7. To what degree are new policies driven by implementation?
**Research Design**

Research design is the overall approach to the research process, from the theoretical underpinning through to the collection and analysis of data (Hussey and Hussey, 1997:54). Creswell (2009:3) stated that “research designs are plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis”. Creswell (2009:5) also noted that philosophical ideas influence the practice of research, though remain largely hidden. Philosophical ideas can be framed in terms of paradigms or worldview, epistemologies and ontologies. Explanation of these ideas assists to make clear why the researcher has chosen their particular research methods.

Worldviews or paradigms represent a general conceptualisation of the world and of research that influence the researcher’s methodological preference (Creswell, 2009:6). The worldviews or paradigms held by researchers commonly explain their preference for adopting either quantitative or qualitative approaches to research, or a mix of both.

**Quantitative Research Methodologies**

The positivist paradigm assumes that there is an objective, external world that is amenable to quantitative measurement. Through a scientific mode of enquiry, researchers are able to acquire knowledge of this world (Clark, 2002:32). As Clark (2002:32) has noted, “Ultimately, the aim is to develop valid and reliable ways of collecting ‘facts’ about society, which can then be statistically analysed in order to produce explanations about how the world operates”.

As Creswell (2009:7) has noted, most quantitative research begins with a test of a theory. The evidence obtained in research is imperfect; the aim is not to confirm the theory, but to determine if sufficient evidence exists to reject it. Quantitative research design includes requirements to identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes, to reduce broad questions into a small, discrete, set of ideas to test (Creswell, 2007:6). As Creswell states: “The knowledge that develops through a post-positivist lens is based on careful observation and measurement of the objective reality that exists out there in the world” (Creswell, 2009:7).

Neuman (2006:81) has stated that, broadly defined, the positivist paradigm is the approach to natural sciences. Positivism, when applied to the social sciences, is described by Neuman as
“an organised method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behaviour in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity” (Neuman, 2006:82). Positivist approaches to research imply that the researcher has identified a cause-effect relationship, expressed as a hypothesis, that logically derives from a general theory. The researcher will attempt to measure the strength of this relationship, examining the evidence and possibly replicating the research of others. During the research, the researcher remains detached, neutral and objective, the research is objective and free of the influence of subjective values (Neuman, 2006:86, 87).

**Qualitative Research Methodologies**

Creswell (2009:4) described qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. Creswell (2009:4) also noted that the process typically involves exploring emerging research questions and processes by inductively analysing data to build from particular instances to general themes and through interpreting (subjectively) the meanings of the data. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are in effect, embracing the idea of multiple realities (Creswell, 2009:16). In terms of the research for this thesis, a qualitative approach provides the opportunity to explore the relationships between individuals within policy networks, and the way that these relationships change over time and during the differing stages of the policy process.

Neuman (2006) noted that interpretive, or qualitative, approaches to research are concerned with how people interact with each other. Noting that interpretive researchers study meaningful social action, he described the interpretive approach to research as “the systematic analysis of socially meaningful actions through the direct, detailed observation of people in natural settings” (Neuman 2006:??page??). The aim of this approach being to understand how people create and maintain their social worlds” (Neuman, 2006:88).

Krauss (2005:261) has stated that different modes of research allow us to understand different phenomena, so the methodology employed must match the particular phenomenon of interest. Krauss (2005:758) also noted that there are many topics within the social sciences that are deeply embedded with meaning. Human beings construct multiple realities
as each person attempts to impose order on the world they perceive. Krauss (2005:760) believed that meaning lies in cognition, rather than in elements external to the perceiver.

Social constructionism recognizes that individuals have subjective meanings of their experience, and that these meanings are varied and multiple (Creswell, 2007:20). The researcher relies as much as possible on the participant’s views of the situation in order to make sense of the meanings that the research subjects have of the world (Creswell, 2007:21).

An interpretivist approach to research, based on a social constructionist paradigm, was considered the most appropriate approach in this thesis. This is because the differing views of the policy process, as previously identified in the literature review, means that policy practitioners are unlikely to share universally accepted views of policy. Each participant may have a unique perception of the policy process: the meaning that each individual policy worker attributes to their own role may differ. It was therefore anticipated that actors in issues-based policy might well express differing views regarding policy influence and the roles that various policy actors do play, or should, play.

**Overview of methodology**

An inductive qualitative research methodology was selected as the best way to examine the work of policy officers in agencies within the Western Australian Public Service. The research design is based on a single case study, using a combination of documentary research, semi-structured interviews and participant research. The case study: development of a significant land use planning policy in Western Australia, examines the behaviour and interactions between policy actors, their role and function within government organisations, and the role and effectiveness of networks. The research addresses the work of policy actors, their understanding of the policy process, their relative influence and position in the organisational structure, and the nature of the work they undertake to implement government policies within the context of land use planning.

The research examined the experiences of government officers who were working in the land use planning field or related areas, identifying their roles, organisational positions and areas of expertise. Additionally, the research considered the role and influence of government officers in shaping or influencing policy decisions. The primary source of information is data gathered from a series of in-depth interviews that were conducted with
officers working on the South-West Framework policy initiative of the Western Australian Planning Commission. Development of the South-West Framework was undertaken by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure with the support of an interagency working group consisting of state and local government officers. During an interview for this research, the Chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission described the South-West Framework as being the most significant policy initiative yet to be undertaken for the South West region, and one of the most significant land use policy initiatives to be undertaken in Western Australia (Interview 15). The success of the South-West Framework has led to preparation of regional planning frameworks for other regional areas.

Public servants who assisted in preparation of the South-West Framework or who were influential in its endorsement were interviewed to examine their role in developing or shaping policy processes. The majority of interviewees were employed in middle level management and more senior positions, and were generally in charge of technical or policy sections within line departments of state government. Interviews were also conducted with policy and technical officers in non-management positions, ministerial advisors (including one chief of staff), heads of government authorities, and several senior government ministers. Using a comparative interviewing technique, analysis of early responses was used to guide more focused questions that were put to respondents as themes emerged from the data.

A snowball sampling method was used to identify additional interviewees. Snowball sampling has been found to be particularly effective in identifying and accessing ‘hidden’ populations, in situations where populations are hard to identify or access (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). In this research snowball sampling proved a particularly effective method for identifying policy actors who are ‘hidden’ in the middle ranks of government line agencies. See Appendix 3 for the list of interviewees.

Additionally, documentary research has been used to triangulate research findings. Documents that were used in this research included job description forms, corporate statements and publications, outcomes of taskforce workshops, submissions made by stakeholders and draft and final versions of policies and strategies released by the Western Australian Planning Commission, the latter including draft and final versions of the South-West Framework.
**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research was described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as consisting of a set of interpretive activities. Qualitative research methods enable the study of social interactions in their natural surroundings (Neuman, 2006, Clark, 2002). Qualitative research methodology allows the research to focus on developing an understanding of the motivations and other factors that influence and guide the actions of policy officers. Flick (2002) noted that qualitative research studies the participant’s knowledge and practices. It analyses interactions and ways of dealing with problems in a particular field. It takes into account that viewpoints and practices differ due to different subjective perspectives (Flick 2002:6). The imperative of qualitative research is to reconstruct the subject’s viewpoint (Flick 2002:6).

This perspective was supported by Neuman (2006:88) who stated that a qualitative researcher adopts an interpretive approach to the research question. The role of the researcher is to develop an understanding of how people interact and how they construct and maintain individual social worlds. Researchers can also examine the processes by which people actively construct and transform the existing conditions (Neuman, 2006:93).

Flick (2002:4) listed the essential features of qualitative research as: the correct choice of appropriate methods and theories; recognition and analysis of different perspectives; researchers’ reflections as part of the process of knowledge production; and the variety of approaches and perspectives. The empirical starting point is the subjective meaning that individuals attribute to their environments and activities.

Flick (2002:24) stated that there are three theoretical positions that the researcher may assume in qualitative research: the subject’s point of view; makings of social realities; and cultural framing of social realities. Beginning with an examination of personal viewpoints, the research position is broadened to include interactions between participants, and finally to consider the rules within which the participants operate. These rules include those that are implicit and unconscious, as well as those explicit and more overt rules imposed by organisational culture, professional and personal ethics. Flick’s (2002) breakdown of theoretical positions provides a methodology for understanding why policy workers adopt a particular position or undertake a specific approach to resolve an issue.

Neuman (2006) found that there are three orders of interpretation that broadly correlate to Flick’s (2002) three theoretical positions. The first order refers to the personal views and
motives of the subject group; the second order is the researcher’s discovery, reconstruction
and attempt to find meaning, whereby the researcher places the different streams of
behaviour into their context; the third order is a broader level of interpretation where the
researcher assigns a general theoretical significance (Neuman, 2006:160). Neuman
(2006:97) noted that while people make choices, the choices are confined to what they feel is
possible. People’s choices are limited by a number of factors, including their own perception
of what they can or cannot achieve. Policy officers operating in similar positions within
government may have differing views over their ability to impose or implement changes to
influence implementation processes.

Maxwell (2009:216) proposed a research design consisting of five components: clearly
stated goals that establish why the study is being conducted; a conceptual framework on
which to base the research; research questions that lead specifically to what the researcher
wants to learn from the study; the methods that will be used; and the validity of the results.
Maxwell (2009:221) proposed that there are five particular areas of research for which
qualitative studies are particularly useful: 1. understanding meanings, how the participants
make sense of events and actions, and how these influence their behaviour; 2. understanding
the context in which participants act and the influence this has on their actions; 3. identifying
unanticipated phenomena and influences and generating new “grounded” theories; 4.
understanding the processes that lead to outcomes; and 5. developing casual explanations.
Consideration of these factors suggests that a qualitative research methodology is the most
appropriate approach to address the research question in this research.

This research examines individual perceptions of the policy process from the viewpoint of
policy actors in government agencies. Examination of the respective roles of policy actors in
issues-based policy necessitates examination of how policy actors conduct their work, and
the rules circumscribing their activity. A qualitative research methodology is the most
appropriate choice for this research as it provides a mechanism to examine the actions and
motivations of policy actors to assist in understanding why they do what they do.

**Inductive and Deductive research methods**

Merriam (1998) has suggested that the aim of qualitative research designs is to inductively
build theories. Inductive research is the process of moving from a set of observations to a
theory (Gilbert, 2002) and involves a non-linear process of theory construction and testing.
Beginning with a general topic and general ideas, these can be refined and elaborated into more exact theoretical concepts (Neuman, 2006:60). Additional questions are able to be incorporated into the research design as the research topic emerges (Neuman, 2006:153).

Inductive approaches to researching the work of policy workers provides scope for questions to be refined and additional, more informative questions to be asked as data is collected and evaluated. Examining the work and views of policy officers at different levels and in different organisations is likely to lead to the emergence of new questions, and may reveal unexpected answers or opinions over the way in which policy work is conducted.

Merriman (1988) recommended seeking an appropriate blend or balance of deductive and inductive research. However, Maxwell (2009) cautioned that highly inductive, loosely designed studies may extend the time taken to complete research and result in wasted time and effort. Maxwell suggested that an amount of structuring is necessary, but more importantly, the structuring must be used effectively. This research uses an inductive approach to allow some flexibility. However, it has also included elements of a deductive approach; pre-structuring of the research topic and research questions, to ensure that the research remains focused on the research topic.

An inductive approach is appropriate to this research as it is intended to discover who the relevant policy actors are and glean information about the roles they perform in issues-based policy. While the research question does presume that policy actors do play a role in issues-based policy, the research is not testing a pre-existent thesis; rather, the research entails an inductive process to discover who the relevant policy actors are, and the roles that they play. Taking this approach has allowed the researcher to develop theories based on the perceptions of policy actors, which could then be compared with existing theories of the policy process.

**Case Study Methodology**

Neuman (2006) noted that case study research places cases, and not variables, ‘centre stage’ and helps researchers connect the actions of individual people to large scale processes and structures. Case studies also allow many aspects of policy work to be studied in depth (Neuman, 2006:158). For these reasons, Neuman argued that case studies are likely to produce the best theories (2006:41).
Yin (2009a) listed five differing strategies that can be used to collect information for research: experiments; surveys; archival analysis; histories; and case studies. A case study being “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the object of study and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009a:13). Yin believed that the three conditions that distinguished the use of case study research from other methods were: the type of research question; the extent of control the researcher was able to exert over events; and the degree of focus on contemporary events. Yin further pointed out that, although case study research may be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory in nature (2009a:8), case studies offer effective strategies to answer explanatory questions of “how” and “why” events occurred in situations where the researcher has little or no control over events (2009a:9).

Yin (2009a:5) noted that although each of the five strategies has its own unique characteristics, there is considerable overlap among them. The main benefit of using a case study approach is the ability to deal with a variety of evidence including documents, interviews and observations (Yin, 2009a:8). However, Yin (2009bb) also cautioned that sources of data need to be considered carefully to ensure that sufficient, relevant data is available to undertake the research. Dul and Hak (2008) believed that Yin’s definition of a case study was somewhat deficient as it applied only to an enquiry of one instance. They further distinguished between comparative case studies in which data from multiple instances were compared, and single case studies in which data from a single instance was examined (Dul & Hak 2008:4).

Merriam (1988) noted that the strength of case study research is its ability to address complex social science issues about which little is known. These issues usually entail “how and why” problems, rather than “what” or “how should” problems (Merriam 1988:94). Merriman stated that case studies were particularly appropriate to researching “a contemporary phenomenon within its dynamically changing, real life context where the boundaries of the phenomenon and its context (place, period, people and process) are not clear-cut; and multiple sources of evidence are used” (Merriam, 1988:95).

This research topic clearly meets Merriam’s (1988) criteria. Here, multiple sources of data will be used to identify who policy specialists are, what they do, and by inference – where they do it. The case study method is therefore an appropriate research methodology to
address the research question. Other advantages of this particular case study arise from access to documentary data and policy workers, providing context of the case study – to develop a new approach to policy implementation, and the number of policy participants from differing state government agencies.

Clark (2002) has noted that qualitative researchers commonly use methods such as participant and non-participant observation and non-standardised interviews to gather information. This research uses a variety of methods, including documentary research and participant observation to triangulate data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with the study participants.

A single case study was selected as the preferred research methodology for this research for the following reasons: availability of data and sources of information; existence of working relationships with other policy workers; cooperation from the department within which pertinent activities took place; the number and differing levels of policy workers who were actively engaged in formation of the policy; and, the support and cooperation of the statutory bodies for whom the policy was created. Use of a case study provided an opportunity to examine the activities that policy workers engaged to implement and influence an area of state government policy through preparation of what is effectively a detailed policy implementation strategy.

**Data Sources**

Evidence was sourced from both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected through observations, interviews and documents (published and unpublished). Secondary data sources included public and unpublished documents, administrative records and website based materials.

This research began with an examination Flick’s (2002) first position, namely; understanding the phenomenon from the subject’s point of view in order to provide some insights into the activities of the subjects. Insights collected through the use of semi-structured interviews were compared to determine similarities or differences. This data was used to ascertain if there was evidence that differing perceptions of an issue could lead to differing courses of action or different approaches to policy implementation. This initial round of interviews was followed by an examination of the interactions with co-workers, peers, personnel external to
the agency, and within professional networks. Next, consideration was given to the organizational and cultural context within which policy officers conduct their work. Differences between cultures and priorities of the different agencies involved in the case study needed to be recognised in order to evaluate their impact on officer values or behaviour. Finally, patterns and trends were identified and evaluated in order to assess their implications for policy implementation.

Four primary sources were used for collection of data for this research:

1. interviews to gather the views of policy workers, senior bureaucrats, ministerial advisors and members statutory committees established by the Western Australian government;
2. documentary data from public documents, internal working papers and resolutions of statutory government committees;
3. documentary data from job application packs, position description forms and job advertisements; and,
4. personal observations of the researcher.

**Interviews**

Maxwell (2009) suggested that interview questions used in qualitative research should be directed towards finding the meaning of events and activities as ascribed by the people involved in them; or gleaning the influence of the context upon events and activities. Interviews conducted with public servants can be used to examine the workings of public officers (Page, 2006, Page and Jenkins, 2005).

Merriam (1988) further suggested that an interview should start with an invitation for the interviewee to tell the story of their experience. However, the researcher must also have a number of “probe” questions prepared beforehand to guide the interview towards discussion of particular research issues, in case the interviewee does not raise them early in the interview (Merriam, 1988:101). Merriam (1988) noted that the “probe” questions should form a major part of the prepared interview and should provide a reliable framework for analysis of data.

This research used a series of semi structured interviews to examine the experiences of public officers working in the policy field. In doing so, these data identify the meaning that
policy workers ascribe to their work. The interviews were based on a series of questions that attempted to draw out the interviewee’s experiences, observations and views on public policy and policy processes. The main aim of the interviews was to identify the commonalities or differences in the way that public servants view and approach public policy and, if possible, to identify the extent to which policy is central to their work. Interviewees were asked to discuss how, in their experience, policy is implemented, and shaped, in government. Interviewees also discussed the importance of several aspects of policy work: effective networking, engagement in collaborative partnerships, education and experience, and understanding of the policy process. All interviewees were encouraged to tell their stories of the policy process and share, in their own words, their views and experiences of policy work.

Flick (2007) has advocated the use of semi-structured interviews as a means of keeping some methodological features of the research constant. An interview guide was developed and applied more or less consistently for each interview to assist with comparative data analysis. Flick noted that by including a relatively high degree of standardization in the interview design, the data will more likely reflect differences between the interviewees (2007:42-43).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:27) stated that a professional interview is a conversation that has purpose and involves a specific approach and technique. Interviews are semi-structured conversations that focus on certain themes and may include suggested questions. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) also noted that ethical considerations are critical to interview research. The interviewer must create a stage where the interviewee feels free and safe to talk about private events that are being recorded for later public use (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). They point out that this involves a delicate balance between the interviewer’s pursuit of knowledge and respect for the integrity of the interview subject (2009:16). Care was therefore taken to ensure that the information included in this research would not cause harm or embarrassment to the participants, or other persons.

The majority of interviewees whose roles were examined in this research were employed in middle level management or more senior positions who were generally in charge of technical or policy sections within line departments of state government. Other interviewees were employed as policy and technical officers in non-management positions, ministerial advisors, heads of government authorities, and senior government ministers.
A snowball sampling method was used to identify the additional interviewees. This methodology proved effective in ‘discovering’ influential policy actors who were often ‘hidden’ in line agencies. Commonly, these policy actors held positions in government that were not obviously related to policy: they were not located in discrete ‘policy’ sections, nor did their position titles contain the word ‘policy’. Snowball sampling also proved effective to identify the extensive scope of the professional networks of policy actors in government.

With one exception, all the interviewees gave permission for the interviews to be recorded. After permission was given to record the interview, the recording device was placed centrally between interviewee and interviewer and was kept in plain sight at all times when recordings were being made. On several occasions, after the interview was terminated the topic of conversation returned to public policy; when this occurred, the interviewee was asked permission to re-commence recording of the conversation.

Care was taken to conduct interviews at times and locations suitable to interviewees. As a result, interviews were conducted in a variety of forums including offices, meeting rooms, restaurants and cafes. Interviewees were at times very open in expressing their opinions of the policy process, and of other policy actors; however, care was taken to only use information that would not cause any harm or embarrassment to the interviewee, or other persons. Information provided during interviews was not selected for use in this thesis if it was considered that it might possibly be defamatory or could potentially cause embarrassment. On several occasions, interviewees requested that particular comments or statements were not used in the research. On other occasions, potentially sensitive information was specifically discussed with the relevant interviewees prior to its inclusion, and some of this information also was excluded. To protect their anonymity, interviewees were described by role and position and individuals were not named during the research.

The snowball sampling technique enabled the research to expand beyond the initial sampling group (members of the South-West Framework project taskforce). Interviewees were asked to nominate other persons who they considered to be influential policy actors as potential participants in this research. Consequently, all participants in this research were recommended either by their agency or by other participants, as being persons who were influential in shaping public policy.
Reliance on interviews alone may place limitations on the evidence that can be examined. Evidence obtained from interviews may contain bias, and viewpoints will almost certainly differ dependent upon the experience and views of the public officers interviewed. This research addresses the issues of potential bias by selecting interviewees from a broad cross section of officers from several government agencies who work in a single policy area within state government departments in Western Australia. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the experiences and views of these officers will most likely differ from those of public servants working in other policy areas.

**Documentary information**

Documents form an important source of data, the importance of which has often been overlooked (McCulloch, 2004). They are useful in assisting the researcher to understand the historical and organisational context within which the research subjects operate. Documentary data includes information from a wide variety of written sources, including the written outcomes of meetings or working groups, official reports and public statements. Other document sources include letters and email correspondence, newspaper articles, press releases, and public advertisements. Less well utilised sources comprise internal documents of government that may be made available to the researcher, such as position descriptions, internal memoranda, corporate statements, and unpublished reports and working papers.

For this research, documents were used to examine the stated policy position of government and compare this with the policy positions adopted by differing government departments and with departmental culture, as reported through conversations and interviews. Documents were also used to verify the role of policy workers within their organisations, track progression of the policy development through outcomes of workshops and meetings, and examine the impact of various influences on the final policy position that was ultimately promulgated.

All of the documents used in this research were readily available to members of the public or obtainable under the *Western Australian Freedom of Information Act 1992*. The majority of documents obtained for this research were publically available from agency websites; others were available on request from individual agencies. However, several documents were used that are not publically available. Where these were included in the research, permission was obtained from the relevant agency for their use. As one public servant noted during an
interview: “As long as a document does not contain contentious or confidential information, it’s usually very easy to obtain it from a government agency by just asking…. You just need to know who to ask” (Interview 37). Notably, one finding of this research is that technical policy specialists can be very helpful in identifying relevant documents and are often the ‘people to ask’ when requesting permission to access non-confidential government documents.

Job descriptions

Written job descriptions are a valuable source of data for researchers studying the workings of public policy. Information from written job descriptions may be used to determine the expectations that agencies have of policy workers, in terms of their duties, level of responsibility, reporting relationships and the minimum qualifications. When positions are advertised, job descriptions are published as a part of application packs for the position, or as supporting material. Job descriptions for positions that are already held within the organization may also be obtained by application to the respective department. Job descriptions, obtained from both website based application packs as well as those provided directly by government departments were used as a source of data for this research.

Stone (2005) noted that a job description is “a written statement explaining why a job exists, what the job holder actually does, how they do it and under what conditions the job is performed” (Stone, 2005:145). Job descriptions outline the job objectives, duties and responsibilities, relationships, authority, qualifications, experience (and knowledge) and performance standards associated with the position (Stone, 2005:145). In the Western Australian public sector, Job Description Forms (JDF) or Position Description Forms (PDF) are used to document details of a position that exists within an agency: its reporting relationships, essential qualifications and experience, and an outline of the duties expected of the incumbent. Often the JDF or PDF contains a breakdown or summary list of duties, detailing the importance of each and the amount or proportion of time expected to be spent on each.

Job descriptions can be used to identify public servants whose official tasks include the development, implementation or review of public policy. It warrants a mention here that the word “policy” was not reflected in the job titles of many employees whose official tasks actually involve the creation, review and implementation of public policy. Reporting
relationships, stated in job descriptions, can also be used to identify the particular area of the organisation within which the position is located.

Job descriptions for professional, specialist positions also state the requisite academic qualifications for an applicant to be suitable for consideration for possible appointment to a given position. Qualifications may be listed as ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’, providing a method of weighting the importance of qualifications to the position. The relative importance of ‘public policy’ qualifications can be compared with that of other areas, such as management qualifications, or those related to the specific area for which the policy is developed. It is noted here that Page and Jenkins (2005) found that many of the policy workers working in the United Kingdom at a managerial level did not have relevant qualifications and had limited knowledge of the policy area for which they were responsible. Job descriptions provide a method to examine if this is also the case within Australia and if this is true of policy workers operating at other levels of within the public sector.

Information obtained from interviews about a person’s role and their assessment of the relative importance of the duties they perform may be compared with the information contained in their job description, and with the expectations stated by senior management to triangulate data. Comparisons made between the written job descriptions and the work that is done by the worker can assist to identify the level of autonomy the officer is able to exercise over their role.

As noted above, this research utilizes several sources of documentary data that may have been overlooked by many qualitative researchers in the past. Several of these sources are described in more detail, followed by an explanation of how some barriers to obtaining public information from government sources may be overcome.

**Additional information in job application packs**

In addition to job descriptions, job advertisements and application packs contain rich data including the following:

1. Job advertisements state the job title and give a brief description of the position and its duties; they may also contain details of the organisation, its culture and objectives.
2. Application packs commonly include a description of the organisation, its role, culture and organisation hierarchy.

Advertisements for vacant positions commonly describe the role of agencies and inform on the policy environment in which the agency operates. They describe the specific areas of policy for which the agency has responsibility, such as health, education, environment or planning. They may also describe the focus and direction of the agency and current activities or priorities. They may also provide some indication of the culture that exists within an agency, expressed through a description of the agency’s role or through formal statement of agency values.

Job advertisements and application packs are publicly available forms of data. They are used internationally, are produced for almost all publicly advertised positions, and are readily available upon application or via download from public websites. The search tools included on job search websites can be used to identify jobs within particular employment sectors or jobs with selected attributes. Most websites provide an alerting service for new positions that meet specified criteria. Job search sites are a particularly effective tool for searching particular position titles where a researcher wishes to examine if those who occupy a given type of position in different organisations perform a similar role.

In conclusion, job application packs and position descriptions can offer an insight into the role, experiences and abilities of policy officers and the organisation within which they work. They can be used to identify officers working in a similar field and they allow comparison between organisations. They form a source of data that is publicly available, though one that has largely been ignored by policy researchers. These sources were important to obtaining data for this research.

Public documents and statements

In Australia, increasing amounts of data is being made available to researchers through the release of information by governments into the public domain. Much of this information is published on the websites of politicians or government departments and is relatively easy to locate. This data can broadly be grouped into two categories: a) published data, and b) unpublished data. These are elaborated upon below.

a) Published data
Policies, strategies, press releases and statements are regularly published by governments on public websites to advise of their activities, regulations and proposals. Draft versions of new policy directions are often published for a period of time for the purpose of eliciting public comment. Governments publish transcripts of parliamentary proceedings. Ministers and governments release statements regarding particular positions of government.

Government departments also publish information on their operations, strategic business plans and on various topics relating to their role in government. Public information is also available from these sources. Government websites are also a source of public data. A third source of data is from the websites of the boards, committees and authorities established to assist the implementation of government policies. These latter organisations are often linked closely with government departments. While the relationships between departments and such authorities may vary, in Western Australia, board or commission websites are used to publish information, policies and positions relating to their areas of responsibility. These websites are also used to publish ‘draft’ policies where they are released for public comment for a period of time.

Corporate information, such as annual business plans, is a source of data that informs upon the current structure of an agency, its role and its priority programs. Budgetary information within business plans can be used to identify where resources are to be allocated within the department, or where additional resources are to be allocated to address particular issues. Business plans often identify the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ within government as their budget information depicts how departments and work areas within departments compete for their share of the limited resources available.

Information was obtained for this research from a number of government websites, including those maintained by departments, commissions and statutory authorities. The case study described in this research also resulted in publication of documents, including draft policies on the website of a statutory government commission. As will be seen below, information published on websites of official publications is not the only form of government information used for this research. Other sources were also used.

b) Unpublished data
Government departments often undertake research as part of their business. Research officers within government departments disseminate their research to other public servants through both official and unofficial channels. Much of this information is not contentious, nor politically sensitive. It is available for release to stakeholders outside of government, including researchers. The difficulty lies in finding out where this information exists, and identifying its source.

Not all public information is published online and it is often possible to obtain additional public information directly from government agencies or from other sources. Unless it has some degree of confidentiality, additional information is often obtainable from government departments. In the case of the Western Australian Public Service, publications are often accompanied by a brief description and the contact details of an officer who may be contacted to obtain more information. This person may either be working in a corporate communications section, or within the area that prepared the publication for release. It is open for a member of the public or a researcher to ask to discuss particular aspects of a publication with someone who was involved or directed its development. Direct contact with policy officers who prepared a policy can result in the provision of additional written information that was not included in the publication.

Preparation of public policy and policy implementation strategies requires collection and assessment of large amounts of information and data to inform on the extent of the issue and on current trends relevant to the issue, and evaluate possible responses. Generally, the published information consists of a summary of the issue, brief discussion of the appropriateness of the selected response and the rationale for the new position, and the implementation measures that will be employed. However, this brief summary of the policy response is supported by a large volume of documentary information, which is held within government departments. This information, comprising various reports, discussion papers and other forms of data is often available by request.

Government reports and papers are often produced by public servants to inform internal and external stakeholders about an issue or a proposed response to an issue. They do not always result in changes to policy and are often not published on publically accessible websites. However, they are often freely available to specialists working outside of government. Public servants, particularly at a senior level, also present papers at conferences and
seminars. These are usually written by more junior public servants and may be based on a substantive amount of research. These may be published on conference websites, or may be obtained on request from the author.

Unpublished data also includes information developed by government agencies to inform staff about their activities. Often these materials are intended to inform agency staff on recent trends, new directions proposed by the organisation, contentious issues that have arisen, or new initiatives of the agency.

**Participant observations**

Participant observation is an effective data collection technique and can assist to select sites and events, or identify focus groups for study (Flick, 2007). Flick (2007) also noted that participants often observe many things they did not expect, and that these observations may lead to new insights into events or the environment in which they occur.

Observations and information obtained by the researcher from spontaneous, informal discussions with other policy workers during the course of this study provided a significant source of data. Informal discussions often provided insight into particular aspects of the workings of policy officers that had been previously overlooked or perhaps considered less important than was ultimately found. Notes were taken of informal discussions as soon as possible after the conversations occurred. Observations and information obtained through such informal discussions were used to triangulate other, verifiable data.

**Notes on difficulties encountered in collecting data**

A constraint to understanding how public servants develop strategies to implement public policy is the difficulty in obtaining verifiable data. Public servants may not be willing or able to share their views openly on certain subjects, particularly when discussing government policy positions. Identifying and accessing the appropriate people for interviews may also pose difficulties. Finally, although documentary research is an important tool for understanding policy processes and examining internal workings of government, documentary evidence from within departments may be difficult or impossible to obtain.

Empirical data collection is aided by understanding the processes of government, workings of the public service, availability of data sources, and the constraints that may be imposed on
their publication and use. This research is based largely on data that has been collected through public documents, selected internal working papers, interviews with public servants who work, or have worked in policy implementation. All documentary data used in this research was obtained by request to the relevant agency for use in this research. Although access to documents was aided by the position of the researcher within a state government agency, the documents that were used in the research are available to researchers outside of the public sector.

**Regarding obtaining information from Government Agency files**

An issue facing researchers is the difficulty accessing non-confidential information from government departments. Requests made to government departments may be ignored or, when acted upon, the information provided may be less than expected or take longer than expected to deliver. While the right of access to public information in Western Australia is established under the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*, unless a request is made for specific documents, the applicant may encounter difficulty in obtaining the information they are seeking.

Government departments rely on the retention of information to ensure that corporate knowledge is maintained. All agencies have policies and procedures establishing requirements for the collection and storage of important information, notably including research, and setting out how this information may be made available to the public. Most agencies have very effective information collection and storage systems. However, retrieval of information can be time consuming for public officers, particularly where the specific location of the information is unknown. With the vast amounts of data collected by governments, even the people working within the system may encounter difficulty in locating information that has been stored by others. Furthermore, difficulties exist if the searcher does not have a detailed understanding of the topic area as the relevant information may be spread across a number of project files. Files containing the relevant information often contain large numbers of unrelated documents that have no relevance to the research. Therefore careful, and time-consuming sorting may be required to identify documents with pertinent information as other documents within project files cannot be provided, due to ethical considerations or for reasons of confidentiality.
An understanding of the way that governments collect and store information is essential. Public information is retained in a structured file system and, where it exists in hardcopy form, it is usually ordered chronologically (in time series). The ability to track events in time is also an important functional capability in the public service, and this capability is therefore normally retained in computerised data systems where files are stored in digital form. Consequently, public servants who have access to these files, in hardcopy and digital forms, are able to track the progress of a project or policy from its inception to its conclusion.

It is important also to comprehend that the system of document storage is often related to, or is dependent upon, the function of the department that is storing the documents. For instance, documents relating to development of specific policies are allocated dedicated files; however, in land use planning documents are usually stored in files relating to the physical location (rather than by topic). Therefore, the documents relating to the implementation of land use planning policies will normally be found in different locations from those relating to development or review of the respective land use policies.

Key to a data strategy is identifying an ‘expert source’ for the particular data set required. The term ‘expert source’ in this instance refers to the public servant who has a detailed knowledge and understanding of the data that is being sought. Unless the research is examining record systems themselves, the ‘expert source’ is unlikely to be found in the records department. However, they can usually be identified early in the research process by asking the questions: “Who works, or has worked, in this particular area?”; “Who has the most knowledge about this particular area?”

This research was facilitated by the role of the researcher who was also the ‘expert source’ within the particular government department. In this instance, the researcher was able to access information from numerous files relating to the policy development, and its implementation. Information collected from other agencies for this research was obtained after enlisting the assistance of a ‘specialist source’ within those agencies to help locate the information being sought. On many occasions, officers ‘volunteered’ information after being informed of the research, or for the purpose of assisting development of the policy that forms the subject of the case study. Although all of the data used for the research would have been available through application under the Freedom of Information Act 1992, it is unlikely that someone without specific knowledge would be able to identify all the necessary material.
It is suggested here that methodologies for obtaining public information are an area that has
been largely ignored by researchers, and so present an area meriting further research
attention. Although this research was facilitated by the researcher’s position within a
government agency, it must be acknowledged that this apparent advantage may also have
limited the researcher in regards to the collection techniques that were actually chosen. Other
more effective data collection techniques than those described, and used in this research,
may need to be developed for use by researchers outside of government departments.

**Regarding difficulty identifying and accessing public officers**

Researching the role of public servants is difficult for a number of reasons. Difficulty begins
with the task of identifying the correct way to approach an agency for information; in this
task academics must negotiate a maze of permissions and levels in order to gain access to the
relevant public servants. Perhaps not surprisingly then, most academic research into policy
workers has concentrated on the upper levels of agencies, or the policy units in central
agencies. These levels are both highly visible and highly influential in shaping government
decisions, and so deserve special attention. However, they are not the only influential actors
in the policy process. Although as individuals, bureaucrats outside of this group may have
less obvious influence, collectively they are significant players in the policy process.

Commonly the most visible groups of policy workers rely on public servants working
‘behind the scenes’ to supply and evaluate information, propose policy solutions and most
importantly, to implement those policies that are formally adopted. As discovered by Page
and Jenkins (2005), the people ‘sitting at the policy table’ are likely to have a broad, but
limited understanding of the issues. Decisions have already been made to determine what to
bring to the ‘table’, often based on detailed understanding of the issues gained through
analysis, research and long experience of officers working in the relevant area. This
important part of the policy process is less visible and involves participants who are more
difficult to identify.

Having identified that many public servants are actively involved in shaping or
implementing policy, few are able to freely discuss their work outside of the circles of
government. While these matters may be discussed internally, government employees are
constrained from commenting publically on government policies, programs or initiatives.
Although this does not constrain government employees from discussing matters pertaining
to their role or answering general questions about the work of their department, academics must be aware that there may be some reluctance to discuss certain matters.

Accessing the relevant officers is complicated by their dispersal within, and between agencies, and further, by the lack of obvious position titles, or consistent nomenclature. The majority of people whose work influences policy are located in government line agencies. Position titles often do not include the word ‘policy’. Position titles are more likely to reflect technical roles or in the case of managers, the functions of the department or section of which they are in charge. Identifying the work areas that are dealing with the wider policy area of interest commonly leads to people directly involved in the relevant policy process. Further, the researcher should be aware that it is not uncommon for different groups within the same department, or in different departments dealing with similar issues, to sometimes offer conflicting opinions or advice to their respective department heads. Also, it is not unknown for several groups to be working on a similar issue with no knowledge of each other. The snowball interviewing technique used in this research led to the discovery of several such groups; and it has proved to be an effective tool, particularly in the identification of “undiscovered” policy workers.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted in several stages, beginning with evaluation of interview data to identify common threads and emergent themes. Data obtained from documentary evidence and personal observations during the course of the case study was also examined to triangulate findings.

Kvale (2007) noted that analysis of interview (and other) qualitative data begins while the data is being collected and continues through the interview and collection process. Kvale stated that the process of analysing data from interviews can be broken down into six steps:

1. the discussion that occurs between interviewer and interview subject;
2. re-evaluation of beliefs and opinions by the interview subject as the interview progresses (Kvale noted that this process may form the basis for a self-correcting interview);
3. interpretation of data during the interview as the interviewer condenses and begins to interpret the data, then requests the interview subject to clarify that the interviewer has correctly interpreted the subject’s meaning;
4. detailed analysis of data that is undertaken after the interview as the interviewer transcribes the interview data and applies various methods to order and analyse it;
5. a re-interview, if necessary to verify the interviewer’s interpretations of the subject’s statements; and,
6. action, as the subjects begin to act on the new insights they gained during the interview (Kvale, 2007:102).

Data from interviews were captured through a combination of written notes made during the interviews and preparation of interpretive reports compiled as soon as possible after the interviews. Interviews were also recorded, and an audio recording of each interview was used for review and verification of key points during subsequent data analysis stages.

An interview report was prepared as soon after the interview as was practicable, to summarise and interpret the results of each interview and capture the key points that had been raised. Interview notes were used extensively for this purpose. Recordings of interviews were not transcribed, but were used for review and verification of key points, and to obtain requisite details when note taking had failed to capture parts of interview conversations.

Although Seidman (2006) stated a preference to separate interviews from data analysis in order to avoid the potential for the researcher to impose meaning on subsequent interviews, Wood (2000) cautioned that this may lead to some meaning being lost. Particularly, Wood (2000) noted that as time passes the nuances of an interview can often be lost and, as these nuances often rely on context or non-verbal communications they cannot be captured by interview notes or even, recording. Wood (2000) therefore argued that interview reports are critical to capture and review data from interviews and these reports must be compiled as soon after the interview as possible in order to avoid data loss.

Creswell’s (2007:159) simplified method for analysing phenomenological data was adapted and used to analyse the interview data. Interview subjects were asked to describe their personal experiences in the policy field. Using interview notes, a list of significant
Statements was compiled for each interview and this was included in each interview report. Significant statements were then grouped into themes. A textual description of the phenomenon was developed, followed by a description of how the phenomenon occurred. Finally, these were combined into a composite description of what occurred.

Interviews provided the main source of data; the interviews were initially examined for evidence of common experiences or shared views. Where there was evidence of shared or differing views, these were explored to determine if there were underlying paradigms (whether commonly held or differing between divergent groups), common beliefs, or common views on the policy process. Attempts were also made to determine if there was a tendency for officers sharing similar beliefs to form networks and if so, if officers used these networks to influence policy implementation.

**Triangulation**

Findings from interviews were triangulated through examination of documentary evidence, comparison between interviews, and personal observations. In particular, documents were examined to find supporting or contradictory data. Interviews from focus groups were also triangulated through interviews conducted with several agency chiefs, heads of statutory authorities, policy officers in central agencies and the State Minister for Planning. Interviews conducted with a number of public servants, whose experience included current or previous roles working in Commonwealth Government agencies and as ministerial advisors, assisted to triangulate the findings of interviews from the case study group.

**Conclusion**

This research examines the views of policy officers and other professionals who work to implement policy, by examining their roles and experiences to determine the influence of policy networks on policy implementation. The challenge in any qualitative research is to find the meaning in the stories that people (or documents) tell. The research uses a combination of interview data, documentary research and focus groups to find the meanings that public officers working in the policy arena attach to their work.

A single case study was selected for examination to identify officers within the public service whose role was likely to include policy development. The South-West Framework was developed by the Western Australian Government to respond to strong population and
economic growth, and coordinate a whole-of-government response to issues such as climate change, population aging, declining water resources and environmental degradation. State government agencies and local government authorities in the South West region were requested to nominate representatives to an inter-agency taskforce to assist in development of the South-West Framework. Following endorsement by the Western Australian Planning Commission and the Minister for Planning, the South-West Framework was published in October 2009. The Framework guides statutory decision making and will be implemented through interpretation in local planning policies, strategies and schemes that are developed by state government agencies and local government authorities.

The majority of interviewees whose views and experiences were examined in this research were employed in middle level management or more senior positions. Many interviewees were in management positions, in charge of technical or policy sections within line departments of state government. Interviews were also conducted with policy and technical officers in non-management positions, heads of agencies, ministerial advisors, heads of government authorities, and one senior government minister. Additionally, interviews were conducted with public servants who were currently working for, or had previously worked for, the Australian Government, including one agency head and a former chief ministerial advisor. Using a comparative interviewing technique, analysis of early responses was used to guide more focused questions to respondents as themes emerged from the data. Interviewees were often able to identify other potential candidates for the study, and on several occasions interviewees arranged for the researcher to interview others whose participation in the study would otherwise not have occurred.

The work of Page and Jenkins (2005) has previously suggested that policy development in Great Britain was often tasked to middle order bureaucrats who possessed limited technical expertise of the issues, but who had substantive policy experience. If this was indeed the case, it would be likely that these people would rely on more junior members within their team to conduct research and develop specific policy responses. The interviews were intended to examine if this situation existed in the Australian Public Service and if this was found to be so, to determine where the actual work of shaping policy responses was being conducted.
Chapter 5: Case Study. The South-West Framework

Introduction
A single, but complex case study has been selected as the most appropriate method to examine the respective roles of policy actors in issues-based policy. The case study, preparation of the South West Framework, is examined within the context of the broader state-wide land use planning policy environment. The case study selected as the basis for this research was the first regional planning framework to be developed in Western Australia. Development and preparation of the South-West Framework (WAPC, 2009) was a collaborative policy initiative undertaken by the Western Australian Department of Planning and Infrastructure and the Western Australian Planning Commission.

Preparation of land use policies involves consideration of a broad range of issues, including consideration of the natural environment, economic growth, water and electricity supplies, transport systems, community amenity, aging, health and education (for example, see the range of issues addressed in the South-West Framework: WAPC, 2009). As a result, preparation of regional land use planning strategies and policies commonly involves the participation of a wide range of participants from various government agencies, local government, business and the general community.

Stewart (2012) has noted that the purpose of governance related research is usually to understand patterns across organisational boundaries. Importantly, the South-West Framework case study provided an opportunity to consider the differing roles of various policy actors in the preparation of issues-based policy across a wide range of government portfolios and agencies. Specifically, it permits pursuit of Stuart’s purpose, by considering the research question: What is the role of respective actors in issue-based policy?

The Western Australian Land Use Planning System
The Western Australian Government regulates land use in Western Australia through a formal, hierarchical planning system. Planning is regulated via formal government legislation, the Planning and Development Act 2005 (WAGovt., 2005). The Western Australian planning system also includes separate environmental legislation: the Environmental Protection Act 1986 (WAGovt, 2006).
The Western Australian planning system has some elements that are unique in Australia. These elements include the centralisation of authority through the Western Australian Planning Commission which has a broad range of responsibilities, including: determination of the majority of subdivision applications across Western Australia; preparation and implementation of State Planning Policies; preparation and implementation of Statutory Region Schemes for Perth, Peel and Bunbury; and determination of regionally significantly development applications.

The Minister for Planning is the State Government’s elected representative and has the ultimate authority for town planning in Western Australia. The Minister is responsible for: overseeing the administration of planning agencies; maintaining and reviewing planning legislation; directing statutory and strategic planning matters; approving regional planning schemes and local planning schemes; and approving some planning policies (DPI, 2009:2).

Other influential policy actors include the Premier of the Western Australian Government, the Chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission, the Director General of the Department of Planning, the Director General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet Director, senior ministerial policy advisors, and senior officers within the Departments of Planning and Premier and Cabinet. Technical specialists commonly have little direct input when planning decisions are discussed at senior levels and so may appear to have little influence over planning processes. However, technical specialists are commonly tasked with providing information necessary to inform the decisions that are made at higher levels. Consequently, their influence in shaping planning decisions may easily be overlooked.

The Western Australian planning system vests responsibility for many planning decisions with the Western Australian Planning Commission, which is an independent, statutory authority. Critically, elements of the Western Australian planning system include the following: policy development and decision–making responsibilities are vested in the Minister for Planning, the Western Australian Planning Commission and local governments; planning services are provided through the Department of Planning, supported by other state government agencies and local government; and the State Planning Strategy is supported by over 100 State Planning Policies and Planning Bulletins (DPI, 2009:3). Policies that have state significance are presented either to the Cabinet or to the Parliament prior to their endorsement by the State Government (WAGovt., 2005). Several interviewees noted that it
is also becoming common practice for major policies or strategies to be reviewed by policy officers within the Department of Premier and Cabinet before they reach the Cabinet or the Parliament. It is not uncommon for central agency policy officers to attempt to reshape the policy or attempt to prevent policies reaching parliament. Being close to the centre of power, they can be very influential policy actors. The relationships between principal actors are illustrated in Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1. Reporting Relationships in the Western Australian Planning System

(Unpublished document, Department of Planning 2012)

However, the vast majority of planning policies are authorised and implemented without referral to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Development of these policies occurs predominately within the Department of Planning or within local government authorities. Planning policies that are developed by local government authorities are required to be consistent with State Planning Policies and local governments must give due regard to State Planning Policies in their decision-making (WAPC, 2007a, WAPC, 1997). Diagram 2 sets out the hierarchy of planning policies in Western Australia, identifying the links between state and local government policies.
Diagram 2. Hierarchy of Planning Policies in the Western Australian planning system

(Unpublished document, Department of Planning 2011)

The Department of Planning (DOP) was formed on 1 July 2009 following the split of the Department for Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) into three agencies. The Department of Planning has state-wide responsibility for the planning of future communities (DOP, 2012), and it prepares land use planning strategies, policies and plans on behalf of the Western Australian Planning Commission. The Department of Planning also provides advice and administrative services to the Western Australian Planning Commission and, where appropriate, implements the Western Australian Planning Commission’s decisions (DPI, 2009:2).

The Western Australian Planning Commission is an independent statutory authority with legislated responsibility for land use planning decisions. The powers of the Western Australian Planning Commission are exercised in accordance with government and Western Australian Planning Commission policy, the Department of Planning providing both professional planning and administrative support to achieve the desired outcomes of the
government and the Western Australian Planning Commission. The Western Australian Planning Commission has also delegated to local government the power to determine some development applications (DPI, 2009:2).

As noted earlier, the majority of policies that are developed by the Department of Planning are presented to the Western Australian Planning Commission for its endorsement. Most, but not all, policies endorsed by the Western Australian Planning Commission are forwarded to the Minister for Planning for the Minister’s consent prior to their adoption as a state government policy (WAPC, 2007a). The Western Australian Planning Commission is both an advisory body and a decision making body, having powers to shape, create and direct the implementation of state government policy. As a result, the Chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission is arguably one of the most influential policy actors in the state.

The Western Australian Planning Commission performs its functions in collaboration with the Department of Planning. However, land use planning policy is not prepared in isolation and it potentially impacts upon the domains of many other government agencies, including central agencies, line agencies and local government authorities. Some of the relationships that exist between these various agencies are depicted in Diagram 3 below.

Local government authorities are responsible for preparing and administering local planning schemes and strategies that seek to ensure that appropriate planning controls exist for land use and development. Local Planning Schemes set out the way land is to be used and developed. When a Local Planning Scheme has been prepared, it is sent to the Western Australian Planning Commission for a recommendation to the Minister for approval. A Local Planning Scheme has effect following the Minister’s approval and when it is published in the Government Gazette. Local government authorities must base their planning decisions on the provisions and controls in their Local Planning Scheme(s), which must be reviewed every five years (DPI, 2009:9). Local government authorities also provide comment to the Western Australian Planning Commission on subdivision proposals and planning policies that guide land use planning decisions (DPI, 2009:2).

While local governments are tasked with implementing the State Government’s policies, they also prepare and implement their own local planning policies and local planning laws
Development of policies in local government is undertaken by technical specialists working in similar types of positions and at similar levels to their state government counterparts. The decision makers for policy decisions in local government authorities are the local government councils, comprising a number of elected members (WAPC, 2007a).

Diagram 3. Links between WAPC – Department of Planning and other State Agencies

((Unpublished document, Department of Planning 2011)

The influence of policy actors working in the Department of Planning and in local government authorities can easily be overlooked, the most obvious policy actors being the Minister, Planning Commissioners, the Director General of the Department of Planning and central agency policy advisors. However, all of Western Australia’s planning policies are developed either within the Department of Planning or within local government (WAPC, 2007a). These policies are commonly developed in consultation with other agencies that may be affected (WAPC, 1997). The diversity of agencies that were engaged in the preparation of
planning policies provided an ideal case study for examination of the work of policy specialists in government.

In addition to the relationships with external agencies, the Department of Planning is organised into several functional areas of responsibility, each having its own specialist policy function. Some of the internal structure of the Department of Planning, describing the relationships between functional areas within the agency and their role in policy, is shown in Diagram 4, below.

**Diagram 4. Internal Relationships between policy workers in the Department of Planning**

(Unpublished document, Department of Planning 2011)

**The Case Study: The South-West Framework**

The policy forming the basis of this case study was developed by a government agency, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, on behalf of the Western Australian Planning Commission, albeit with the assistance of an interagency taskforce. The policy was presented to the Western Australian State Government Cabinet by the Minister for Planning for its endorsement as a State Government policy instrument. Subsequent to Cabinet endorsement,
the South-West Framework was published by the Western Australian Planning Commission and was implemented by the Department of Planning.

The South West region covers an area of 23,998 square kilometres and is one of the fastest growing regions in Western Australia. Its population, approximately 140,000 in 2006, is expected to reach 190,000 by 2031 (WAPC, 2009). In terms of economic growth, the South West region is one of the fastest growing areas in Western Australia, and in the country. The region’s strong growth is due to an abundance of minerals and other natural resources, a plentiful supply of arable agricultural land and appealing scenery; these regional attributes draw large numbers of people to the region, both to visit and to live (WAPC, 2009).

The South-West Framework was the first regional planning framework of its kind in Western Australia, and it was one of the first collaborative policy initiatives to be undertaken by the Western Australian Planning Commission. At the time of writing this thesis, the Western Australian Planning Commission had prepared and endorsed a second regional planning framework and was undertaking preparation of two additional regional planning frameworks (WAPC, 2012). The South-West Framework guides planning to achieve beneficial outcomes. As is stated in the introduction to the South-West Framework:

The South-West Framework is a broad planning blueprint which seeks to guide the future development of the South-West region over the next 20 years. The framework addresses the scale and distribution of future population growth and housing development, and identifies strategies for dealing with economic growth, environmental issues, transport, infrastructure, water resources, agriculture, tourism and the emerging impacts of climate change. It seeks to ensure that growth and development in the South-West region is achieved in a way that improves people’s lives and enhances the unique character and environment of the region. (WAPC, 2009:1)

In the introduction to the South-West Framework, the Chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission offered the following advice:

The South-West Framework has been endorsed by the Western Australian Planning Commission as a regional strategy and will be listed in State Planning Policy 1 to provide a big-picture view of the long-term future of the region. Its focus is on the major challenges and opportunities facing the region. In doing so, it expresses the position of the WAPC in relation to key issues and challenges, and provides direction for regional planning and to
local governments for the preparation of more detailed local planning strategies and local planning schemes. (WAPC, 2009: iv)

The South-West Framework is an example of a top-down policy, prepared and enacted by the State Government to guide more detailed planning decisions. Implementation of the South-West Framework is largely the responsibility of local government. However, unlike many top-down policies, development of the South-West Framework was a participatory processes, with significant input from local government representatives.

To assist in development of the South-West Framework, more than 30 state government agencies and local government authorities were requested to nominate representatives to an inter-agency taskforce. The taskforce met regularly during an 18 month period to develop broad regional strategies and specific policies to be incorporated into the South-West Framework document. Members of the taskforce also assisted to identify critical issues, research and analyse critical areas of need to be addressed through policy, and were ultimately highly influential in shaping the South-West Framework. The South-West Framework was presented to the Western Australian State Government Cabinet in October 2009, and was published after endorsement by the Western Australian Minister for Planning and Western Australian Planning Commission in October 2009. The Framework was in force at the time of writing this thesis. It operates to guide statutory decision making and is implemented through interpretation in local planning policies, strategies and schemes that are developed by state government agencies and local government authorities.

The South-West Framework was selected as a case study for this research for several reasons: its significance in establishing a “whole of government” policy position for the south-west region of Western Australia; inclusion of a broad range of policy actors in its preparation; and the relatively good accessibility of these policy actors. The South-West Framework provides a sound basis for examining the role of respective policy actors in government due to the breadth of issues covered by the policy and the high level of engagement a variety of policy actors during its preparation. Preparation of the Framework was undertaken with direct input from: a range of technical policy specialists working in line government agencies; policy analysts from central agencies; senior agency staff, including several agency heads; members of statutory authorities; ministerial policy advisors; and government ministers. Many of the policy actors who participated in development of the
South-West Framework were interviewed to provide evidence for this research. These included the Minister for Planning, the heads of both the Western Australian Planning Commission and the Department of Planning, several senior Department of Planning managers, heads of other state and local government agencies, and many policy officers who had been involved in preparation of the South-West Framework.

Importantly, the methodology allowed examination of the actions of policy actors involved in development of issues-based policy and provided an appropriate mechanism to examine their actions and influence in policy. It provided sufficient latitude to examine the roles of a range of policy actors, including the public servants listed above who assisted in preparation of the Framework or who were influential in its endorsement. This provided a basis to consider the differing roles and relationships that exist between various policy actors in government. It also provided an opportunity to compare the roles of policy actors that are located in state government agencies with the roles of policy workers in local government authorities.

**Examining the Role of Policy Workers during Preparation of the South-West Framework**

Development of the South-West Framework was undertaken by a small team of technical policy specialists working in the Department of Planning, under direct supervision of the Planning Manager South West Strategic Planning, a middle level manager. The team was supported by an interagency taskforce chaired by the Executive Director with responsibility for planning and strategy in the Perth, Peel and South West regions. Oversight of the policy was undertaken by the WAPC through via the South West Region Planning Committee. Regular briefing sessions were also conducted between the Planning Manager South West Strategic Planning and the Chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission. Several briefing sessions were also conducted with government ministers whose portfolios included responsibilities within the South West region, and with other elected members whose electorates were impacted by the policy.

The members of the interagency taskforce included: several heads of state government departments; senior policy advisors; technical policy specialists from state government agencies; regional managers; and local government council members. However, more than half of the taskforce members were employed in state government line agencies as middle
level or senior managers, responsible for management of technical policy specialist units. A full description of the membership of the South-West Framework taskforce is provided in Appendix 1.

Other stakeholders also assisted preparation and development of the South-West Framework, or contributed advice and guidance during the legitimisation process. This broader group of stakeholders included various government bureaucrats, elected officials, ministerial advisors, and industry and community representatives. Membership of this group is shown in Appendix 2.

The interviewees participating in this research were drawn from both the interagency taskforce and from the broader stakeholder group. Members of each provided insights into the process of developing the South-West Framework, and insights into their experiences in policy processes generally.

**Applicability of the Case Study to the Research Questions**

There are many examples of case study research examining the role of bureaucrats in policy (for examples see: Page and Jenkins, 2005, Gill and Colebatch, 2006, Connell and Colebatch, 2006, Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006). The purpose of this research was to reassess implementation with a different case study to investigate the role of technical policy specialists. This research was not undertaken as an isolated case study, but is consistent with many other case studies in policy (examples include: Evans, 2011, Barzelay and Jacobsen, 2009, Mayer et al., 2004, Mayer et al., 2005, Werners et al., 2010). This research is also consistent with previous research into the role of land use planners (for example see: Hoch, 1994).

The case study chosen for this research examines the roles of “planners” and other public servants in the development of a major planning policy, and considers their relationships with elected officials and senior policy advisors. Notably, while Hoch (1994) considered the role of planners primarily through the lens of implementation, this case study considers the role of planners through the lens of planners as the creators of new policy.

As noted by Hoch (1994), successful (land use) planners combine technical expertise with political acumen:
Planners expect their advice to be heard and followed and to reap the intended results. Planners expect to act in powerful ways. As they work to identify and reduce collective uncertainty, planners participate in power relationships based on craft, coercion, and consent. Planners do not act as apolitical technicians or nontechnical politicians. Their actions necessarily draw on both political experience and technical knowledge…. Labouring in the middle-management ranks of government, planners can use their professional expertise to enhance their institutional authority and individual discretion or they might try to improve the prospects of various clients by enhancing the predictability of organizational or community life. At one end of the continuum, the planner is a power broker; at the other, a public servant. Most planners assume a combined role. Regardless of their choice, planners usually rationalize their actions in terms of professional competence and the protocol of professional expertise. (Hoch, 1994:70)

In this research, the analysis focuses on extension of the role of planners as policy specialists and the role of the technical policy person. It considers the duality of their role as providers of objective ‘expert’ advice to decision makers, and as active shapers of opinion, or policy entrepreneurs.

The South-West Framework case study was used to identify key participants in the development of land use policy in Western Australia. It also provided context for many of the interviews. That is, interviewees commonly began by discussing their role in the development of the South-West Framework, often drawing comparisons with their experiences in the development of other policies. Interviews then typically shifted to discussions of policy processes generally, policy training and to examination of specific policy issues. The interviews were semi-structured and interviewees often discussed a specific aspect of policy in some detail. In order to minimise the introduction of bias, interviewees were encouraged to lead the discussions, to describe their experiences ‘in their own words’.

Although the majority of the policy practitioners who were interviewed in this research were engaged in the development or implementation of planning policy, many were not “planning” specialists. Interviewees worked in a wide variety of specialist fields including land use planning, architecture, engineering, economics, commerce, environmental science, sustainability, social science, politics, management and public administration, and public policy. Interviewees also operated at a wide range of levels within agencies; from relatively
junior policy officers up to the heads of government departments and senior cabinet ministers. In addition, several interviewees compared policy processes in Western Australia with policy processes they had encountered while working in policy in other governments; many interviewees had worked for other state governments or for the Australian government or for the governments of other countries.

The interviewees related varied accounts of policy processes and often expressed differing, at times contradictory, views on where policy influence was greatest. The case study provided an opportunity to examine these accounts, resulting in the identification of several emergent themes. Specifically, the chosen methodology provided an opportunity for participants to provide their own accounts of the policy process.

These accounts often contained subjective, rather than objective, accounts of policy processes. Focusing on a single case study afforded the opportunity to compare and contrast the viewpoints of the various participants who were engaged in shaping a single government policy. Notably, while there was a universally shared view that government ministers are the final arbiters of policy, there was no universal understanding amongst the interviewed practitioners of where policy influence is greatest in government. Many policy specialists, senior managers and technical policy specialists believed that they alone held the most policy influence. However, there was generally a shared understanding that new policy is commonly initiated by technical specialists. Policy specialists and senior managers generally shape and refine draft policies to ensure that they align with the views of their political masters.

There was also evidence that the relative power of policy actors is not static but may instead change, waxing or waning over time. Changing trends in public policy have had significant impacts on the ability of the public service to deliver sound policy advice. In particular, politicization of senior levels of the public service and increasing mistrust in ‘expert’ advice were identified as two major contributors to policy capability decline. The study gives the empirical evidence to reassess case studies with the view to reassess the role of technical policy specialists and policy analysts.
Chapter 6: Positioning Technical Policy Specialists in the Policy: Implementers, Shapers and Entrepreneurs

Introduction

To answer the research question, “what is the relative influence of policy actors in government?”, it is necessary first to establish where policy work occurs within government agencies. The primary source of information for this research is a series of semi-structured interviews with elected officials and bureaucrats. Interviewees were asked about their role in the policy process and were invited to discuss examples where they had personally been involved in developing new policy or shaping policy implementation strategies. While the majority of interviewees had been personally involved creation of the South West Framework, itself a significant government policy. Many were able to describe other instances where they had been responsible for review of existing policies or creation of new policies. The majority of interviewees also described instances where they had been responsible for, or involved in the process of, shaping implementation strategies.

Some effort was made to determine if bureaucratic policy workers perceived that there was a clear distinction between policy making and implementation. Interviewees were asked about where they thought the decisions to create new policy originated and who, in their experience, had the most influence in policy creation, shaping and implementation.

Data was collected to identify the extent to which public policy was influenced by or arose from within line government agencies. Line government agencies are government agencies whose role is to deliver services or to implement government policy. Line agencies typically include agencies with responsibility for health, education, environmental, planning, social services and other arenas of service delivery. To determine the degree of influence on policy decision making, these data were interpreted to evaluate: the relative influence of individual agencies; the ability line government agencies to shape existing policy and propose new policy; and the extent of collaboration between the policy actors and these agencies. During a series of in-depth interviews, public servants were asked to describe their experiences in policy implementation and development. While attention often focused on development of the South West Framework, interviewees were encouraged to describe their experience in policy development more generally. Interviewees were asked to discuss how, in their experience, policy was implemented, and shaped, in government. Interviewees also
discussed the importance of several aspects of policy work: effective networking, engagement in collaborative partnerships, education and experience, and understanding of the policy process. It was noted by interviewees that these aspects of policy work were as important to successful implementation of policy as they were to its creation. Attention is therefore given to their influence in the shaping and implementation of policy.

The majority of interviewees were employed in the Western Australian Public Service at the time of interview. The remainder were employed by the Australian Public Service, local government authorities or were working in policy roles in private sector agencies. The interviewees were selected because they were able to demonstrate considerable experience in government policy processes. These included public servants who were nominated by the heads of government agencies to assist in preparation of the South-West Framework under the auspices of the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC, 2009), a major Western Australian State Government policy initiative. Other interviewees included bureaucrats and politicians who were influential in bringing about the endorsement of the South-West Framework, including several ministerial policy advisors (including one chief of staff), policy advisors in central agencies and heads of government authorities.

Several elected members of parliament were also interviewed, including two senior ministers. Each of these had more than 20 years in government, including several terms as members of both the political party in power and the opposition (the political party not in power). Moreover, each of the senior ministers had held several ministerial portfolios during their time in parliament and each had introduced major reform Bills into parliament, which subsequently passed into legislation. These elected members of parliament discussed their impressions of bureaucratic influences on policy; the changes they had experienced, including the introduction of ministerial policy advisors; and the impact of these changes on the policy process.

The interviews were intended to identify where in agencies, and by whom, the work of developing and implementing policy takes place. The interviewees related slightly differing views and experiences; nonetheless several strong themes did emerge.
**Topic 1: Policy Advice in Government**

As is evidenced in chapters two and three, the policy literature is somewhat ambiguous about the role that bureaucrats play in the policy process and the influence they exert. The majority of policy literature recognises that policy-making does not begin and end in the legislature. However, while some top-down writers have argued that bureaucrats should not involve themselves in policy decisions (for example: Wanna et al., 2010), other writers have recognised that policy implementation often involves the refinement of policies, establishing programs and budgets, and sometimes even involves the complete rewriting of a policy for it to be effective (Elmore, 1980, Page, 2006, Page and Jenkins, 2005). Nevertheless, there has been ongoing debate about whether implementation can be seen as separate from policy making (Sabatier, 2007, for example see: Hill and Hupe, 2002, Althaus et al., 2007).

Page (2006) has stated that academics tend to have a top-down view about how policy is formulated, and tend to examine the interactions occurring at the “top”. However, policy often originates from within government agencies. Althaus, Bridgeman and Davis (2007) noted that relatively junior officers are commonly involved in policy based research and may play some role in policy preparation or development. There is some tension between the top-down view that policy is directed by politicians and senior bureaucrats, and the view that policy can arise from lower levels in government agencies.

If the top-down literature accurately reflects actual policy processes in the Western Australian Public Service, it should be the case that elected politicians and senior bureaucrats will be actively engaged in establishing priorities for policy and will exercise a relatively high degree of control in policy formation. If the process is similar to that described by Page and Jenkins (2005), it is to be expected that policy development will primarily be conducted by relatively senior officers in central policy units, with broad direction provided by the relevant Minister or other elected politicians. On the other hand, if the processes are similar to those described by Colebatch (Colebatch, 2006c, Colebatch, 2010, Colebatch, 2006, Colebatch and Radin, 2006e) and Hoppe and Jeliazkova (2006), it is to be expected that bureaucrats working at lower levels in government, including very junior officers (as described by Althaus et al., 2007) will be actively engaged in policy development.

The emergence of ministerial staffers has created another layer of policy workers who exert considerable influence. Anderson (2006), writing about his own personal experiences, stated
his belief that he and other early ministerial staffers were “carving out a new public sector career path and inserting a new layer of administration” (2006:167). Anderson also argued that this new layer of bureaucracy forged stronger links with the media. He suggested that “just as the policy cycle cannot be immune from politics, politics in turn cannot be immune from the media” (Anderson 2006:181). This new layer of policy workers then formed a link between bureaucrats within government agencies and their ministers, and between ministers and the media. These actors were able to influence both the way in which information was provided to ministers, and the way ministerial statements reached the public through the media. However, there is only flimsy empirical evidence to determine who has the most influence on policy within government agencies.

When asked where the majority of policy is developed, all the interviewees, including the ministers, central agency policy officers, and line agency technical policy specialists, stated that the majority of government policy originates from within “line government agencies”, whose role is usually associated with implementation. Line government agencies are continually engaged in a process of researching, analysing, negotiating and formulating “new” government policy, which two interviewees noted was typically a refinement of existing policy (Interviews 24 & 40).

Interviewees from within line agencies noted that within their, often narrow, fields of expertise, line agencies were typically engaged in a continuous process of policy refinement, implementation and development. Interviewees also noted that, while line agencies typically developed policy within their own portfolios, they could also influence positions and policies developed by other agencies that might affect their area of operation (Interviews 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37 & 41).

While bureaucrats working in central agencies are highly influential in policy development, they rely heavily on information provided by line agencies, often balancing advice from several agencies to formulate a position for government. Rather than developing policy, central agencies typically perform the role of “umpire”, seeking to find a balance between often competing agency positions. Interviewees working in central agencies noted that, while policy analysis in central agencies is heavily reliant on ‘expert’ advice provided by line agencies, policy work in central agencies is more “politicised” than in line agencies. Consequently, policy advice is more likely to be influenced by political imperatives or
agencies outside of government (Interviews 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37 & 41).

**Government Ministers**

Three members of parliament were interviewed, one from each of the three major political parties in the Western Australian government: Liberal (Interview 13), Labor (Interview 40) and National (Interview 39) parties. All had served more than 20 years in parliament. The Liberal representative was a serving Minister, and both the Liberal and Labor representatives had served more than two terms each as govern ministers. The National Party member had previously held positions as a Shadow Minister and as a Parliamentary Leader of the National Party, and had also been the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Each had been influential, senior members of the government during the last two decades.

Many interviewees noted that while government ministers exercised a large amount of control over policy, often it was left to agency staff to determine the specific approach (Interviews 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 27, 31, 35, 36, 37, 40 & 41). One Minister provided an example, stating that he had requested a state government department to “streamline the approvals process to prevent unnecessary delays for developers”. He stated that the agency had evaluated the available options and had recommended a strategy that led to a new Bill being introduced into state parliament for adoption into legislation. The Minister noted that this policy response had originated from within, and had been developed by, the agency, proposing that it was “the agency’s idea”. However, the Minister also noted that the decision to refer the draft legislation to parliament rested entirely with himself, and any decisions whether to adopt the legislation, or not, rested with elected members of government and would be decided as the Bill passed through parliament (Interview 13). The Minister stated that he “relied on his department to provide expert advice” and to prepare policy that was appropriate to the Governments’ needs (Interview 13). He did not expect to understand all of the technical aspects of the policy, but expected to be “well informed on any contentious issues” (Interview 13). These statements were consistent with the experiences described by many other interviewees (Interviews 12, 14, 15, 20, 23, 36, 4 & 42).

Several interviewees noted that it was common for the responsibilities of government ministers to fall outside of their field of expertise. It was also relatively common for the
portfolios of government ministers to change during a career in government and, while ministers may have responsibility for a single portfolio, it was more common for government ministers to hold several portfolios. Ministerial portfolios were also likely to change, even during a single term of government. It was noted that it was common for a minister to spend less than three years in a portfolio area, particularly if this was not their primary area of responsibility (Interviews 13, 14 & 40).

The two members of parliament who had served as ministers (Interviewees 13 & 40) noted that, due to their own limited expertise, they relied heavily on the technical expertise of line agency staff to provide sound policy advice, commenting that these bureaucrats were often “experts in their field”. However, the other parliamentarian (Interview 39) held a different view. This interviewee (Interview 39) expressed strong views that policy should be made within a political party, in consultation with the general community. The interviewee noted that, in the past, party meetings had been open community events, attended by party and non-party members alike, and were events where important policy decisions were made (Interview 39). The interviewee expressed concern that this form of policy making no longer occurred, being replaced by the advice of “professional” political advisors, stating that “grass roots” opinion was now ignored: …party policy is increasingly being driven by a policy elite…not by the interests of the grass roots party members…and is often captured by interest groups (Interviewee 39). When asked where he believed that policy advice originated in government agencies, the interviewee stated that most policy advice came from the executive levels (Interview 39).

This statement is inconsistent with the views expressed by the two ministers (Interviewees 13 & 40), and the majority of the public servants interviewed, but may be explained by the presence of internal protocols for contacting electoral offices that exist within many government agencies. Specifically, Western Australian government protocol is for all contact between agency staff and a government ministers’ office or parliamentary electoral office to take place through their department’s ministerial office. For example, the Department of Planning (DOP) Electoral Contact Protocol precludes agency staff from contacting staff in electoral offices, or responding to queries directly:

From time to time you may be contacted directly by a member of parliament or an electorate office staff member seeking information on a particular matter or asking that a departmental
representative provide their office with a briefing on a particular matter. If you receive such an enquiry, please immediately refer it to the Manager, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services on telephone number. Government protocol requires that all such enquiries are directed to the Minister's Office for consideration. As it is necessary to seek prior guidance from the Minister's Office, any requested information should not be provided directly to the member of parliament nor should any undertaking to brief the member be given. Ministerial and Parliamentary Services will liaise with the Minister's Office on your behalf and may seek the information sought by the Member from you via a formal request or confirm any briefing arrangements. (DOP, 2011: 1)

Although it does occur, it is relatively unusual for line agency staff to have contact with other government ministers or their staff, or to contact non-ministerial elected members of parliament. In most instances where contact does occur, it is through approved channels of communication, the conversation pre-vetted and approved by the agency heads and ministerial policy advisors. It is therefore expected that government ministers who are in regular contact with agency staff will hold a different view of the bureaucrat’s role than people whose contact with agency staff is more limited.

The ministers who were interviewed stated that they generally received their advice directly from agency heads or senior staff. However, one former minister (Interview 40) stated that it was also common for more junior staff to brief ministers on topics specific to their role and expertise. This former minister related an example of where he had come to rely heavily on the advice of a middle manager who had a particularly high degree of expertise in a specific, contentious, policy area. The bureaucrat was often present at events where the minister believed the matter would be raised, being widely recognised as the government’s “expert” in the particular field and effectively “became the Government spokesman” (Interview 40).

The minister believed that the contribution made by this particular individual was significant and improved the effectiveness of government policy and the level of public trust in government decisions (Interview 40). What is unusual about this example is that the bureaucrat in question was at the time a relatively junior program manager. However, as the minister noted, the bureaucrat provided information to the public on technical matters and did not comment on policy, this being the typical role of senior bureaucrats (Interview 40).
The view that policy originates within line agencies was supported by many interviewees who worked in line agencies (Interviews 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35 & 37) and surprisingly, by policy specialists in specialist agencies (Interviews 26, 30, 36 & 43). One senior elected official, commenting on the influence that line agency bureaucrats can exert in the shaping of government policy, stated the following:

...so the bureaucrat is actually writing the policy.... The bureaucrat would never say they are writing policy. But what they actually say is “well, if you want to make a better Bill Minister, this is what you need to do”. (Interview 39)

A senior bureaucrat noted that ministers are often open to advice from by bureaucrats, although the bureaucrats must present a “good argument”, well-grounded in evidence if they wish to gain support for their proposals (Interview 31). However, the interviewee also noted that such, while expected to reflect “frank and fearless” advice, can also be influenced by political imperatives. The bureaucrat must be careful to guard against the influence of political pressure in order to ensure that their advice is balanced; understanding that the best technical outcome may not be politically palatable at that point in time, to that particular minister, or to that particular government (Interview 31).

Bureaucrats may also wait until conditions are favourable, or they have gained required support, prior to promoting policy positions to elected representatives. One interviewee described it thus:

A lot of the successful public servants that I know who have influenced policy haven’t necessarily had one go...and then been rebuffed and never gone back again.... Sometimes you shape some ideas, and bounce some of that thinking off others, and I think collaborative policy development is a good thing...we often find there is an opportunity that may not present initially, but the opportunity comes to sort of sew the seed, and in a sense nurture it over a period of time, and it can have some influence. (Interview 31)

The head of a government authority (Interview 12) gave an example where the authority had “been persuaded by agency staff” to adopt a position on a particular policy area. The interviewee commented that “people in this agency have a responsibility to offer policy advice [to the authority]” (Interview 12). Similar statements were made by several other interviewees (Interviews 12, 14, 15, 20, 23, 36, 4 & 42). However, a senior staffer stated that
there must be an “alignment of policy advice and political will” for the advice of bureaucrats to be effective (Interview 14).

One middle ranking bureaucrat noted the importance of researching the appropriate response prior to approaching an agency head or minister, noting that “it is a good idea to go in with a position and answer to the issue (small laugh)” (Interview 2). This interviewee noted that public servants learn early in their career about the folly of taking a problem to their department head or Minister without first having formulated a recommendation to the issue. The interviewee further noted that “the (Minister’s) response to address the issue will largely be dependent on the flavour, direction and quality of the advice” (Interview 2) provided by the policy officer. A technical policy specialist described a recent experience where technical policy specialists had not formulated a recommendation, but had instead requested direction from a decision making body on “which direction they wanted to go” with respect to a policy:

*I know just recently the staff (technical policy specialists) did go to the (decision making body) for guidance, and the (decision making body) said “No. You come to us with a recommended way forward and we’ll decide whether we like it or not”…. So when you do go to…we went seeking real guidance: which way do you want to go on this? And they said “no, you come up with an answer and we’ll decide what we want” (laughs). It’s open as to what guidance is…don’t go to them with a blank slate and expect them to come up with the answers…. It’s a good idea to go with an answer and a position and get the (decision making body) to agree or disagree. (Interview 11)*

One member of parliament of more than 20 years’ experience also noted that the majority of new Bills introduced into parliament are refinements to existing legislation:

*There are 200 odd Bills per year go through most parliaments and a lot of these Bills are consequential amendments…many of those amendments are driven by bureaucrats.* (Interview 39)

However, some policy bureaucrats described where they had worked on transformative policies that were significant departures from existing policy, including one economist who described his role in the floating of the Australian dollar in the international currency market and in the restructuring of the Australian Superannuation System (Interview 22), arguably
being two of the most significant and transformative policy initiatives in Australia during the 20th century.

The experiences related by Ministers in the Western Australian government bears little resemblance to the top-down view of policy making contained in the policy literature, described in previous chapters, that sees bureaucrats as ‘passive implementers’ of policy. The ministers themselves see bureaucrats as being authors and initiators, active advocates and promoters of policy. The role of bureaucrats in policy is not only to be the implementer of government decisions; it is also the role of a trusted advisor and, at times, that of a policy entrepreneur. The role of bureaucrats is closer to that described by Stewart (1999) than proposed by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989). These interviews suggest that policy workers are more akin to the description by Colebatch (2006a) of policy workers as active shapers and agents of policy than the role that is proposed by Wanna et al. (2010) of policy workers as passive implementers.

The next sections consider the case of policy being shaped within the bureaucracy. As noted by Hill (1997), public servants cannot be treated as a unitary group or class. Differences exist within the public service, including differences in approach to, and views of, the policy process.

**Policy Workers in Ministerial Offices**

Several interviewees were working in ministerial offices as policy staff; all had a technical specialist qualification (Interviews 14, 23 & 36) and had previously worked as technical specialists in government line agencies. These interviewees related that ministerial staff were either seconded from public sector agencies, or employed as “term of government” employees appointed from outside of the public sector.

While all the interviewees working as ministerial officers were engaged to provide policy advice to their respective ministers, their function differed depending on the relevance of their specialist qualifications to the Minister’s portfolio. Of the three interviewees, only the urban planning specialist provided advice in his specialist field; the two others functioned as generalist policy officers, employed at more senior levels, advising on a variety of matters pertaining to the Minister’s portfolio.
However, interviewees noted that the work of policy staff seconded from line agencies was most commonly characterised by provision of advice to their Minister on matters relating to their specialist field. Technical specialists tended to hold “policy advisor” or “principal policy advisor” positions in ministerial offices. Staff were seconded to the ministerial offices from line agencies for a period of time and continued to hold substantive positions as statutory or strategic technical specialists, returning to these positions at the end of the secondment term (Interviews 14, 23 & 36).

One interviewee, whose work experience had included roles as both a senior agency official in a state government agency and as a principal advisor to an Australian Government minister, noted that the differences between these roles primarily related to the function of bureaucracy to provide “fair and frank” advice free from political bias (Interview 36). In their view, “term of government” officers were more likely to provide “political” advice to the Minister in response to a policy issue, the main consideration being “to ensure that their political party wins the next election” (Interview 36). However, the interviewee (Interview 36) noted that while policy development required technical expertise in the specialist area, a different skill set was required to implement the policy. Another interviewee stated a similar view:

*Then you can have a nice policy document…. The step from getting a good policy into reality is a whole different kettle of fish, and is more political by its nature…. You need two different types of people. So you have the technical person…in the policy development stage. Then, in the implementation stage, you really need someone who knows how to work the legislative process…and the political process. So that actually takes two different skill sets…and it may be a single person, but these are two sides of the policy formula.* (Interview 34)

This view contrasts with the majority of top-down policy literature, and much of the policy analysis literature, which considers political and policy skills as being essential during the policy development phase, while technical specialist skills are utilized during policy implementation. This interviewee also suggested that the majority of policy development occurs within the line agencies:

*...they (technical specialists) are the ones with the technical expertise, especially in the planning area. I wouldn’t describe myself as a planning expert; I’m a general policy type person. We rely on what (sic) technical specialists need to fix the system. At the same time,
we might consult with industry stakeholders ourselves and feed that into the process. But in
terms of the draft Bill, which is the policy document itself, the Department prepares the Bill.
We might say “we don’t like that” or “move that back”…whatever changes (changes to the
requested to be made). Then it goes to Cabinet and into the legislature. The technical details
(sic) of the policy…have to rest with the Department. (Interview 34)

The interviewee (Interview 34) noted that in other spheres of government, especially in the
Australian Government, policies may be developed entirely in ministers’ offices. However,
the interviewee regarded government line agencies as being integral to the policy process
(Interview 34).

These statements were supported by other interviewees and were consistent with
documentary data. For example, the draft “South-West Framework” (WAPC, 2008), when
published for public comment, contained a preface by the Chairman of the Western
Australian Planning Commission. However, it also included the name and contact details of
a middle manager of a technical policy specialist unit, who was to be contacted for any
additional information. After endorsement by the Western Australian Government, the
South-West Framework was released by the Western Australian Planning Commission to
provide:

…a big-picture view of the long-term future of the South-West, focusing on the major
challenges facing the region and the main opportunities to guide the region towards a desired
future. It restates and expands upon the key principles of the State Planning Strategy as it
applies to the South-West, in planning for sustainable land use and development. It also
brings together many policies that are specific to the South-West region. (WAPC, 2009: 2)

Text in the South-West Framework also states that: “The South-West Framework has been
endorsed by the WAPC as a regional strategy under section B2 of the State Planning
Framework (State Planning Policy 1)” (WAPC, 2009: 2). In the State Planning Framework,
State Planning Policy 1, Section 2.4 states:

The State Planning Framework unites existing State and regional policies, strategies and
guidelines in a central framework which provides a context for decision-making on land use
and development in Western Australia. It informs the Commission, local government and
others involved in the planning process on those aspects of State level planning policy which
are to be taken into account, and given effect to, in order to ensure integrated decision-making across all spheres of planning. (WAPC, 2009: 2)

The South-West Framework was precluded by an introduction from the Minister for Planning. The Minister stated that:

The South-West Framework provides a response to many of the challenges facing the region. In doing so, it provides a basis for further, more detailed planning to be undertaken at the sub-regional and local scale. The framework provides a basis for unified action between state and local governments. (WAPC, 2009: iii)

While the South-West Framework was endorsed by the Western Australian Government, its development was undertaken by the Department of Planning (Interviews 13, 15 & 20). Similarly, amendments to the Western Australian Planning and Development Act (Western Australian Government 2005) were, in the Minister’s own words, “developed within the Department of Planning” (Interview 13). However, the evidence also suggests that the policies are commonly “refined” by staff working in the Minister’s office, and that these officers play a significant role in helping to ensure that the policies gained the required level of political support to be accepted by government (Interviews 9, 14, 15 & 36).

It was found that, in comparison with policy positions in central and line agencies, relatively few positions in ministerial offices are advertised. In part, this may be due to the relatively small numbers of staff employed in these offices, or to the relatively high numbers of “term of government” appointees, whose positions are not necessarily advertised.

Job descriptions are also useful as triangulation tools as they describe the responsibilities and tasks associated with a role, and list the essential qualifications and experience considered necessary for a particular position. They are also the “official” statements of duties that are to be undertaken by a public servant occupying a particular position. The accounts of policy workers in the ministerial offices accorded with the key requirements stated in the job descriptions: possession of conceptual and analytical skills, policy research and development skills, interpersonal and communication skills, and report writing skills [Position advertised Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia (DPCWA, 2011)]. The purpose of these positions is often described as being to analyse and develop appropriate policy responses to issues, and provide timely policy advice; with essential attributes most
commonly cited for these positions are strong analytical and communication skills (Seek, 2011a, 2011b).

Although interviewees who had been seconded to ministerial offices from line agencies described their work as differing from their former work, their views of policy work and the policy process remained very similar to those of many of their former co-workers (Interviews 36 & 23). However, these officers also believed that they had developed a vastly improved understanding of political processes by working in ministerial offices, and that this experience would benefit their future career. These findings appear to be consistent with the views of British policy workers as described by Page and Jenkins (2005).

However, one interviewee noted that there were “vast differences” between political staffers and bureaucrats in ministerial offices (Interview 36). This interviewee suggested that policy advice given by political staff in ministerial offices is often based on what they believe will help the current government to win the next election. The interviewee believed that the focus by political staffers on short term political imperatives created difficulties for government agencies seeking long term strategies to address critical issues (Interview 36).

Several interviewees who worked in ministerial offices noted that ministerial policy staff often comprised a mix of “term of government” staffers and public servants who were seconded from positions within government agencies for a period of time. These people usually are appointed for their policy expertise and often remain within ministerial offices through changes in ministers and changes in elected governments. However, there is also continual movement of policy specialists within and between agencies, and between agencies and the ministerial policy offices. Notably, all of the line agency staff seconded to ministerial offices considered that placement in a minister’s office would also improve opportunities to move into more senior strategic specialist roles.

Several interviewees noted that the ratio of political staff to agency staff varied widely between different ministerial offices. The ratio was largely dependent on the amount of trust the minister had in the public service and, or, in his or her agency staff (Interviews 14 & 40). Both of the ministers who were interviewed noted that the majority of their staff, indeed all of the staff of one of the ministers at the time of interview, had been seconded from line agencies. In comparison, an example was provided of a government minister whose staff
entirely comprised “term of government” political appointees, predominately members of that minister’s political party (Interview 14).

One interviewee (Interviewee 34) noted that, while there were some differences between the work experiences of technical specialists working in ministerial offices and those working in government agencies, these differences were less significant than those existing between different types of employees within the ministerial offices themselves. Interviewees generally related significant differences in the views and experiences of the permanent public servants and those of the political appointees working in these offices.

Several central agency staff (Interviews 31, 43 & 44) noted that policy units in central agencies comprised a mix of career public servants and, as one interviewee termed it, “term of government party hacks” (Interview 44) [Note: A ‘party hack’ describing someone who blindly agrees with and supports their political party]. However, in these offices “term of government” employees often outnumbered the career bureaucrats, particularly at the higher pay levels. One senior policy advisor described how she was the only career public servant in a central agency policy unit and, as a result, was viewed with some suspicion by other policy workers in the unit; she left to work in another agency (Interview 44).

Interviewees stated that, in both ministerial and central policy units, a change in government commonly results in replacement of the “term of government” staff with people who are aligned with the “new” party in power. In some instances, the change in policy staff may approach 100%. However, it was also noted by one interviewee that it was not uncommon for new ministers to retain several of the policy advisors of the former government until they could install preferred replacements (Interview 14). Another interviewee noted that for staff in a ministerial office, the last few weeks of an outgoing government were spent “clearing the decks”; describing how he spent several weeks “at the shredder” prior to departing the office of the outgoing minister (Interview 23). Extensive replacements of policy staff and the shredding of documents at the changeover of governments (potentially every 3 or 4 years) has serious implications for the retention of the “corporate knowledge” that is usually considered one of the strengths of government.

The role of bureaucrats who work in ministerial offices, whether career bureaucrats or “term of government staffers”, is to provide ‘balanced’ policy advice to their Minister. The views
and accounts expressed by bureaucrats working in ministerial offices appear to be largely consistent with those described by Page and Jenkins (2005). ‘Ministerial staffers’ commonly lack technical understanding of the issues; however, they do utilize sound knowledge of policy and political processes to ‘balance’ the advice of technical specialists against ‘political’ objectives. Consistent with Page and Jenkins (2005), policy officers working in ministerial offices believed that working in these positions placed them on the ‘fast track’ to more senior levels in the public service.

**Policy Workers in Central agencies**

Policy specialists employed within the Department of Premier and Cabinet noted that their role differed significantly from that of policy practitioners who worked in line agencies. Interviewees noted that policy specialists working in central agencies, such as the Department of Premier and Cabinet were commonly termed “Policy Officers”, “Policy Advisers” or “Policy Analysts”. More senior roles usually included the prefix “Senior” or “Principal” to the position title. Titles such as “Senior Policy Advisor” or “Principal Policy Advisor” were common in both central agencies and ministerial offices. Middle management staff within line agencies often held the title “Manager” or “Director”, followed by a descriptive term, such as “Director Strategic Policy”. These observations were consistent with the position titles of many ‘policy’ positions position that are advertised on job network sites (Seek, 2011a, 2011b).

Interviewees working in central agencies or specialist policy units stated that they were commonly tasked with policy work across a range of different policy areas. Considering themselves to be professional policy specialists, they worked in the broad field of public policy and usually moved between different policy areas. The policy specialists related that they often had limited experience or knowledge of a specific technical area. Commonly, they worked to very tight deadlines and time constraints, and relied heavily on the line agencies to supply technical advice. However, they shared a common belief that their professional skills and abilities enabled them to undertake research and analyse policy options, to provide effective advice to government (Interviews 26, 30 & 43). One interviewee noted that central agency policy workers are “at the centre of government policy”, expressing a view that central agencies“…take a holistic view of the nation or of the state and create policy about
the key drivers” (Interview 44). This interviewee also stated that the function of central agencies may include refining or reshaping the policy environment itself:

...they then have the business of coordinating, and in part driving those agencies that have carriage of those areas of policy as their core business, and in some cases redefining what the core businesses of the particular agencies will be, including amalgamating, disbanding so forth where they consider the past core business to be irrelevant or could be better done by being devolved or by another agency.... (Interview 44)

Several central agency policy workers that were interviewed noted awareness of the political climate as being critical to working successfully in central agencies. They described their role as a one of negotiation, networking and balancing technical advice from line agencies against the policy objectives of the elected government (Interviews 26, 30, 43 & 44). Central agency policy workers placed far greater emphasis on achieving results that were “politically palatable” than did bureaucrats working in line agencies. Often their role required them to find a balance between competing views or proposals put forward by line agencies. As one interviewee put it:

...you work in an environment that’s driven both politically...and I guess from a short term view...political perspective...and you’re responsive, and to a longer term (long pause) policy perspective. (Interview 26)

Central agency interviewees considered that their role included “balancing” what was often competing or contradictory agency advice. One interviewee described it thus:

...our role is to be a lot more mindful of whole of government issues, even when preparing a cabinet submission for an individual minister. So I look at a planning submission (sic from the Department of Planning), and I can’t just assess it in terms of ‘is this good planning?’, I also have to consider the impacts across other portfolios. (Interview 26)

The same interviewee noted that his freedom to evaluate and to influence policy had increased after moving from a line agency to a central agency:

I guess the first step is problem identification, and whether that is done for you or by you. In the current context I do a bit more (sic problem identification). Certainly in the line agency environment, there’s not as much opportunity I guess for that. You work in a more controlled environment: certainly I did. But then, I’m expected to identify issues and...if they gain
traction…then I go through the policy development process…. In my case it’s putting something together through my management and then up to the Premier’s office. (Interview 26)

The interviewees were all career bureaucrats, most of whom had entered the central agency immediately after leaving university. The exception being a principal policy advisor who had begun his career in a line agency working in the information technology area prior to being seconded to work within a small team undertaking an organisational review of the line agency. The latter role had led to an offer from a central agency to work in the policy unit (Interview 26).

However, several “central agency” policy workers had also worked in line agencies (Interviews 26 & 44). One officer (Interview 26) had begun his public service career as an information technology specialist in a line agency responsible for land use planning. The other was seconded to a line agency at the time of interview (Interview 44).

As noted in the next chapter (pps 163-175), sound networking and influencing skills were considered a critical skill for policy workers who were employed in central agencies. The critical importance of networking was noted by all of the central agency policy workers, ministerial staffers, executive staff in line agencies, and some, but not all, technical specialist policy workers. Notably, officers working in statutory roles placed considerably lesser importance on networking, some stating that they engaged in very little “informal networking” as it was not “core business”.

The accounts of policy workers in the central agencies accorded with the key requirements stated in the job descriptions. These included conceptual and analytical skills, policy research and development skills, interpersonal and communication skills, and ability to write reports as essential requirements for these positions. Essential education requirements commonly included qualifications in law, economics or public administration [Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria (DPCVic, 2011)]. Some of the policy practitioners interviewed for this research also suggested that the state government employed large numbers of policy workers, the majority of whom were employed in line agencies rather than in central agencies.
The role of policy workers in central agencies, according to interviewees, is in many ways consistent with policy literature. They tend to be ‘generalists’ and their level of specialist expertise is broadly consistent with the accounts described by Page and Jenkins (2005). Interviewees stated that officers were routinely tasked with research and analysis across several policy areas. Accounts of policy research were largely consistent with the explanation of policy analysis provided by Scott and Baehler (2010). Policy analysts in central agencies also stated that they had ‘limited time’ to research and analyse policy options, noting that junior officers were commonly tasked with researching and analysing policy. This view is consistent with the findings of Bridgeman and Davis (2007). However, interviewees noted that they relied heavily on technical advice, and research, provided by line agency staff. These interviewees noted that their own research, as policy officers in central agencies, often consisted of finding out what agencies and other stakeholders ‘knew’ about an issue.

The role related by policy workers in central agencies also included accounts of “negotiating” policy outcomes. Interviewees identified a process of negotiation, of weighing often differing advice from line agencies, attempting to find policy option that were both ‘palatable’ to the relevant agencies, and politically acceptable. As such, political officers in central agencies commonly influenced policy development, at times ‘blocking’ some policy options, while promoting others. This component on their role, while a very important part of their work, is not reflected in the relevant policy literature previously discussed.

**Policy Officers in Line Agencies (Technical Policy Specialists)**

The role and influence of technical policy specialists is not well examined in policy literature. Policy literature commonly examines the role of “policy specialists” (for example Edwards, 2001, Page and Jenkins, 2005, Scott and Baehler, 2010), with the focus of the literature being on the policy process. There is little empirical evidence describing policy work in line agencies, or the relationship between policy development and policy arising from implementation, (although some notable works describing this area of research do exist, for example: Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006, Colebatch and Radin, 2006e). Less evident also, are accounts of how technical expertise is used in the policy development process.

Accounts of technical specialists working in policy do exist in ‘technical’ literature (for example Hoch, 1994). However, accounts of technical specialists’ workings have tended to
receive limited attention in the past from the scholarly policy community. In this respect, the accounts of policy work in line agencies collected during this research are more in accord with the accounts described by Hoch (1994) than those described in some mainstream policy literature.

Technical policy specialists are commonly engaged in shaping implementation strategies, preparing “white papers” outlining policy options and writing policy documents. Technical policy specialists also regularly provide briefings to more senior bureaucrats and government ministers on matters within their specialist field. Also, as evidenced in this research, technical policy specialists are also the developers, promoters and shapers of new government policy.

Technical policy specialists are generally characterised by having a high level of technical expertise in a specific policy area. The role of shaping policy appears to be primarily undertaken by senior technical officers and middle managers. However, junior officers commonly assist senior officers in shaping existing, or developing new, policy. Occupants of these positions usually have postgraduate qualifications in their specialist field, and often have worked in a specific technical field for a substantial period of time. It is common for these technical officers to spend their entire career working in the same specialist policy area (Interviews 1, 4, 7, 8, 15, 18, 19, 23, 24, 28, 29, 34, 37 & 45).

The term “technical policy specialist” is a more accurate description of members of this group than the term “policy analyst” or “policy officer”. In comparison, policy specialists working in central agencies were much more likely to view themselves as specialist policy officers. The latter tend to perceive themselves to be members of a broader ‘policy community’, while the former perceive themselves to be members of their ‘technical’ profession (e.g. environmental scientist, social scientist, planner, transport engineer).

The roles of technical policy specialist vary according to their specific field. That is, the role of an education policy specialist is likely to be somewhat dissimilar to that of an environmental scientist or a hydrologist. Similarly, the work of social policy differs from transport policy. Transport policy primarily relates to the provision of physical infrastructure, such as roads, rail lines and the vehicles that utilize them. Transport policy
specialists tend to be from engineering or similar backgrounds. Social policy specialists more commonly have qualifications in social science, health or similar fields.

Several interviewees stated that the values of agencies also shape the way that policy is approached (Interviews 5, 16, 17, 18 & 31). One interviewee noted that in her experience, differences in orientation also existed between technical specialists whose role was primarily to develop policy and those working primarily in policy implementation (Interview 16). She noted for instance, that statutory planners were primarily focused on ‘doing’ and felt a driving need to make decisions within short time frames, while strategic planners were more outcomes focused, taking longer to prepare positions, and often questioning how the policy or strategy would meet its objectives. She believed that these value/orientation differences often created tension between the two groups. In her opinion, both orientations were necessary in order to provide a balanced approach. However, she also noted that in many important ways, technical policy specialists shared similar beliefs and values that shaped their work, foremost among these being the strong reliance on their particular technical expertise in formulating policy advice (Interview 16).

It was evidenced during the interviews that bureaucrats working in technical specialist roles could be categorised into two groups: technical specialist officers working in strategic and, or, policy roles, and technical specialist officers working in roles relating to the statutory functions of the department. The role of technical “policy” specialists is primarily related to research, preparation of strategic or policy documents, or developing implementation strategies. The role of technical “statutory” specialists is related to decision making, asking “what decision should be made based on current policy?” These roles are described in more detail in the following paragraphs. Consequently, this study differentiates between technical specialist “policy” specialists and technical “statutory” specialists.

**Technical Specialists: the Street Level Bureaucrats**

Several interviewees (technical policy specialists) working in management positions (Interviews 2, 7, 9, 17 & 38) and non-management roles (Interviews 1 & 23) stated that they did not play a significant role in policy development, and had little influence over the policies developed by their departments. These interviewees (Interviews 1, 2, 7, 9, 17, 23 & 38) stated that their role was to implement current government policy and deliver on government, and departmental, priorities. Descriptions of these roles appeared to relate
primarily either to statutory decision making or service delivery. Indeed, their descriptions of work appear to be similar to Lipsky’s (1980) "street-level bureaucrats". While not engaged in policy development, each of these interviewees was actively engaged in policy implementation. They were also aware that people in their department were actively engaged in policy development. Several middle managers were in relatively frequent contact with the ‘policy shapers’ in their department. These interviewees described using channels of communication within the organisation to bring policy-relevant matters, those where new policy may be required, to the organisation’s attention. Furthermore, these interviewees (Interviews 1, 2, 7, 9, 17, 23 & 38) noted that policy was developed by “policy specialists” in “head office”. Several complained that policy was often developed with limited, or no input from their staff. One interviewee (Interview 9) stated that while they were occasionally consulted, this usually occurred after the policy decision had been made, and consultation usually related to how the policy was to be implemented. However, one interviewee (Interview 7) stated that he had previously succeeded in gaining the assistance of policy specialists in the agency in reshaping agency policy.

**Technical Policy Specialists: the Policy Shapers**

Several senior bureaucrats stated that a significant amount of government policy is initiated by technical policy specialists working within line agencies (Interviews 12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 27, 31, 32, 33, 35 & 44). However, while there was often consensus that the public service, and technical policy specialists in particular, were influential in shaping policy, one interviewee (Interview 15) noted that policy comes from several sources; including political agendas, pressures exerted on government agencies, professional views amongst public servants, emerging issues, the national agenda, community concerns and industry. This interviewee noted that, in his experience, policy issues arising from community concerns were more likely to prevent something occurring, whilst industry concerns tended to focus on the refinement of existing policy, rather than proposing new policies. This interviewee believed that public servants were extremely influential in shaping policy through developing policy options, undertaking research, and presenting choices to decision makers. However, he also cautioned that the people and forces that are driving policy can be difficult to identify:
The more you know about these things, the harder it is to draw boundaries (who are driving policy).... Often it is driven by professional views emerging within the public servants. (Interview 15)

The degree of influence that is, or can be, exerted by technical policy specialists also varies depending on several factors. As one interviewee observed:

I think that public servants are extremely influential (in shaping policy). I think that a key part of their work is to develop the policy options, to do the research, to develop the policies, to make assessments, to develop options to present to decision makers for information and choices to make a policy.... But the space to do that varies considerably from jurisdiction to jurisdiction depending on the political climate and the political space they've got to operate in.... (Interview 15)

The interviewee (Interview 15) used the development of another significant land use planning policy, Liveable Neighbourhoods, to emphasise their point:

In developing Liveable Neighbourhoods ...there was an emergence of a policy position from within the professional officers that then gets developed in the context of the Department–Commission–Ministerial framework. (Interview 15)

It it notable that Liveable Neighbourhoods (WAPC, 2007b) is an important Western Australian planning policy that has been guiding land use planning in Western Australia for more than a decade. One interviewee (Interview 17) for example stated that, although he had studied at a Queensland university, Liveable Neighbourhoods was well known and was held out as one of the nation’s most influential planning policies. He stated that it had shaped many of his professional views.

Importance and Influence of Technical Policy Specialists

Technical policy specialists appear to be the ‘engine room’ of policy in government, their role being to provide policy advice based on sound technical expertise and experience. However, consistent with some policy literature and contrasting with others, they are often also the ‘creators’ and, or, ‘promoters’ of policy. As has been noted by Colebatch (2006c, Colebatch, 2006d, Colebatch, 2006, Gill and Colebatch, 2006) and Radin (2000), bureaucrats are often actively involved in policy development. At times, their role can be
likened to Kindon’s (1995) “policy entrepreneurs”, actively promoting ideas or policies. This contrasts with Wanna’s (2010) view that bureaucrats should leave policy to the politicians.

However, not all technical specialists play a passive role in shaping policy advice. Many technical policy specialists are active policy entrepreneurs, proposing and promoting new policy. Data from the interviews conducted during this research suggests that senior technical specialists or middle managers in technical specialist teams often take a leading role in policy development work within government agencies. The majority of interviewees working in line agencies stated that there is a heavy reliance on technical specialists to provide expert input into policy on behalf of their agency. This view was also supported by the interviews held with several central agency policy workers (Interviews 30, 43 & 44) and policy offices working in ministerial offices (Interviews 14, 23 & 36).

Some interviewees expressed the view that the technical specialists working in either senior technical, or middle management roles, are best placed to respond to emerging policy issues as a consequence of the following:

- they have sufficient expertise and experience in their specific technical field to be able to identify the issue, assess its likely impacts, and then formulate a response;
- they often have detailed knowledge of previous attempts to address similar issues through policy;
- they have a degree of political awareness enabling them to determine if support is likely to be forthcoming from the government of the day;
- they are able to utilize extensive networks of professionals working in other jurisdictions to determine what other governments have done, and how successful these attempts have been;
- finally, people working in these positions are often able to utilise their own time or the time of their teams to undertake the initial research and evaluation necessary to bring emerging policy issues to the attention of their agency (Interviews 2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 14, 15, 16, 19, 24, 25, 31, 34 & 37).

However, some interviewees (Interviews 15 & 24) also suggested that technical policy specialists may be declining. One interviewee expressed this view as follows:
The role of public servants is to develop policy frameworks as a response to government...sometimes it will be as a response to a request for a policy to be developed in those areas...and sometimes they (public servants) will lead. I think it is increasingly becoming it is harder for them to lead. Resourcing is so much tighter; the need to run tighter work programs...it doesn’t leave much scope for that sort of policy development. (Interview 15)

Almost all of the technical policy specialists interviewed noted that their advice was increasingly contested, or ignored. Most interviewees stated that it was becoming more common that policy development was tasked to people with limited understanding of the issues. This is consistent with Bridgeman and Davis’s account of a junior officer who was given the responsibility of writing policy. Several interviewees also noted that it was becoming increasingly common for complex tasks to be given to relatively junior officers (Interviews 24, 37 & 46). Many interviewees expressed concern that this was leading to policies that were ineffectual, or were even delivering adverse outcomes that were detrimental to both government and the stakeholders in particular policy areas. Often, unintended consequences could have been avoided if the advice of technical specialists had been sought or heeded during the policy formulation stage. Interviewees in general expressed the view that these trends, together with the politicisation of the bureaucracy, were contributing to a decline in the capacity of government to produce sound policy.


Some policy analysis literature (Scott and Baehler, 2010) appears to suggest that the majority of policy analysis is conducted in specialist policy units that are located in central “policy units”. Page and Jenkins (2005) suggested that most policy decisions are made by middle to upper level managers working in central policy units, who have very limited understanding of the policy area. However, Colebatch (2006b, 2006c, 2006e-a) and Hoppe and Jeliazkova (2006), examining the role of policy workers, have noted that considerable policy work is conducted outside of central government agencies. Colebatch (2006c) found that there has been a marked growth in the number of policy specialists and dedicated policy specialist units in the Australian public service. Colebatch also found that policy specialists are mobile and are likely to move between functional departments and central agencies during their career (2006c:5).
Studies examining public servants in Britain and the Netherlands (Page and Jenkins, 2005, Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006) found that there are thousands of policy workers, if not tens of thousands. Most policy work is conducted outside of the top tiers of government, and is often the role of specialist policy officers. Some Australian researchers have also noted that public policy professionals also appear to form a large cohort within the Australian public service (for example Scott and Baehler, 2010). The role of these specialist officers is not only to implement policy; often it includes creating policy as well.

This research indicates that large numbers of technical policy specialists are employed in government agencies, and they work across a wide variety of specialist areas. Technical policy specialists were identified working in areas such as health, education, agriculture, architecture, land use planning, environmental science, social work, police, emergency services, economics and law, and many other fields. Several interviewees noted that they could think of no areas of policy that do not require specific technical knowledge (Interviews 5, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 25, 31, 37 & 46). Several interviewees also noted that technical policy specialists are the initiators of most government policy (Interviews 12, 15, 16, 18 & 46).

Interviewees worked in different levels of government, ranging from government ministers to relatively junior officers, and were employed in a variety of government line agencies, central agencies, or ministerial offices. Interviewees were generally mobile; more than half had worked for more than one government department, or had worked in other levels of government, such as local government or in Australian Government agencies, during their career. Some interviewees had worked in countries other than Australia. Many had worked for both government and the private sector. Several interviewees were currently employed in, or had previously worked in, specialized policy units within government; some as ‘principal policy advisors’.

Generally, policy officers employed in central and line agencies reported similar levels of experience for officers employed at equivalent levels. Senior policy officers commonly reported more than 10 year experience; principal policy officers and middle managers were likely to have worked in policy for more than 15 years, and often more than 20 years. However, there was significant variation between the amounts of time working on specific policy areas. The length of time needed to rise to senior policy levels appeared to be similar
for policy workers in line and central agencies. However, policy workers in ministerial offices believed that employment in these offices offered possibilities for early advancement to higher positions (Interviews 14, 23 & 36).

Several interviewees whose experience included working for government agencies outside of Australia asserted that there were strong similarities between policy work in the Western Australian Public Service and their experiences in other countries (Interviews 25, 37 & 44). Interviewees stated that policy work, relating to the role of technical policy specialists, in Great Britain (Interview 44) and South Africa (Interviews 25 & 37) varied little from similar work in Australia.

Unexpectedly, the differing views appeared to be greater between cohorts of policy workers within the same government than between levels of government or between different national systems. Several regional directors stated that they had an indirect role in policy development within their agency, often initiating policy to improve service delivery (Interviews 10 & 45). They provided several examples of being able to exert significant influence over government policy. One interviewee (Interview ??) noted that senior managers in line agencies needed to adopt a strategic approach, by developing strategies to address long-term and systemic issues. These interviewees (Interviews 10 & 45) also stressed that there was a large difference between the “little p” operational policies, and the strategic decisions of government. However, they also believed that the lines between operational and strategic were, at times, blurry. In responding to the question “How would you differentiate between the development of new services and a policy?” one interviewee replied that he stressed to his staff, primarily “street-level” bureaucrats working in health services, that “every decision that they make has a direct and measurable financial or resource complication” (Interview 45).

One interviewee (Interview 45) provided examples where he had been successful in gaining additional health services for the region, effectively altering government budget priorities. This interviewee also noted that line managers could have a significant impact on government policy, but it had to be driven by a strong evidence-base and supported by effective networking skills:
...ministers tend to be “operational” in their thinking. It is up to the agencies to develop sound strategic visionary policies to address long term issues. (Interview 45)

Of particular note is the different influence of two interviewees (Interviews 7 & 45) working in similar senior management roles. Both were responsible for provision of services (social and community services, and health) within in the same region. Both had responsibility for managing relatively large numbers (>100) of “street-level bureaucrats”. The interviewees frequently liaised at work and knew each other well, their departments offering “complimentary” services to the general public. However, one was able to exert a significant amount of influence on certain issues, while the other was more limited in this regard. Differing views of policy influence were also provided by two other interviewees who worked within the same line agency (Interviews 9 & 10). While both were employed at a relatively senior level as regional managers, and were located in the same building, they expressed differing views about their ability to influence agency policy (Interviews 9 & 10). There was more variation in the degree of perceived influence amongst this group (Interviews 7, 9, 10 and 45) than among any other group of interviewees. Notably, the interviewees who believed they exerted influence in policy decisions (Interviews 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 43, 44 & 45) also stated that they had very strong networks with policy workers within their own agency, and often also with policy workers in other agencies. However, an understanding of variation in the perceived policy influence of line managers in government service agencies requires considerably more research, and such research would add to the research on the role and influence of “street-level” bureaucrats.

In contrast, the majority of interviewees who worked in the central offices of line agencies stated that they had a direct role in shaping government policy. Technical specialists working in policy roles within the head offices of line agencies also exert considerably more influence than those working outside of the central offices, or those who worked in statutory or operational roles.

Evidence from the interviews suggests that policy workers may be categorised into two cohorts based on their own views of their profession (see pages 113 and 118 for descriptions of these roles). Members of each cohort share similar sets of views and experiences of the policy process with their colleagues, often based on similar roles, positions or learning.
These cohorts were given the descriptors ‘Policy Analysts’ and ‘Technical Policy Specialists’. It is noted here there is a significant body of literature that accurately describes the work of policy analysis (see for example: Scott and Baehler, 2010). Policy analysts are recognised in policy literature; their role, function and importance in delivering policy advice to government is well understood (for examples see: Bardach, 2009, Kraft and Furlong, 2007). Approaches to policy were characterised by one senior executive as being “the difference between being focused on process and being focused on outcomes” (Interview 16). This comment, in some respects, characterised the tension that exists between technical policy specialists and policy specialists. This descriptor can also be used to distinguish ‘technical policy specialists’ as a distinctive cohort of policy workers.

However, while policy analysts are commonly located in central agencies, they are also employed in line agencies. These officers typically provide general ‘policy advice’ to technical policy specialists, refining draft policy to comply with legislation, ensuring that the correct terminology is used. The role and function, and value, that policy analysts bring to policy was recognised by many of the technical policy specialists interviewed.

This research suggests that the majority of policy work in line agencies is carried out by ‘technical policy specialists’ working in senior technical or middle management roles. They appear to be working at a similar level to the middle level bureaucrats interviewed by Page and Jenkins (2005). Page and Jenkins noted that the middle level bureaucrats were often given no more than a “broad steer” for guidance. Similarly, the senior technical specialists and middle managers interviewed in this research noted that they were usually only given a broad directive to develop a policy or strategy, or refine a policy to address a particular issue.

Technical policy specialists are distinguished from ‘policy analysts’ by the mandated qualifications and expertise in their specialist technical field. While there are exceptions, policy analysts are more commonly generalists, often working across a broad field of policy, their primary expertise being an understanding of the policy process itself. As noted above, the work of policy analysts has been examined in the policy literature. However, the work of technical policy specialists is less well understood. The technical policy specialists that were interviewed emphasized the importance of a deep understanding of the issues in preparing advice that that could only be gained through years of experience working in the particular field. Interviewees related both the importance of having sufficient technical expertise,
largely gained through tertiary education, and expertise gained through experience. Both were deemed essential to develop effective policy and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past (Interviews 1, 11, 19, 23, 24, 28, 34, 37, 41 & 46).

These views differed significantly from the experiences of policy analysts (Interviews 26, 30, 36, 43 & 44), who often had only weeks or months to develop enough understanding to respond to a policy issue. Nevertheless, these policy analysts believed that their training gave them appropriate skills and frameworks to examine issues analytically and respond with evidence-based policy. They also noted that they relied heavily on advice from technical specialists in line agencies, weighing up advice from different agencies to, as one interviewee put it, “achieve a balance” (Interview 43).

Several technical policy specialists were interviewed who were working in a technical, non-supervisory role (Interviews 1, 3, 8, 28 & 29), or in middle to senior management roles (Interviews 4, 5, 6, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 34, 35, 37, 41 & 46) and were actively engaged in shaping policy. This work primarily involved the development of implementation strategies, and the refining or development of new policy. The role of technical policy specialists also included conducting or supervising third party research, in order to; determine appropriate policy responses, prepare strategic or policy documents, produce ‘green’ or ‘white’ papers recommending courses of action, and draft new legislation. Technical policy specialists shape the direction of government policy within line agencies but were seldom involved in day to day decision making.

However, one senior bureaucrat noted that “very seldom do agencies have people that exclusively develop policy.... People all through agency are engaged in the development of policy and advising on, if not writing, policy” (Interview 16). She also noted that the people who wrote policy were not the people who initiated it; more commonly, one group of people drafted the ‘bare bones’ and gave it to others to develop: “A whole range of people have a range of policy functions as part of their work” (Interview 16). These observations were supported by those of other interviewees (Interviews 5, 18 & 46), for instance, another interviewee commented thus:

*Very seldom do (line) agencies have a group of people that exclusively develop policy. People all through agency are engaged in development of policy and advising, if not writing, policy...most policy work is done by experienced level 5s, level 6 (senior technical)*
or level 7 (line managers) officers…. Level 6 to level 7’s, the middle ranks, are the prime developers of policy… in the middle levels you find the people who are doing the grunt work… (Interview 46)

Technical policy specialists are not mere passive implementers of policy; nor is their role confined to the provision of advice to government. Technical policy specialists are commonly engaged as policy advisers, policy shapers, and at times, policy entrepreneurs. They can, and do, exert significant influence on government policy. As one interviewee put it:

...so the way it (the policy) turns out in the end is fairly reliant on what we (the technical policy specialists) say, or do, or don’t do.... (Interview 11)

Several executive officers also noted that the work of these technical specialists was fundamental to the work of developing effective policy, for instance:

Finding where are the good thinkers in your organisation…and outside your organisation…you can bring together and say ‘alright, I’ll sit down for an hour here and I want to talk about these particular issues’…and then that will give you a view about what’s the strategy…or, yes it is a significant issue…. You’ve got to be able to identify individuals within your organisation who are good at this (policy) stuff. But those individuals also need to be guided by (sic agency priorities). (Interview 12)

...policy is also often driven by professional views emerging from within the public service…where there is an emergence of professional opinion from within the agency that then gets developed in the context of the department, commission, ministerial framework…. (Interview 15)

**Policy Entrepreneurship and Policy Influence: Shaping Government Policy**

One interviewee (Interview 18) suggested that people working in technical specialist policy positions are able to identify and take advantage of ‘policy windows’ (referring to the concept of policy windows as suggested by Kingdon, 1995) and can be ‘policy entrepreneurs’ within the bureaucracy. However, this interviewee proposed that ‘policy doors’ was a better analogy, suggesting that:

While walking along a corridor, doors can open, allowing bureaucrats an opportunity to influence policy. The bureaucrat is provided a choice: walk through the door and take
advantage of the opportunity, accepting the potential risks associated with this move, or to keep walking down the corridor. The trick is to be in the correct corridor and to position yourself within the corridor to be able to walk through the door when the opportunity arises. (Interview 18)

Bureaucrats must position themselves to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that arise. Bureaucrats also can also exert influence to create opportunities.

Bureaucrats interviewed during this research provided many examples where they and other bureaucrats, had acted as ‘policy entrepreneurs’ to varying effect. It was evident in this research that technical policy specialists who combined political acumen with technical and policy skills were capable of acting effectively as policy entrepreneurs.

Senior technical officers provided examples where they had identified an issue during the implementation stage of a policy, and had approached more senior staff to initiate a new policy response (Interviews 2, 4, 11, 37 & 45). In most instances, the agency had developed a policy response to address the issue, and this policy was ultimately endorsed by the relevant minister. One interviewee described it thus:

Policy development is often driven by an idea coming from someone who has the power to push for its development. I very rarely see a critical strategic policy review to say ‘this is the role we are operating in. This is the policy. These are the gaps. This is the new direction we need.’ Most of the time its policy by ‘oh my god, there’s an issue! It’s become political’, or the DG (Director General, agency head) says ‘we’ve got to do something about this’, or there’s a lobby group making trouble for us. So there’s, power involved in pushing for an issue to be resolved. (Interview 28)

However, managers of technical specialist teams were noted by some interviewees as being a particularly influential group that were influential in developing and promoting new policy (Interviews 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 24 & 25). Interviewees believed that bureaucrats working at senior technical and middle management levels often have sufficient flexibility in their role combined with the technical knowledge to research alternative policy options. This research is commonly conducted as informal collaboration with bureaucrats working at similar level in other agencies. Often these collaborative networks expand as bureaucrats “connect” through informal networks to address issues of concern (Interview 19).
Senior technical specialists and middle managers were also seen by many interviewees to be in a unique position to initiate new collaborative efforts and, through this process, policy responses. One interviewee (Interview 37) for instance noted that middle managers working in senior strategic or technical policy roles have the time, the expertise and the political acumen to initiate new policy. This interviewee pointed out that people working in these roles at times initiated research into issues of concern. In doing so, it was common for them to collaborate with peers in other agencies, and even outside of government, to produce effective advice and sometimes instigate the preparation of new policy (Interview 37).

The same interviewee (Interview 37) noted that middle managers and senior technical specialists tasked with the leadership of teams working on aspects of policy implementation were particularly influential in shaping policy direction. This interviewee felt that these middle managers and senior technical specialists had the requisite experience and knowledge, as well as the authority to support carriage of the policy:

*Policy is generally undertaken at the middle to higher management officer level... Notwithstanding the fact that there would be inputs and involvement by more junior staff; policy, because of its complications, requires quite a high level of experience and knowledge. Both of which one doesn’t acquire...you know...‘just like that’...and obviously with that experience goes the knowledge of the effectiveness or the ineffectual nature of certain...processes or approaches.*

*The second thing is that there is a requirement for some authority to be exercised, and in order to exercise that authority, one needs to be at a reasonably senior level...otherwise you don’t get that carriage, you know. Sometimes it’s the weight of authority that might carry the day...and it has happened on numerous occasions where really good policies have founded because they’ve been carried by people who haven’t had the ability to carry it through...they’ve come up against really tricky opposition and were not able to get it ahead.*

*And I’m referring to both in the Australian and the South African government as I’ve had a fair bit of experience (sic more than 20 years) working in South Africa.* (Interview 37)

However, there was a difference between the amount of influence that the interviewees believed they could exert over new policies, and in the way in which they escalated the problem to the “policy people” in their department. Middle managers felt that they had the option of either raising a matter during departmental meetings, to bring senior management
attention to the issue, or “contacting the policy people (in the department head office) to request their assistance” (Interview 10).

Middle managers often stated that they were well supported by their agency and were able to influence their agency to develop new, or reform existing policy when it was needed. Several also described their actions as amounting to acting as advocates for their client groups (Interviews 9 & 10). However, one regional manager stated a concern that, for a public servant, “there is no risk to say no” (Interview 45). “No” can be justified through policy, procedure and precedent. Saying “yes” exposes the public servant to risk of having to justify the reasons for the decision if challenged, with the possibility of censure.

Middle managers also have the advantages of understanding the bureaucratic system, the communications channels to formalize collaboration initiatives, and the technical knowledge to understand the pressing issues. Bureaucrats working at these levels were also considered, by some, to do most of the work in developing policies in line agencies, for example:

...the initiation might come from further up, but the work will be done by that senior project officer to Director level.... I'm talking not only in Australia, but also in South Africa.... I've obviously had experience in government in my 30 years (working with government).... (Interview 24)

Some interviewees (Interviews 11, 19, 24 & 37) held the view that middle managers had the political acumen to know when to bring their suggestion to the attention of senior management. If senior managers’ attention was drawn too early, the middle managers risked not having sufficient detail on how the issue should be addressed, including the role of the other agencies. On the other hand, if attention was drawn too late, they risked committing their agency to a process that the agency itself may not support (Interviews 11, 19, 24 & 37).

The evidence also suggests that for some bureaucrats, the period they spend working in senior technical and middle management roles is one in which their informal networks and influence expands rapidly. The strength of the networks they develop during this period of their career often shapes their senior career choices (Interview 15):

I would say networks have been fundamental to my career really. My career would not have gone as far as it has if I hadn’t been good at networking and building networks and developing them. (Interview 15)
Interviewees commonly referred to several different networks while describing their work experiences. The networks described by technical policy specialists can be extensive, and they include both personal and professional relationships. Network descriptions also included ‘issue-based’ networks that appeared similar to the “advocacy coalitions” described by Sabatier and Weible (2007).

Interviewees articulated their experience of policy process, and related instances where they had personally been involved in formulating new policy initiatives. Most interviewees related instances where certain policy initiatives had been particularly successful, or where ‘good’ policy initiatives had failed. They described some of the circumstances that had led to the success or failure of these policies. The majority of interviewees were able to relate experiences where they had personally been involved in developing a policy for government. Most were able to describe the issue in detail and explain why the change in policy was necessary. Most also related experiences of where their efforts to effect policy change had been unsuccessful.

The main factor for success appeared to be finding avenues of support for the proposed policy. These avenues of support could be inside or outside the agency. Interviewees who had been successful in promoting policies spoke of working collaboratively with groups of ‘likeminded people’ to organise ‘coalitions of support’ for their policy proposal. Many interviewees who had been involved in preparation of the South-West Framework (WAPC, 2009) noted that several such coalitions had been established during preparation of that policy, and these coalitions had successfully altered the positions of key government agencies in the areas of agricultural land use and environmental protection (Interviews 6, 8, 11, 19, 21 & 25). In particular, interviewees noted the importance of finding ‘champions’ for the new policy, people with the political and bureaucratic connections that were necessary to carry it to the higher levels of government. Without the support of an influential ‘champion’, commonly a senior bureaucrat or person trusted by senior levels, a policy proposal was almost always doomed to fail. Successful policy champions, it was noted, were well-skilled in networking and influencing, these skills identified as being critical for policy workers.

Interviewees also noted that public servants have a responsibility to bring policy issues to the attention of executive levels of government. As one interviewee related:
Several senior technical officers provided examples where they had identified an issue while implementing policies and had approached more senior staff to initiate a policy response (Interviews 8, 28 & 34). In each instance, the agency had developed a policy response to address the issue, and the policy was ultimately endorsed by the relevant minister.

The majority of interviewees working in specialist practitioner roles within line agencies were passionate about their particular field. Many stated that they remained in the public service, working for less pay and without the benefits of the private sector because they wanted to ‘make a difference’. However, most interviewees were also pragmatic, understanding that often a balance had to be reached between competing interests and budgetary constraints in determining the level of service.

At a senior technical or policy level, technical specialist policy officers generally are expected to work with limited direction and are afforded a high level of autonomy in their work. As one interviewee related, “…It’s understood at certain levels that public servants must be operating independently and that they need to be achieving agency objectives and things like that…” (Interview 11). Other interviewees pointed out that often they were provided with a “problem” and requested to develop a policy response, for example:

> I basically got employed and asked to do an Industrial Land Development program document, which was just a document on the supply and demand for industrial land in the Perth-Peel region. And then…the Cabinet approved the Commission (Western Australian Planning Commission) to prepare an Industrial Land Strategy…which is what I’ve been working on since. (Interview 29)

While junior officers were often tasked with researching policy issues, it appeared relatively uncommon for junior officers to work unsupervised. Generally, junior specialist officers work under the guidance of more senior and experienced staff, whose role is both to oversee the work and to mentor and train the more junior staff member:

> …and also the other thing that happens is that senior staff are training the junior staff…in culture (of the agency) and how things are done…that training happens internally and people are taught how to do the job. (Interview 11)
However, one former senior manager expressed concern that it was becoming more common for less experienced officers to work individually on policy issues, and that insufficient time was allocated to their supervision. This person noted that policy work that had in the past been a team effort was in more recent times often left to an individual, who might sometimes provide an unbalanced or biased position, often due to inexperience (Interview 24).

Several line agency policy officers noted that they were given little time to research and develop policy (Interviews 5, 24, 28 & 29). Others stated that policy can take longer to develop. Several technical specialists noted that it often takes considerable time to formulate effective policy, from several years (Interviews 11, 21 & 25) to decades (19, 31, 37 & 46):

...sometimes the opportunity to drive government policy arises...got government support to come up with an updated science based conservation policy for the metropolitan area. That was about a four year project that actually relied on earlier information as well.... It got through with a $100 million budget attached to it...that was in 2000. That’s 9 years ago...and implementation is still proceeding. (Interview 19)

One interviewee stated that he had, in the past, “struggled with not having his voice heard” (Interview 21); policy positions he proposed struggled to gain traction within his agency. However, he had persisted in espousing the need for the government to develop a position on an issue, both within his own agency and to officers from other agencies because, he explained, it was an issue that the government could not ignore (Interview 21). Other interviewees related experiences where their advice had been ignored, often to the detriment of the environment or the community (Interviews 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 21 & 34). For instance, one interviewee related:

You might have a great idea, but you need to be able to sell it to the right people, and it’s hard for a lower level bureaucrat to do that because you have steps you have to go through.... I had this paper. My director at the time sat on it. He said it wasn’t going anywhere...and then there was a change in management. I got a new senior level manager who was a ‘go-getter’... we sat down... I told him about my policy...he said “this sounds great. All we need to do is sell this to the Minister”. So he rang up the Minister’s Chief of Staff and said “I’d like to lock in some informal meetings with you.... I’d like to let you know what’s going on in the Department and I’ve a few ideas”. So they went along to a meeting...coffee somewhere...floated the idea, and the Minister’s Chief of Staff said “This is fantastic. This is exactly what we want. He (the Minister) wants to get money into the
regional areas. He wants to help the local people. He just needs a means of doing that, and this will provide it.” So, it was taken to the Minister and the Minister agreed what a great idea it was. So we were then able to formally run it up through the organisation. (Interview 34)

One interviewee (Interview 31) noted the importance of timing. Public servants may wait for the right opportunity to present policy options to government:

Almost without exception in the time that I’ve been in public sector roles, there’s always been a couple of things, almost ‘in the back pocket’, that are opportunistic…um…initiatives that are very consistent with where you are going or want to go, or setting direction for an agency. But at the point in time at which you want to promote them, there’s either no budget or the (political) climate isn’t right: the time isn’t right. So they stay there for when the timing is right. Not all of them get up, but it’s amazing how many of them have…. Its thinking strategically, but it’s also thinking opportunistically. (Interview 31)

Interviewees also suggested that considerable effort is often spent by technical specialists identifying the most effective process for gaining agency support, including identifying what role each agency would take, prior to seeking endorsement of the process from more senior levels. Several interviewees noted that a significant amount of time is spent gaining support for proposals from other agencies:

...contacting people informally...(Sic. asking) what do you think about this? Talking to them about where we should be going on it…. (Interview 24)

...vital to have good networks...there’s a whole lot of information, positions, opinions which one requires to operate.... Without having those effective networks you can’t do any of those stages effectively...we can’t do it by ourselves and because most policy is going to be applied fairly widely, you need to make sure you’ve good a good level of collaboration prior to going out to whoever the stakeholders could be…. (Interview 37)

Accounts of bureaucrats waiting for the ‘right’ moment to put forward a policy contrasts with some policy literature that describes policy development as a systematic process that occurs within relatively short timeframes (for example: Althaus et al., 2007, Scott and Bachler, 2010). Rather than systematic, the process described by interviewees is almost ‘opportunistic’. It is also difficult to reconcile this view of policy with the accounts of mobile policy workers described by Page and Jenkins (2005).
Technical policy specialists commonly adopt positions based on their own field of expertise, often shaped by their interactions with a particular client group (Interview 16). These positions may at times conflict with those of other technical policy specialists who are approaching the issue from a different perspective. This can often lead to intense negotiation between agency staff, and even between the agencies themselves (Interviews 12, 14, 15, 16 & 20).

One technical specialist (Interview 1) described a close affinity to her client group. However, she spoke of how difficult it was to make anything happen within her agency, describing processes that involved endless rounds of meetings, only to find that decisions had been made “at the top” without any consultation with those “on the ground” (Interview 1). This interviewee stated her mistrust of those policy processes in head offices that involved negotiating with stakeholders, believing that these stakeholders predominately comprised lobby groups representing vested interests. Community representation was usually ignored by the agency unless political pressure could be brought to bear. However, this interviewee noted that in the South-West of the State (Western Australia), community groups were well organised and politically aware, so were able to exert a significant amount of influence. The interviewee’s clear affinity for, and alignment of purpose with, community groups, and her disenchantment with the ability of bureaucratic processes to address community needs, establishes the preconditions of a “guerrilla employee” (as described by O’Leary (2006)). Rather than “go guerrilla” however, this employee had chosen to leave the public service to pursue a career in the private sector. This was not always the case and some interviewees described personal experiences, or those of others, where agency staff had employed guerrilla tactics to influence government policy.

Several interviewees noted that, at times, the professional opinion of the technical specialist officers differed from that of the stated position of the agency or elected government. Most of the senior technical and policy officers interviewed in this research indicated that they were not willing to compromise their professional principles, and would promote options reflecting their professional opinions in spite of the agency holding a different position. Most stated that, where this type of conflict occurred, they would continue to provide their professional opinion, and that, to do otherwise would be an abdication of their professional responsibility to provide honest advice to the government. One senior public servant
(Interview 15) noted that technical policy specialists may, on occasion, even pursue personal or professional objectives that are not a priority for government.

One interviewee noted that “these ideals are generally established while training as an undergraduate student in the university they attended” (Interview 19). This interviewee further noted that the ideals of some agencies may even reflect those espoused by a particular university at which many of the senior staff had trained, rather than the more general ideals espoused within the wider profession. However, agency heads and senior managers tended to adopt a more pragmatic position; most suggesting that there was often a need to balance professional opinions with “political reality” (Interviews 15 & 20).

Some interviewees suggested that senior technical staff sometimes chose how to present a range of different options to their superiors, or to present only those options that favoured their preferred outcome. Their role enabled them to influence decisions by choosing to present options that were consistent with their professional opinion or ideals in a positive light, while highlighting the negative aspects of other options (Interviews 22 & 24). As one interviewee (Interview 34) pointed out, officers could also choose to align their (preferred) proposals more closely with political priorities to ensure a more favourable response:

With some policies, you are really ‘banging your head against a brick wall’. If politically, it’s unlikely to succeed, it can be very difficult. On the other side of it...if it’s aligned with the thinking of government, it’s so much easier to do. (Interview 34)

Another interviewee (Interview 15) pointed out that technical officers with strong preferences may pursue agendas; and these can cause problems for agency heads. Technical policy specialists who act in this manner are seen at executive levels to be promoting their own personal, rather than the agencies or government’s agenda:

I know that there have been instances or examples where you can have officers with particular ‘hobby horses’ or interests that will drive a policy agenda almost regardless of whether the Government, Department or the Commission is interested in it. (Interview 15)

Similar experiences were also described by Hoch (1994) and O’Leary (2006), both of whom described the use of “guerrilla” strategies to describe the activities of those employees seeking to achieve their own policy outcomes while working within government agencies. O’Leary (2006:6) asserts “that guerrilla government happens all the time in the everyday,
often mundane world of bureaucracy”. Further, O’Leary points out that bureaucrats can, and do, engage in clandestine “guerrilla activities” at many different levels; ranging from unwillingness to implement policies that they believe are unfair, to actively undermining the public’s trust in government, or government policy. However, in contrast with O’Leary’s examples, interviewees related experiences of working ‘within the boundaries’ to shape policy advice. Within these ‘boundaries’, even relatively junior bureaucrats can be very influential, as demonstrated by the following account.

While Hoch (1994) did not use the term ‘guerrilla’ in his descriptions, his accounts accord strongly with both those related by O’Leary (2006), and with the accounts of many interviewees during this research. However, it must be noted that neither Hoch (1994) nor the public servants interviewed during this research reported instances as extreme as some of the instances of ‘guerrilla’ actions that O’Leary (2006) examined.

In contrast to O’Leary (2006), who reported that several of the “guerrillas” she researched had suffered professional harm or personal hardship as a result of their actions, several bureaucrats who were interviewed during this research noted that policy shaping activities had been beneficial to their careers. Rather than describe themselves as ‘guerrillas’, the majority of bureaucrats who were interviewed during this research stated that they worked ‘within the boundaries’ to shape policy advice. Several interviewees stated that they had an obligation to provide ‘frank and fearless advice to government’ and others stated that their obligation was to act in the interests of the community and not to act only in the interests of the political party in power. Interviewees did not perceive these to be the actions of a ‘guerrilla employee’, but were instead what was expected of a career bureaucrat.

One former minister (Interview 40) stated that it was also common for more junior staff to brief ministers on topics specific to their role and expertise. This former minister related an example of how he had come to rely heavily on the advice of a middle manager who had a particularly high degree of expertise in a specific, contentious, policy area. The bureaucrat was often present at meetings where the minister believed the matter would be raised, coming to be widely recognised as the government’s “expert” in this particular area and effectively “became the Government spokesman” (Interview 40). This former minister (Interview 40) believed that contribution made by this particular individual was significant, improving the effectiveness of government policy and the level of public trust in government.
decisions. What is significant about this example is that the bureaucrat was, at the time, a relatively junior program manager.

However, it was also noted by many interviewees that the ability to influence policy is largely dependent on the officer’s position in the organisation, although it is also influenced by the organisational culture within which they operate, the level of support for the policy, and the nature of the policy (Interviews 19, 24 & 25). It was also noted by one interviewee that the success or failure of a policy can be influenced by the degree to which they are personally committed to the policy (Interview 19).

The ministers who were interviewed stated that they generally received their advice directly from agency heads or senior staff. However, as one minister noted, bureaucrats provide information to the public on technical matters and do not comment publically on policy (Interview 40). If comment is to be made by bureaucrats, it is much more common for more senior bureaucrats to discharge this role (Interview 40). This account by the government minister is consistent with Wanna et al.’s (2010) assertion that bureaucrats should be wary of attempting to make policy (Wanna et al., 2010).

Often the issues were politically sensitive. For example, one minister (Interview 13??) stated that he had requested a state government department to “streamline the approvals process to prevent unnecessary delays” for developers. The agency then evaluated options and recommended a strategy to the minister that resulted in a new Bill being introduced into the State Parliament for adoption into legislation (Interview 13). This Bill, which amended land use planning legislation and introduced the use of Development Control Panels to Western Australia, has been particularly controversial.

It was noted by many interviewees that the environment in which they work is both complex and demanding. Many expressed views that effective implementation of government policy often involves strategies that are contentious, and, or, difficult to achieve within fiscal and resource constraints. However, it was also noted that the capability of public servants tasked with developing policy or implementation strategies varies widely, and is dependent on their skills and experience. One line agency manager complained that the capacity of line agencies to undertake policy work has been declining due to a loss of experienced staff, and, as a
result, policy is now often developed by relatively junior and inexperienced officers (Interview 24).

While senior bureaucrats were more likely to advise ministers or make public statements regarding their agency, it was reasonably common for agencies to rely on relatively junior specialists to analyse options and advise upon the most appropriate response. Relatively junior offices were also tasked with formulating policy. This is consistent with a case cited by Althaus et al. (2007) in which they were approached by a junior officer who had been tasked with developing a policy.

As the senior technical officers often have more immediate knowledge of the area than their superiors and are more "in touch" with an issue, it is sometimes very difficult for a superior officer to substantiate a different viewpoint. Although this situation does occasionally happen, it was noted by one respondent that it can leave the government open to criticism if reports are "leaked" to the media or other parties (Interview 34). Several interviewees also expressed concern that their reports were at times edited by superiors to reflect a different position (Interviews 1, 28 & 34).

This finding is consistent with Stewart’s (2009) observation that “too many senior managers continue to edit and re-edit briefs and other documents, to the frustration of their junior colleagues” (2009:7). Staff in the Minister’s office noted that their role was to balance the policy advice from state government agencies with the expectations of other stakeholders to find the best political solution for the Minister to support.

**Mobility, Experience and Expertise of Technical Policy Specialists**

It was noted that some of the more senior bureaucrats tended to be quite mobile with regards to shifting between agencies, several holding academic qualifications that were not specifically related to their area of policy responsibility. One senior ministerial policy adviser expressed his opinion that policy advisors at the highest levels required broad experience in policy, encompassing several areas, in order to operate effectively at a ministerial level (Interview 14). However, this view was at odds with the views expressed by several of the senior technical specialists, who believed it was only by remaining in a particular professional field for a lengthy period of time that officers could gain the necessary experience to address complex policy issues (Interviews 5, 19 & 24). While it
appeared to be relatively common for policy analysts to work on issues that were outside of their area of technical expertise, arguing that their technical expertise was in “policy”, most of the technical specialists interviewed had in fact continued to work within a specific area of expertise.

While these findings appear to differ somewhat from the findings of Page and Jenkins (2005), it is likely that many of the interviewees in this research worked at lower levels in bureaucratic departments than those interviewed by Page and Jenkins. Initial analysis of the limited number of interviews conducted with bureaucrats working in the higher levels of the public service have tended to confirm the findings of Page and Jenkins (2005).

One senior member of the public service who was interviewed (Interview 15) stressed the importance of researching experiences of policy workers in other states and from counties. Expressing some degree of concern that the Western Australian Public Service tended to be isolated, with some elements holding somewhat parochial views, this interviewee stressed the importance of speaking with policy officers who had developed a policy or strategy, rather than relying on the published information. This interviewee stated that, in their experience, copying a policy often resulted in repeating the mistakes of others, without benefitting from the learning experience associated with policy development. The interviewee also pointed out that it was often more important to find out what went wrong, rather than just focus on where the policy had worked. This interviewee believed that the most important question should be: “What would you not do if you were to develop the policy or strategy a second time?” (Interview 15)

Management staff interviewed for this research believed that as staff progressed to more senior positions, the administrative component of their role became more dominant. Several respondents stated that they no longer had the time to research issues in depth, so they relied heavily on junior staff and colleges to keep them ‘current’ on key issues (Interviews 5 & 37).

Policy workers, whether working in line agencies, central agencies or ministerial offices were aware of the limitations, and frustrations, of policy work in government, where ideals often were overtaken by “bureaucratic” processes:

\[ \text{Sometimes it becomes a bureaucratic policy process, rather than outcomes based analytical process. So if we do due diligence, we will end up with outcomes based policy, but those} \]
outcomes will be based on the unique characteristics of the society and the sector to which we are addressing the policy rather than a blanket… (long pause)

(Researcher: “does this happen very often?”)

I don’t believe it does, and I think that the times that it does happen (sic. are) the times when people make strategic plans, state strategic plans, state strategies. A high order strategic plan is when people say “what could we do differently? What’s unique about our situation? How can we make it better?” And I think that this is almost seen as a luxury…and people get down to the “real nitty gritty policy” which is the structural stuff which (includes)…“oh look they’ve done this in another country or another jurisdiction”. A ‘cut and paste’ that…and change the name to “Perth” or “Midland” and that will be our new policy on the xyz…and what good chaps are we. (Interview 44)

Published Evidence in Vacant Position Advertisements: Where Technical Policy Specialists work in Government

Technical policy specialists are employed in large numbers throughout Australia, working both inside and outside of the public service. In March 2011, the Australian job web-site “Seek” returned 777 positions in Australia for which ‘policy’ was listed as a key term in the ‘Government’ and ‘Defence’ sectors (Seek, 2011a). Based on the number of positions advertised, there is a significant amount of policy work occurring in line government agencies and in local government; 144 positions were listed on “Seek” in “Policy, Planning and Regulation” within “Government and Defence” (Seek, 2011b).

As previously noted, the key requirements of such positions, as stated in the published job descriptions, were consistent with the accounts provided by the technical policy specialists who were interviewed in this research. Job descriptions for technical policy specialists varied, particularly with respect to the education requirements and experience deemed essential to the position. Notably, the majority of these positions did not list policy qualifications or training as being essential requirements for the position. This finding is consistent with the statements of the technical policy specialists interviewed in this research. With very few exceptions, the majority of interviewees did not possess formal qualifications in policy, or a related field, and few had undertaken any formal policy training.

Broadening the search to include other sectors resulted in more than 2000. While noting that the search results included a number of positions that were not specifically related to policy
work, the search did demonstrate the variety and number of positions for which the role includes exerting some influence on policy. It must be noted however, that searches of job search websites, such as Seek, identify the positions that are currently being advertised, so the results will vary according to the positions being advertised at the time.

The primary purpose of these websites is to link job seekers to employers, allowing job seekers to apply on-line for advertised positions. For this to occur, positions advertised on these sites include links to job descriptions and other materials detailing the position requirements and providing information for job seekers on role and responsibilities of positions, required education and training, reporting relationships, and in the location of the position within the organisational structure. In addition, job advertisements on job search websites may also provide links to organisation websites, providing details of the organisation’s purpose, goals, objectives, structure and performance.

The accounts of policy workers in the line agencies accord generally with the key requirements stated in the job descriptions. These job descriptions commonly list a range of requisite skills, including; conceptual and analytical skills, policy research and development skills, inter-personal and communication skills, and ability to write reports. However, in addition to these skills, job descriptions for technical policy specialists almost always require specialist qualifications in a specific technical area. Technical policy specialist job descriptions almost always require specialist qualifications in a specific technical area, typically stating that possession of tertiary qualifications relevant to the particular specialist area are an essential requirement for applicants to be considered. For example, positions relating to land use planning commonly require at least an undergraduate degree in Urban and Regional Planning or in a related field. Similarly, positions relating to environmental planning require bachelor level qualifications in environmental science or similar. Technical specialist jobs are regularly advertised with links to job descriptions on job websites such as Seek (www.seek.com.au). In Australia, State Governments also maintain their own websites to advertise government positions, including technical specialist positions, for example the Western Australian Government maintains a job website at www.jobs.wa.gov.au (WAGovt, 2010). In recent years, the Western Australian Government has advertised so called “specified callings” for particular technical specialist positions that require specific qualifications, such as environmental science and land use planning. The
Conclusion

The previous examination of the literature demonstrates that, while there has been extensive research into the broad field of public policy and its sub-fields, much of the research into policy implementation has been from the viewpoint that policies are created by politicians and implemented by bureaucrats (see for instance: Dye, 2004, Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Lane, 1990). The ability of bureaucrats to assist or impede policy implementation has long been recognised (Dye, 1976, Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Lipsky, 1980, Winter, 1990, Lane, 1987, Younis, 1990, Stewart, 1999, Hill, 2004, Sabatier, 2007, Hill and Hupe, 2002). However, the respective roles of policy actors within the bureaucracy are less evident. High-level civil servants are not the only actors to consider if we want to more fully understand the development of public policy (Page and Jenkins, 2005:145).

The evidence presented in this chapter challenges prevailing academic understandings of the way in which middle-ranking officials affect policy. Their work, far from being subordinate and insignificant, positions these officers to develop initiatives, sometimes on sensitive topics, and interact with ministers and senior officials, including those within and outside the agency. Policy development is not confined to the top tiers of government, nor is it confined to centralised policy units. Policy is in fact, more commonly developed by technical policy specialists located in the line agency responsible for delivery of that particular area of services.

The boundaries between policy making and implementation are also less distinct than has previously been suggested by some policy literature. It was noted by many interviewees in this research that there is a continual movement of policy specialists within and between agencies, and between agencies and the ministerial policy offices. The research presented here suggests that policy actors perform specific, although not necessarily exclusive, functions in policy development and implementation. Furthermore, individual policy actors may play a variety of roles in the policy process depending on timing and circumstance.

This research has provided considerable evidence that technical specialists are active participants in shaping government policy. Technical policy specialists interviewed in this
research described different roles in policy; some working in areas of implementation, while others almost exclusively worked in policy development. A surprising amount of policy work is undertaken in line agencies, the majority of interviewees noting that these agencies are the principle ‘drivers’ of policy in government. The findings of this research also suggest that policy development and implementation are more closely linked than is suggested by much of the policy literature.

The role of policy analysts in central agencies appears primarily entail undertaking research to ‘balance’ policy advice provided by line agencies, particularly when these agencies provide conflicting advice. Their role is often to coalesce, or “bring together”, policy advice from agencies, often balancing competing or contradictory advice from different agencies. It is less common for policy analysts to develop policy themselves, their role being more aligned with the implementation of government priorities than in the practical work of developing policy. Their involvement is most common when policies are politically sensitive or when policies involve multiple line agencies. However, policy analysts were also identified by technical policy specialists as being ‘blockers’ of new policy initiatives. The roles of policy analysts are therefore more likely to be that of a ‘gatekeeper’ than that of an ‘entrepreneur’.

While ministers are the principle decision makers with respect to policy and commonly provide broad guidance to agency heads on government objectives and priorities, it is less common for ministers to give specific directives. They rely heavily on advice provided by “their” agencies and their ministerial staff. Agency heads also stated that they rely heavily on the advice of ‘technical specialist’ officers.

Technical policy specialists are the initiators of the vast majority of government policy, responding to critical and emerging issues within their portfolio. In particular, technical policy specialists in middle management and in senior technical roles were identified by interviewees as being the initiators of most government policy. However, although they are well-educated and experienced in their technical specialist field, they commonly have limited formal training in policy.

Several technical policy specialists complained that their advice had been filtered prior to reaching their minister or the head of their agency. Interviewees stated that it was not
uncommon for more senior bureaucrats or policy advisers to block policy advice from reaching the Minister; especially advice that may indicate that the aspirations of the Minister, or those of the agency, might not be attainable. Advice might also be blocked in cases where technical policy specialists had identified unintended or adverse consequences. However, political factors were the most common reason for policies proposed by technical policy specialists to be blocked. It was also noted that when technical policy specialists possessed highly developed policy, negotiating and influencing skills, this significantly improved the likelihood of their specialist advice being actioned. Some interviewees noted a continuing decline in experienced people in government, particularly experienced technical policy specialists, as an important factor contributing to a decline in policy capacity in the Western Australian Government.

However, it was also noted that technical policy specialists, and other policy actors, can also present policy options in a manner such that their preferred option is likely to be chosen; or can choose to present only limited options to government. Technical policy specialists often influence decisions by choosing to present options that are consistent with their professional opinion or ethics in a positive light, while highlighting the negative aspects of other options. At times, they may also pursue policy objectives that may not be a priority for government, or that are inconsistent with government policy. Policy actors often act to change government policy, or may choose to ignore it.

The boundary between legitimate actions of a career bureaucrat to alter or shape policy and those of a “guerrilla employee” is indistinct and, beyond very extreme actions, can be hard to define. Whether the boundary is crossed can be a matter of perception. Several interviewees had worked actively to change government policy, championing new directions for government. All had actively sought support from policy actors outside of the agency in which they worked, and several had engaged with actors outside of the state government to elicit support. Several stated that the new policies were eventually adopted by government, with at least one interviewee receiving formal recognition for the policy. However, interviewees also gave examples of instances where their attempts to alter policy had failed; or where they were continuing their attempts to alter policy. In these instances they continued to wait for the ‘right’ alignment of political actors, or for the issues to reach a sufficient ‘critical mass’ to gain the necessary support. This is inconsistent with statements by Wanna, et al. (2010) that bureaucrats should not involve themselves in making policy.
It was noted that unlike policy analysts, technical policy specialists describe themselves by technical profession. For example, urban planners refer to themselves as ‘planners’ or ‘strategic planners’; environmental specialists refer to themselves as ‘environmental scientists’. They are also commonly described by similar titles in published job advertisements and position descriptions. This creates difficulties differentiating between technical policy specialists and technical specialists whose roles are primarily related to policy implementation. Statutory technical specialists share with technical policy specialists requirements for professional qualifications and experience.

Interview responses suggest that while statutory specialists appear less likely to have a direct role in shaping new policy, they will often escalate issues to technical policy specialists to initiate a policy response. The role of technical specialists is primarily in policy implementation. They are primarily involved in “application of rules” or implementation of policy. In contrast, the role of technical policy specialists includes “shaping the rules”: refining existing, or creating new, policy. While many technical policy specialists work in policy related positions for their entire career, interviewees noted that it is relatively common for statutory specialists to move into policy positions, becoming technical policy specialists. Several interviews stated that technical policy specialists whose initial roles had been in policy implementation commonly had a better understanding of how policy could be shaped to ensure effective implementation than their ‘policy only’ peers.

The process described by Western Australian interviewees was one where policy is initiated and developed in line agencies and is then ‘refined’ by central agency policy analysts. The evidence from this research suggests that the work of technical policy specialists is commonly to develop policy. Policy analysts consider a policy’s political acceptability and how it will be implemented.

It is becoming evident in this research that the role of technical policy specialists is not well understood. In particular, the following elements of their roles require further examination: how policy specialists go about the process of developing public policy; how they develop strategies for the implementation of public policy (the frameworks within which the “street-level” bureaucrats operate); and, how networks of public policy specialists assist in these processes. Several aspects of the roles of technical policy specialists: technical specialist
expertise; knowledge of the policy process; networking; and collaboration, are examined in the next chapter to further inform understanding of some of these elements.
Chapter 7: Factors Affecting Policy Influence

Introduction

This chapter continues the examination of policy processes in government, exploring several critical aspects of policy work: technical expertise, policy expertise, networking and collaboration. The chapter assists to position technical policy specialists as influential policy actors and more clearly defines their role and influence in shaping policy and implementation strategies.

Technical policy specialists, who have a good understanding of policy processes and possess sound networking and negotiating skills, can be influential policy actors. Hoch (1994) noted that technical expertise must be supported by sound negotiating and political skills if bureaucrats are to be effective in shaping policy. Negotiating and influencing skills are essential to policy and implementation, and are of equal importance to policy analysts, technical policy specialists, agency executives, political staffers and elected representatives. These skills are essential for the effective development, endorsement and implementation of policy. However, while these skills are important, technical specialist knowledge is also an essential ingredient element for the development of sound policy. The majority of interviewees in this research stated that policy decisions made without reference to technical specialist knowledge are unlikely to be effective.

The people interviewed in this study work in a complex and demanding environment. The capability of public servants tasked with developing both policy and implementation strategies vary subject to their skills and experience. Their ability to influence policy, while largely dependent on their position and role in the organisation, is also influenced by the organisational culture within which they operate; the amount of support for, or opposition to, the policy; and the type of policy itself. This chapter examines the importance of these skills to policy work, and positions technical policy specialists in the policy process.

Topic 3: Technical Specialist Expertise

Page and Jenkins (2005) found that many of the bureaucrats they interviewed did not have technical expertise in the areas for which they were “developing” policy. They also found that middle-order bureaucrats relied on talking with other officials, attending conferences and studying information about the policy area to acquire knowledge of pertinent issues
Bureaucrats who were interviewed by Page and Jenkins felt that they were able to develop sufficient understanding of pertinent issues within a relatively short period to enable them to develop effective policy. However, Page and Jenkins also found that European bureaucrats were commonly specialists in their particular policy area; they typically remained working in their specialist area for much longer periods than their British counterparts, and they complained that a lack of continuity made their British counterparts more difficult to work with (Page and Jenkins, 2005). The views of the British policy workers interviewed by Page and Jenkins reflect the notion that it is the transmittance of experience, rather than specialized knowledge that is the critical ingredient of decision making. This view is consistent with that of Barkenbus’s (1998:9).

The work of Page and Jenkins (2005) suggests that in Great Britain policies are often developed by middle-order bureaucrats who possess limited understanding of the issues to be addressed, and who have little or no expertise in the policy area. Some Australian policy literature suggests that this also is the case in Australia (for example: Scott and Baehler, 2010). If policy development is largely being conducted, or controlled, by people without specialist expertise in the relevant policy area, this leads to contemplation of how well the resultant policies can be expected to perform. Alternatively, it may be the case that the actual policy work is carried out by the specialists that report to the middle level bureaucrats interviewed by Page and Jenkins (2005); after all, it is not uncommon for people, bureaucrats included, to take credit for the work of others, and it is arguably ethical for a manager to take credit for the work of their team.

Several questions are raised by the Page and Jenkins’ research. First, how involved were the middle-order bureaucrats in actual work to develop the policy, and how well did they understand the policy making process? Second, did these managers present the policy as proposed by the specialists on their staff, or did they ‘filter’ or alter it to make it more palatable, or to gain favour with their superiors? If either were the case, then it is likely that more junior staff would differ from their superiors in their opinions about the policy process, and the veracity of the policy position ultimately reaching the executive.

The majority of technical policy specialists employed in senior technical or middle management roles were very experienced in their specialist field, most having worked in their specialty area for more than ten years. Nearly all interviewees held undergraduate
degree qualifications in their specialty area; the majority of interviewees working at senior
technical or middle management levels also had postgraduate qualifications in their
specialist area, a few even held doctorates (Interviews 18 & 37). Commonly, the middle and
senior managers that were interviewed also had formal training in management or a related
field, several having completed an Master Degree in Business Administration (referred to as
an MBA) or some other postgraduate business qualification. However, few had undertaken
any form of public policy education.

Often, interviewees stated that a high level of (technical specialist) experience was necessary
in order to have a sound understanding of the issues relevant to a particular policy area.
Experience in a particular policy area bestows a sound understanding of the issues, and is
also essential to establishing networks and building coalitions of support:

Policy...because of the complicated aspect, requires quite a high level of experience and
knowledge...both of which one doesn’t acquire ‘just like that’ and obviously with that
experience, knowledge of the effectiveness or the ineffectual nature of certain processes or
approaches...It takes a long time to develop an appropriate response to some problems. It
takes time to bring together people with the skills, and who were willing to assist, to research
and identify potential solutions, and to gain the political support necessary. (Interview 37)

Policy actors who lack experience may find it difficult to find the necessary support for a
policy proposal. As one interviewee stated, inexperienced policy actors lack support because
they have not had sufficient time to develop networks of support:

They don’t have the connections. They haven’t been around long enough half of the time to
really know who to talk to, what to do or what to look for. (Interview 24)

Other technical policy specialists commented on the time taken to collect the information
necessary to address problems. Several noted that it can take years (Interviews 11, 16, 18,
21, 24, 25, 29, 37, 41, 44 & 46) or even decades (Interviews 19 & 31) to develop an
appropriate policy response. Several technical policy specialists also noted that they are
increasingly being given less time to prepare policy, and this is adversely affecting the
quality of the policy response (Interviews 28, 29 & 34). It was also noted by some
interviewees that policy development is increasingly left to junior officers, who were often
unaware of the depth and complexity of the relevant issues. These junior officers were
commonly not given sufficient time to undertake the research necessary to prepare sound policy advice.

A large number of interviewees (almost all technical specialists) expressed the view that it is not even possible to provide sound policy advice without possessing a deep understanding of the relevant issues (Interviews 5, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 28, 29, 34 & 37). Several officers stated that it takes decades of working in a particular policy area to develop the requisite expertise to develop effective policy (Interviews 24, 34, 37 & 46). Significant experience working in a specific field is necessary in order to fully appreciate the complexities and avoid common pitfalls that can befall those inexperienced in policy:

*It takes time to understand how things work and what has been tried before. People new to a role often think they have found the answer to a problem that they think is obvious. They waste time and effort, as often it has been tried before. Experienced people are more likely to know what has been tried, and why it has failed.* (Interview 24)

Generally, technical policy specialists and policy analysts working in policy units within planning and environmental agencies believed that they had substantial experience and expertise in their chosen field, and that this was essential to their position. One interviewee stated that “a good theoretical basis for policy must be supported by an understanding of the issues” (Middle Manager; Interview 19). This interviewee expressed a view that it is difficult for officers without experience in a particular field to develop sound policy positions. This interviewee (Interview 19) also believed that the solutions to policy problems that were proposed by new officers had often been attempted before. Another interviewee (Interview 5) supplied a copy of a paper by Dunning and Kruger (1999) and commented that they often observed the “Dunning Kruger Effect” in people whose (technical specialist) expertise was limited, expressing the view that this explained many of the problems facing people who had worked only for a short time in a technical policy area. The interviewee pointed to the following quote from the article’s summary:

The authors suggest that this overestimation occurs, in part, because people who are unskilled in these domains suffer a dual burden: Not only do these people reach erroneous conclusions and make unfortunate choices, but their incompetence robs them of the metacognitive ability to realize it. (Dunning and Kruger, 1999:1121)
Dunning and Kruger (1999:1132) argued that those with limited knowledge in a domain not only reach mistaken conclusions and make regrettable errors, but also remain ignorant of this fact due to their incompetence. However, they also found that capability rises rapidly when some training is provided (Dunning & Kruger 1999). Dunning and Kruger (1999) also cautioned that their article may contain faulty logic or methodological errors. Notwithstanding this cautionary note, several interviewees in this research pointed out that it is becoming increasingly common for junior officers to be asked to develop policy, these officers lacking both detailed understanding of the policy issue and, often, comprehension of their ignorance (Interviews 24, 34 & 37).

Several interviewees (24, 34 & 37) pointed out that several policies had been released recently containing “critical flaws” that would have been avoided if more experienced officers had been involved in the formulation of these policies. Ignorance of the particular policy issue can also prevent inexperienced officers from finding “experts” who may be resident in the agency, and who could aid in formulating the policy response. This problem is exacerbated in agencies where restructuring has occurred or where officers have been reassigned to areas outside of their core expertise. Unfortunately, this situation is becoming more prevalent; most interviewees noted that regular restructuring, and reassignment of officers to work on “current” priorities, is becoming commonplace in government agencies.

**Topic 4: Understanding the Policy Process**

Policy workers, including policy analysts and technical policy specialists, demonstrated differences in their understanding of the policy process. Adams (2004:30) wrote that “knowledge is the modern currency of public policy” with creation of meanings that guide actions being the most important feature of knowledge. The policy actor who has an understanding of the processes at work, and their relationships to other stages in the overall process will be in a position of relative power, compared to those to whom this knowledge is unavailable. This highlights an important issue, namely that many public servants who are actively engaged in the policy process may not have even the basic understanding of the simplified policy process depicted by the policy cycle that is commonly contained in policy textbooks. Academic literature provides several sources of information that inform on policy work: 1) policy literature; 2) policy analysis literature; and 3) empirical studies in public policy, public administration and public management. The policy practitioner may also
choose to read one of the seminal works on policy, by Lasswell (1936, 1956), Lindblom (1968), Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989). However, specialist policy books may be too detailed to engage policy neophytes, particularly those whose reading time is short and whose main preoccupation is merely finding the correct process to follow. Many policy books contain differing accounts of the policy process, focused more on debating the semantics of policy making than on providing practical insights for policy workers within the public service (for example Sabatier, 2007). Books on public policy may also examine two or more approaches to public policy, examining each from an academic perspective (for example Hill and Hupe, 2002). While academic journals comprise the most up-to-date source of information on public policy research, these are most readily available to, and used by, those inside academic circles; subscriptions to academic journals are less common in public sector agencies.

It is reasonable to expect that sound understanding of policy process and analysis should be essential learning for anyone contemplating a career in the field of public policy. Therefore, when researching policy processes within the bureaucracy, it is reasonable to anticipate that interviewees working in the policy field would be likely to have undertaken some kind of formal policy education. It is also to be expected that the views held by policy practitioners would be likely to vary depending, in part, upon their background, their position within the bureaucracy and the extent of their experience in policy processes.

Understanding the diversity of views that are held by policy practitioners is fundamental to understanding how policy is delivered. A practitioner’s view of, and comprehension of, policy processes is likely to depend on their training and education and their understanding of policy literature. While some practitioners may believe that academic knowledge is of limited relevance, others may view it as being essential to the introduction of new and improved processes for formulating and implementing public policies. However, the academic literature on public policy is often conflicting and contradictory, and consequently, some literature may be incongruent with the processes experienced by some policy workers in practice.

The level of policy training and experience reported by interviewees varied widely, ranging from less than one year’s experience reported by a graduate policy officer working in a central agency, to more than 30 years’ experience reported by several senior public service
executives. However, the majority of interviewees had worked in policy positions for periods of between 10 and 20 years. Importantly, although many of the interviewees did not have formal public policy training and had not attended public policy courses, almost all interviewees had at least a conceptual understanding of the policy process. Many interviewees willingly discussed policy formulation and implementation, noting the different approaches needed when “planning or preparing” a strategy or policy in comparison to those needed its application. Several interviewees also discussed the stagist policy cycle model that is commonly outlined in public policy texts (for an example see Althaus et al., 2007). However, few had done more than browse undergraduate literature that had been prepared to accompany one- or two-day policy courses. Several interviewees used their own experiences to demonstrate situations where implementation and formulation could be seen to be discrete stages in the policy process. Interestingly, the majority of interviewees felt that these processes were much more closely linked than was depicted in some policy literature.

Views of the relevance of policy education and training varied among policy practitioners. The majority of policy practitioners stated that, in their experience, the actual workings of policy were often inconsistent with the models proposed by academic literature. One central agency based policy analyst (whose formal training included a PhD in a field related to public policy) explained that actual policy processes were often closest to those described by Lindblom (1959), stating that the term “muddling through” often came to mind (Interview 30). This interviewee further explained that, in their own experience, almost all public policy work is incremental in nature and governments tend to avoid risks associated with radical policy shifts.

While some practitioners believed that academic knowledge was of limited relevance, others believed it was essential in order to introduce new and improved processes for developing and implementing public policies. Empirical evidence from these interviews suggests that understanding the diversity of views that are held by policy practitioners is fundamental to understanding how policy is delivered; it is also necessary to determine how best to develop and organise knowledge mobilisation and training. Notably, the evidence suggests that policy capacity in government agencies is declining, in part due to a growing lack of understanding of the policy process.
Several senior bureaucrats in line agencies voiced concern over what they saw as a decline in policy capability within government (Interviews 24, 34 & 37). Some interviewees believed that declining policy capacity resulted more from increased contestability of bureaucratic policy advice by policy actors located outside of government, rather than from a decline in agency capability (Interview 1, 5 & 20). Others however, took a differing view, believing that declining policy capacity was principally due to a lack of relevant policy training being provided to those tasked with developing policy. One senior bureaucrat stated that the ongoing lack of policy training in the Western Australian Public Sector was among the most significant issues facing the government, and this lack was hindering the government’s ability to formulate “good” policy (Interview 37):

We’ve got to get serious about it (policy development). We’ve got to invest in people with good training in public policy development. They’ve got to extend themselves a bit and not just sit in Perth and sit in front of the computer. You’ve got to go out and talk to people…. We’re not orphans in this stuff…. I don’t see a lot of the people involved in policy going through some formal training in public policy or in public administration. I don’t know that that happens a lot here either…. Policy advice to government is such a big part of the work of agencies…. But are we any good at it? Do we follow all of the normative models that you read about in public policy literature? Do people attend some university courses? I would like to see our people here (engage in more policy training). Just because you’re involved in policy development under statute doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t get a little bit of understanding about the processes of good public policy. (Interview 12).

The research indicates that there is a commonly held view that policy capacity is declining in line agencies in the Western Australian Government. In part, this may be due to the retirement of some of the more experienced senior technical policy specialists and middle managers. However, it may also result from some of the recent changes to management structures within government organisations noted by several interviewees (Interviews 12 & 15).

A large number of interviewees expressed concern that it was no longer possible to guarantee progression to more senior levels within the same specialist area. As a result, technical policy specialists have become more mobile, and transfers between divisions, both within and between agencies, have become much more common. It has also become more common for technical policy specialists to leave government and enter the private sector.
Often these changes in employment are accompanied by a change in specialisation within the broader technical specialist area. However, technical specialists may leave their area of specialization altogether. As a result, increasing numbers of experienced technical specialists are being replaced by less experienced officers who often lack sufficient background knowledge to fully understand the policy issues. All of this has contributed to an ongoing decline in technical specialist knowledge and government agencies’ capacity to develop sound policy. The rise in the number of, and importance of, generalist policy specialists has increased the capacity of central agencies to analyse policy options, but has done little to address the loss of technical policy specialist expertise. As one interviewee described it:

*The point is, there was a very strong learning environment in government...and it was like an apprenticeship. And you did more time in each job (than now) and you had to demonstrate your understanding before moving up to another level...and it was a training ground...it was definitely a training ground. I think we’ve lost a lot of that now. People move much quicker, they move to higher levels much quicker, and it’s probably not expected of them that they have an in-depth knowledge of [long pause] options.* (Interview 34)

A (technical policy specialist) middle manager whose role was primarily policy development also noted that the lack of policy training is hindering the ability of government agencies to shape policy. They described the situation thus:

*I would like to suggest that proper policy training isn’t provided. It’s almost assumed that if you are a real guru on the (sic technical) topic that you’ve a good measure of the policy that’s required. Whereas the actual mechanisms and the processes...and the way in which that policy might be positioned and its linkages in the governance structure.... I don’t find that actually taught in government.... All I would suggest is that if somebody with the (technical) knowledge also had the (policy) training, they would be better equipped.* (Interview 37)

Lack of appropriate policy training and insufficient understanding of the policy process, especially the authorising environment, is limiting the government’s actual capacity to formulate effective policy. This concern was echoed by the majority of interviewees.

Savoie (2003, 2010) has noted that the policy environment has changed significantly in the past 30 years, stating that “policy is no longer the product of a single department working through its Minister to secure cabinet approval” (Savoie, 2003:206). As a result,
understanding the authorising environment is the one aspect of policy training that was seen by some interviewees to be critically important to people working in policy. One interviewee summed it up as follows:

*I think the most important thing that I learnt in the academic sphere was the authorising environment type studies. That factor is the single most important factor in policy development. People always have to understand who is making the final decision. Too many people just don’t get that. They may think that the Minister is making the final decision. Sometimes it’s not that at all. It may be the Premier in consultation with a backbencher in a marginal seat. Often, the person who is advocating doesn’t understand that and takes the wrong approach to the policy development process.* (Interview 34)

Several interviewees expressed the view that many of the government policies that are developed by agencies are never fully implemented because the policy process had been inadequately understood by the officers tasked with developing the policy. These views were shared by several middle managers who worked in line agencies, all of whom were experienced technical policy specialists, each with more than twenty years’ experience in policy development (Interviews 24, 34 & 46). These interviewees expressed concern that there has been a trend towards policy development being tasked to junior officers, where formerly this had been the role of relatively senior officers, usually working in teams, and often supported by teams of junior officers. Junior officers were thus trained in the ‘art’ of policy by more senior policy workers. While initially, these junior officers had a limited understanding of the technical specialist area (and consequently of the issues the policy was intended to address) and the way the policy process worked, they were provided on-the-job training to develop the necessary skills to work productively in the policy environment. Interviewees believed that the current practice of allowing junior officers to work on policy without close support and mentoring from more experienced bureaucrats is contributing to a general decline in the policy capability in government.

Some interviewees also believed that the trend towards greater reliance upon generalist policy officers has also contributed to the decline in the ability of the public service to offer meaningful policy advice (Interviews 19, 24). However, this view was not shared by other interviewees; notably two policy specialists, who believed that the ability to adopt a balanced approach was crucial to good policy (Interviews 36, 38).
Notably, all interviewees agreed that the work of policy development and shaping of implementation strategies is difficult and requires substantial professional experience to identify solutions to complex policy issues. This research suggests that ‘good policy’ results when the correct balance is achieved between sound ‘technical specialist’ and ‘policy’ or political advice, based on appropriate levels of knowledge and experience. Unfortunately, some evidence suggests that this balance is becoming lost, to the detriment of policy.

Interviewees noted that on-the-job training is only a part of the education process for ‘new’ policy workers. Many interviewees noted the importance formal policy training for both new and experienced policy specialists. Notably, this was seen as a critical issue for both policy analysts and technical policy specialists. The majority of interviewees (and all interviewees employed in government) noted that insufficient policy training is provided to people working in policy, whether occupying roles in implementation or in policy development, or as decision makers).

Only one interviewee, a line agency executive whose experience included working “in policy” as the principle policy adviser to an Australian Government Minister, held formal policy qualifications (Interview 31). In addition to the dearth of formal policy education, the majority of technical policy specialists had received little or no formal policy training. Moreover, the interviewees who had received policy training indicated that the training had only limited practical application to their role. This view was shared, albeit to varying extents, by both policy analysts and technical policy specialists (several policy analysts did state that the training had been “quite useful”). Nevertheless, all the interviewees suggested that ‘on-the-job’ learning held more relevance to learning about policy work than formal training.

While there was a common consensus that education and training are critical elements to understanding the policy process, many interviewees also expressed concern that insufficient policy training was provided to both policy analysts and technical policy specialists. During the course of each interview, interviewees were asked to describe their educational qualifications. While no effort was made to quantify the amount of formal or on-the-job policy training that interviewees had received, many interviewees described in broad terms the training they had received during their career. All of the public servants interviewed had completed, as a minimum, an undergraduate degree from a recognised university. Many
interviewees also had one or more post-graduate qualifications, including several with doctorates. However, very few interviewees had formal qualifications in public policy, politics or public administration. One interviewee noted that many technical policy specialists had “fallen into policy without a proper grounding in the craft” (Interviewee 16). This statement was supported by the majority of technical policy specialists interviewed, few of whom had made a conscious decision to enter the policy field. Interestingly, it also appeared to be fairly common for policy analysts to be lacking formal policy training (Interviews 26 & 43). However, it seems more common for central agency staff to have made a conscious decision to become “policy professionals”.

The responses to questions about formal education and qualifications that were obtained from the policy analysts were somewhat surprising. It was expected that a key requirement for policy analyst positions would be qualifications in a field related to politics or public policy. This was to some extent supported by the documentary evidence. Positions for policy advisors and principle policy advisors advertised in employment websites commonly cite qualifications in economics or law (in addition to public policy) as being essential criteria for policy specialist positions (Seek, 2011a). However, while some policy analysts interviewed did have tertiary qualifications in public policy or a related field, most stated that they had received little or no formal training in public policy. Although several interviewees did comment that such qualifications were common amongst policy analysts, particularly amongst the “newer generation” entering the agency through ‘graduate programs’ (Interviews 14 & 26), only one of the policy analysts interviewed had qualifications specific to public policy, and none had qualifications in economics or law. Instead, the policy specialists that were interviewed related a much broader range of qualifications. Two policy analysts pointed out that they had begun their careers working as technical specialists in line agencies, and had moved to central agencies to be involved in more general policy work (Interviews 16 & 23) and consequently, held tertiary qualifications in various specialist fields, such as agricultural science, commerce, urban planning and computing science.

Technical policy specialists and policy analysts often held similar views when discussing policy training. Most expressed strong views that there was a pressing need for relevant policy training to be made available for policy practitioners. The majority of interviewees who had attended public policy training courses stated that the courses were often of limited
usefulness in practice. Policy education was often described as lacking practical application, as it was delivered in an academic manner and did not include practical examples:

...proper policy training isn’t provided.... If you are a real (technical specialist) guru, it’s almost assumed that you will have the skill to develop policy...whereas the actual mechanisms and processes and...the way in which that policy might be positioned and its linkages in governance structures. I don’t find that is actually taught in government...and the few courses that I have been to...have been, how can I say...were very, very light on.... (Interview 37)

Criticism was generally made that while the courses were useful to assist practitioners to understand the process, they described a process that was overly simplistic and unlikely to occur in practice. One interviewee, a middle manager, described policy courses as “a little light-on”, stating that they seldom offered any new insights for experienced practitioners (Interview 37). Another commented on the value of policy training to ministerial policy advisors:

So, I think a lot of TOGS (term of government employees) have on-the-ground experience in terms of dealing with constituents: enquiries or running a campaign or getting a policy document up and running the night before some launch, or something like that. But in terms of the academic ‘what is the public policy process study?’ I think it’s pretty rare for people in the Ministers’ offices to know about the theoretical side of things. I don’t necessarily think it’s essential to have that knowledge behind you in the policy development process, because a lot of it is intuitive. (Interview 36)

One interviewee noted that many aspects of policy cannot be learned through training courses. Identifying the potential stakeholders (supporters, opponents or blockers) who may influence, support or oppose a policy through its development is critically important. However, identifying powerful actors can be difficult:

...because it’s very difficult to understand the layers within government.... To understand and use government...which influence at times within government...because not everybody has equal influence.... You may have the title of Executive Manager or Executive Director or whatever, but that’s not to say that you have the most influence. That’s the most difficult part to work out: who’s got the most influence.... (Interview 25)
While few interviewees held formal policy qualifications, all interviewees working in a technical specialist policy position held qualifications specific to the technical area in which they worked. Several interviewees also possessed qualifications related to economics, management or project management.

Policy learning, in both central and line agencies, was primarily gained ‘on-the-job’. All the interviewees said that they had learned their policy skills through ‘on-the-job’ training and mentoring by more experienced co-workers and more senior staff:

And also the other thing that happens I guess is that senior staff are training the junior staff. The ‘handing-on’ culture of how things are done...that training happens internally and that people are taught how to do the job...the judgement they use...what things comply and what don’t comply...so you’ve got a double thing there – the influence you’re having over policy and the influence you’re having over the next generation of staff. (Interview 11)

Several interviewees noted that senior technical officers, while not employed in a formal management role, are responsible for the mentoring and training of junior officers (Interviews 11, 19, 24, 28 & 37). However, one experienced middle manager observed that there had been a change in this mentoring training culture since he had entered the public sector nearly 30 years previously:

I’ve had people who can sit down and talk for half a day on the policy options and the flaws and the gaps as to why government should regulate something, or the basis for paying a subsidy, and how you pay that subsidy and what the policy should be.... I mean, I learnt under that environment, and I learnt from my managers. You don’t get that anymore. By and large I don’t learn anything from my managers...but maybe that’s a function of my age (laughs). Now I usually tell them...but maybe I’ve become a cynic (laughs) [agrees with interviewer’s observation that he is now the mentor to whom junior officers turn for advice]. (Interview 34)

While the experiences of policy workers interviewed in this research appear to be somewhat consistent with statements made by Bridgeman and Davis (2007), who state that their book largely resulted from an approach by a relatively junior officer who had been tasked with developing a policy, they differ in several respects. Firstly, interviewees related that the most important learning was achieved through doing. Textbooks and policy courses, while accorded some value, cannot teach people the ‘how to’ of doing policy. Interviewees also
considered that the processes that they experienced in practice did not align with the process depicted in the “policy cycle” described by Bridgeman and Davis (2007).

Many interviewees described what they considered to be a widespread decline in the levels of general knowledge and experience of the people tasked with policy, seeing this as a cause for concern. One senior manager stated that it was becoming more common to find that even relatively senior people had limited understandings of either the issue relating to the proposed policy or the policy process itself (Interview 24). This apparent decline in knowledge and experience of policy workers does not appear to have been addressed in policy literature, nor have the ramifications for policy been explored.

This research has also identified what appears to be a gap between the policy and technical specialist literatures. Policy literature (and policy training) commonly focus on improving understanding of the policy system, or describing in detail the process of analysis, assuming that these skills provide a sound basis for policy development (Scott and Baehler, 2010, as examples, see: Althaus et al., 2007). Technical specialist literature commonly describes the technical processes without examining the policy environment in sufficient depth (although notable exceptions do exist, for example: Hoch, 1994).

Hoch (1994), in examining the role of planners in the United States, noted that planners who relied entirely on technical expertise were often unsuccessful in shaping or implementing policy. Hoch also found that sound political acumen and negotiating skills were also essential skills for planners working to implement existing policy, and for those who attempted to shape it. The research conducted in this study identified a considerable degree of similarity between the experiences related by Hoch and those related by planners and other technical specialists working in Western Australia.

**Topic 5: Networks, Negotiation and Influence: Key Policy Skills**

Policy work is undertaken in a complex and demanding environment. As Hoch (1994) has noted, technical expertise must be supported by sound negotiating and political skills if bureaucrats are to be effective in shaping policy. Stewart (2009) stated that there is no aspect of policy that is not affected by the activities of multiple agencies within governments; that the bureaucratic structures within which public servants operate do not reflect the realities of modern governance and that public servants have a responsibility to define more clearly how
they see their role (2009:8). The bureaucrats interviewed in this research commonly complained of dealing with the complexities of government, where agencies and Ministers can, and do, have competing interests.

Hill (1997:84) has previously warned of the dangers of treating public servants as a cohesive group, noting that there will be differences of interest, experience and culture within the bureaucracy and, in particular, between staff working in different departments. Hill also noted that organisational factors play an important role in determining the influence that a policy actor can exert over the development of policy, and in influencing the direction of policy (1997:86). This is consistent with Edwards (2001), who noted the importance of recognising the competing interests of different agencies. Of considerable importance is the existence of inter-organizational rivalries or circumstances where uncertainties exist over areas of responsibility. These rivalries are of particular concern in instances of “complex and independent cross-portfolio policy making which demands that the relationships between policy areas be assessed before ministers take decisions” (Edwards, 2001:9).

Dunleavy (1980) and Hill (1997) believed that public service professions sometimes adopt a unified view of the world. This position was supported by Croker (1986), who argued that the growing professionalism within the public service, and the structuring of agencies around professions, has tended to intensify the influence of professional disciplines on related areas of policy (1986:2). Thus, policy officers working in different departments will approach an issue from differing perspectives, quite possibly working toward different outcomes.

Considine (1994:127) noted that “Networks may be defined as non-formal methods of system-wide learning and regulation. They are used on the shared need to trade information, to create agreed values and to ward off threats”. In this research, several senior members of the public service stated that ‘siloing of agencies’ was of particular concern and had led to less-than-optimal policy outcomes (Interviews 12, 15, 16, 18 & 20). Interviewees stated that agencies should take more care to consider an issue from many perspectives; not only from their agency perspective. Providing only one perspective to a single minister risked presenting policy proposals to government that are unfavourable to other agencies, and to the stakeholders they represent. As such, the policy may produce unintended adverse consequences for the community.
The issues of siloing was raised by many interviewees, with many stating that they had formed strong working relationships with staff from other agencies to address key issues. However, many noted that it was easier to work with staff from some agencies than from others. One agency head stated that in his experience, when the agency leaders had a good working relationship, this facilitated cooperation between staff (Interview 20). On the other hand, where mistrust or poor working relationships existed between agency leaders it was difficult for agency staff to find “common ground” (Interview 20). He complained that an inordinate amount of time was spent “defending his agency’s turf” against agencies that had an “expansionist” agenda and noted that this often hindered cooperation between agencies (Interview 20). The interviewee explained that “when relations between agency heads are good, cooperation between staff of both agencies can flourish” (Interview 20).

Several interviewees noted that central agencies often exacerbated these “turf wars” between agencies, and had been known to promote the interests of some agencies at the expense of others (Interviews 16 & 20). The “professionalization” of the public service was perceived by many of the interviewees as a major contributing factor to siloing between agencies. Public servants generally felt that their job was much more difficult than when agency structures were more stable prior to the professionalization and politicisation of senior management roles.

The issue of siloing extends beyond barriers between agencies. It also exists between governments. One senior bureaucrat described efforts to educate agency staff over the importance of communicating with other jurisdictions:

*I’ve encouraged people here...you’ve got to start looking outside...not just within your own organisation.... You’ve got to start looking outside of your own state...there’s a fair bit of parochialism...we’ve got to get engaged more with people who are struggling with similar sorts of problems and issues in other jurisdictions to see how they do it.... What can we learn from them? ...what can they learn from us?* (Interview 12)

Most of the interviewees who expressed a view on the issue of siloing believed that greater recognition of the role of networks was necessary in order to strengthen relationships between agencies and facilitate cooperative policy development. Interviewees from all levels suggested that forming strong networks between officers working at all levels of government was an effective way to open communication channels and limit the adverse impacts of
siloing. However, many interviewees noted that bureaucratic agency structures do little to promote networking, with some suggesting that networking was actively discouraged or was viewed by some managers as “not being ‘core business’” (Interviews 1, 6, 13, 28, 29 & 46). The majority of interviewees who expressed a view on the issue of siloing believed that more recognition of the role of networks is necessary, from each agency, and from the government as a whole. They believed that tangible efforts needed to be made to strengthen collaborative relationships between agencies to facilitate cooperative policy development.

Some technical policy specialists noted that strong ‘professional’ cultures establish themselves within organisations, based on shared professional principles and ethics. These cultures are often based upon a common set of values formed in universities. These cultures form the basis for many of the ‘unwritten rules’ within organisations and, unlike political priorities, are not easily changed. One interviewee expressed it thus:

...a professional planner will have his own (professional) agenda. From my experience when you were at (a university) you get taught certain ideals about planning and what you can achieve...and then you get a job and start working and you apply those ideals as a part of what you are doing...those sort of (professional) principles.... They’re in the background I guess...the ideals...and other professionals have their ideals as well, that are always operating in the background.... If you don’t agree with the culture of a workplace you eventually leave. People who are more entrepreneurial will end up being consultants...people who believe in the greater good, and the public good, some of the objectives of planning for the community, will stay in the public service.... (Interview 11)

Several other interviewees noted that the cultures of different universities also shape professional values within government agencies (Interviews 14, 17, 19, 24 & 34). One interviewee, who had attended three prominent universities, stated their view that each indoctrinated students in different values according to the particular ideological orientation of each university’s teaching faculty:

I would say the only time that professionals are indoctrinated in values is through the university they attended. I would say the universities have very strong values, and it is the university values that shape your mindset. I found that all three universities [I attended] had quite distinctively different cultures and values...the reasons why universities are hothouses of ideology is that the lecturers pursue particular students to undertake ongoing research,
and they are grooming their replacements. So you have a very powerful, reinforcing culture. However, this is not what I have found in (agencies). (Interview 17)

A senior ministerial staffer noted the impact of shared values within agencies:

There is a certain zeitgeist, you could say, that permeates a group of public servants: the known world. Planners will have a paradigm of known facts. They’re not necessarily facts in a scientific sense, but they perceive that view to be correct. Economists have a set. Lawyers have a set.... Then subsets within that group will have their own set...road engineers have a way of thinking...so I think that it’s more a professional zeitgeist that applies to each profession...it’s a set of known understandings that each of the professions have, each of the cohorts within the professions have, or the community have...and they tend to be adopted in agencies...areas of belief will permeate the agency, and they will tend to vary little across the agency. But they will be quite different from those held by (another agency). So you have the cohorts that are ‘warring-it-out’ so to speak, when providing advice to government. I know because when I spent time in (names two agencies), there was an understanding what it was all about, and I saw even in (a central agency) that there was another set (of values) that was more focused on the budget.... Although there were some differing views, there was a set of overarching views that everyone agreed to.... (Interview 14)

People who do not share these values often leave the agency to work in the private sector, or other agencies whose values more closely align with that of the individual. It was noted by some interviewees that while central agencies have very strong ‘professional’ cultures, organisation culture is strongly influenced by the ‘political culture’ of the government of the day (Interviews 26 & 44).

However, many other interviewees noted that differences in values and differing cultures can also exist within the same agency. One interviewee highlighted their view that multiple agendas always exist:

Even within (agencies) there are multiple cultures. Being a strategic planner, I have found there is a more progressive...strategic planners generally speaking are progressive thinkers. ...generally speaking, I have found that there is a polarity, some degree within every (agency) I have worked in, and from (agency) to (agency) there is polarity. It is an oversimplification that there is an agenda from government, there are agendas from individuals, and there are agendas from networks of convenience, collective peoples of convenience, and that’s where you find people who align themselves with (special interest)
groups. These people may also exploit networks to push an agenda. But those things are often very individualistically based. (Interview 17)

Notwithstanding that these differences in ‘professional’ culture do exist, all of the interviewees who worked in government expressed one common value: a strong desire to act for the good of the community. As one interviewee put it, it was about ‘making a difference’:

I guess that where I’m coming from is that I personally want to make a difference…. I think everybody wants to make a difference in their careers…and I want to add some value to the...system...so that’s what drives me.... I’m not just a robot applying policy...so I have to come up with a policy. So you get to a certain level in government and you start to influence the advice, and provide the value that you are trying to add. (Interview 11)

Many of the examples provided arose from individual or agency efforts to affect beneficial changes in order to improve policy or its implementation. This desire, strongly reflected in all of the interviews, is somewhat at odds with the view that bureaucrats are motivated by more selfish desires. The ability to influence change was especially important to many interviewees.

Negotiating and influencing skills were therefore seen to be critical to the work of both technical and policy specialists, many of whom make extensive use of personal and professional networks, both to influence and collect information. With the exception of statutory specialists, all interviewees responded that extensive networks were essential to success in their role. Statutory specialists were less likely to maintain extensive informal networks than their strategic counterparts. Meetings conducted by statutory specialists were more likely to be formalized, conducted within set rules to a specific agenda.

Some strategic technical specialists and senior management staff said that up to 80% of their networking was informal; with most stating that networks are used as much to influence as to gain information. Almost all senior officers and many other officers from lower levels that were interviewed stated that successful performance was dependent upon the strength of the informal networks they had developed. All noted that networking required a significant amount of effort to both maintain existing networks and develop new contacts, and this was necessary in order to remain ‘current’ in their field. However, some officers working in more statutory roles suggested that the majority of their networking was through formal meetings;
these officers placed very little importance on informal networks in their work. One statutory officer stated that the use of informal networks could be construed as subversive and suggested that the CCC (Western Australian Crime and Corruption Commission) ought to be concerned if they were aware of their use and influence in the public service (Interview 1).

Interviewees from all levels suggested that formation of strong networks between officers working at all levels of government was an effective way to open communication channels and limit the adverse impacts of siloing. However, as noted earlier, many interviewees noted that bureaucratic agency structures do little to promote networking. It was noted by some interviewees that bureaucratic structures and protocols also discourage networking, for instance:

_There’s obviously somewhat of a proscription against seeking direct advice from officers from different agencies…when those sorts of conversations come to the attention of CEOs, they tend to complain to my colleagues and other officers…and I occasionally ‘get the word’, you know, that if you want to speak to officers from my department, you should go through the official channels…but the reality is that people can’t stop having conversations that people have on street corners and coffee shops which tend invariably to issues of the day…particularly when someone has a network. The definition of a network is when someone has a trusted relationship, and that trusted relationship is built on many, many years of professional…collegiate association. Which has allowed that trust to form, an understanding of what the issues are…and so those people are those who might align in thinking, and therefore provide a peculiar view which might be aligned with your view…who shares the same paradigm…_ (Interview 14)

One agency head (Interview 18) noted that it was critically important for agencies and policy officers to actively identify strategic allies for new policy proposals. This person noted that particular importance should be placed on finding the “corridors of support” (Interview 18). However, this interviewee also noted that there were likely to be agencies (or areas within agencies) in opposition to some proposals, and what they termed “corridors of indifference”, where efforts to gain support would effectively be wasted (Interview 18). This interviewee stressed the importance of finding the “correct individuals within agencies” to leverage support from the agency itself, noting that such people were not always senior executives (Interview 18).
The Chairman of the Australian Government Productivity Commission has recently noted that many senior public servants at the top of the bureaucracy began their public service careers as policy research officers (Banks, 2009). However, many others rise through the ranks of line agencies, gaining both influence, political acumen, and developing strong networks. Several interviewees noted that often these people are recognised as the “go-to people” in agencies. At times, they may exert more influence than some agency heads (Interviews 14 & 25):

*I think that these people have a very important role in that they can pick up on issues...they can provide analysis of the issues to validate whether or not there is a crisis, or if there is an issue. They can assess the various motivations or incentives that drive the peak bodies or industry groups or individuals in the community to provide some sort of second opinion to a minister on how genuine those views are, and whether they are actually real concerns, and if it’s something that government should be involved in...they also forward views, not only about the nature of the problem, but also potential solutions...good public servants will always forward one of more potential solutions....* (Interview 14)

A senior bureaucrat observed that networks are potentially the single most importance source of information for a person developing policy. This person put it thus:

*What you get from the net and what you might get from websites is nothing like first-hand experience from someone who has actually either written legislation or is implementing it, who has dealt with all the foibles and the pit-traps and can give you some really good information.* (Interview 12)

Another interviewee working at a senior level noted that “good networks can take much of the effort out of the job” (Interview 15). This interviewee described the essential conditions for sound networks as comprising trust, rigour, shared views or shared understanding of issues, and alignment of thinking (Interview 15).

Most senior staff members that were interviewed suggested that department staff at all levels needed more training in both policy and networking. Senior public servants in particular noted that influencing skills were commonly lacking amongst junior public servants (Interviews 15, 16, 24, 25 & 37). Several noted also that it is now much more common for junior officers to conduct internet searches to obtain information, rather than contact people
in other agencies. This trend was viewed with concern by many interviewees, one interviewee expressing it in the following way:

You’ve got to go and talk to people. You’ll just get the clinical analysis that you get off the website, about how an existing process works in theory. And I can tell you now, because I’ve worked in it, it doesn’t work like that. You’ve got to talk to people who can give you the good news stories and the bad news stories. Because you’ve got to try to build your own, and if you build off this model, you’ll have the same problems that they did. You’ve got to go and actually talk to the individuals. (Interview 12)

For most technical policy specialists working in policy, informal networks appear to be crucial to coordinating policy processes. Interviewees stated that their role would be well-nigh impossible, if not for the support and assistance provided through informal networks. Some interviewees noted that the majority of their networking involved helping others. Informal networks were viewed as a major source of information, described by one interviewee as “staying in the loop” (Interview 2), and deemed by most interviewees to be critical to success in their role. Informal networks appeared to be of greater importance to technical policy specialists (officer level and managers), policy analysts (central agency based and in ministerial offices) and senior executives than to interviewees working in operational or administrative roles. One interviewee described it in the following way:

You need to go out to find out where are the corridors of indifference? Where are the corridors of support? How are you going to deal with the people who are indifferent or opposed? What’s the strategy? And if you are candid and honest with people, then they’ll be the same with you.... So, you’ve got to think about individuals and you’ve got to think about strategy because you do need support in these things. And it’s good to test some of these ideas out. You’ve got to be fairly clever about it, and not in a formal way. Putting up a good policy paper is all very well, but if you actually haven’t sussed it out with individuals.... But I also think that part is one of the most interesting parts of policy development. (Interview 12)

Policy analysts in central agencies also noted the importance of networks. As one interviewee put it:

(Networking) is extremely important.... Networking and influence...informal networking you spend a lot more time on it. In terms of building trust and influence, the informal is probably more important. (Interview 26)
Senior ministerial staffers shared this view. One interviewee expressed it in the following terms:

*Networks are vitally important...starting with the agency...relationship with the CEO is very important.... If you didn’t have a very good relationship with the CEO, I can’t think of anything worse...you need networks to get good advice...to interdict issues where they are going astray or to get guidance...having networks into the public sector (agencies), while it’s not really condoned as such in a formal sense, because of the separation between the public sector...you know, the official and the non-official networks but I think I notice...the formal networks...provides a check...in my networks, even in casual conversation...someone may speak about a report or activity.... ...you trust those sorts of insights...because they are people you trust, you understand the people they are...so, it draws your attention to that aspect...so, it does tend to take a lot of the effort out of the job... (Interview 14)*

*Having good networks, an informal coffee with the right people...suddenly you find out things that you might otherwise not have known, your attention might not have been drawn to, or you might not have been able to put in the time to do the assessment.... Because that is the issue...at this level there’s just so much information coming into the office...you really do need those interpretive comments from people who you trust to make the right assessments to provide you with the ability to triage what you need to consider and what you need to give advice on... (Interview 14)*

*The problem I think if you rely on the formal networks, you get told what you are supposed to hear, whereas from the informal networks you will get some honest opinions that might not be sanctioned by the powers that be...this provides you the opportunity to question the more pestiferous advice you are getting. (Interview 14)*

Several senior bureaucrats stated that the strength of their own personal networks had been critical elements in their career. One senior bureaucrat noted that “without strong personal networks, it is impossible to get anything done” (Interview 15). Many of the senior bureaucrats and middle managers who were interviewed believed that often strong personal networks were essential to the success of more formal collaboration between agencies. As one interviewee described it:

*Networks are critically important I think. It is critically important to have good networks when you are developing policy (pause) to draw on as many circumstances and experiences as you can. A lot of the success of policy depends on building trust and confidence...gives*
However, there is evidence that suggested that the professionals whose work was to shape or develop policy, or to develop implementation programs, place more reliance on informal networks than do officers working in more statutory roles. This research indicates that many technical policy specialists may be closer in the way they use informal networks to senior staff than to street-level bureaucrats who are employed at a similar level. One senior public servant stated her view that the personality types were attracted to policy work differed from those attracted to more statutory roles; she considered that technical policy specialists were innovators, seeking solutions to problems, while statutory officers were more likely to be focused on decision making (Interview 16).

This research has suggested that technical policy specialists make extensive use of informal networks to collect information, inform others, and influence decision-making and policy implementation. Technical policy specialists and senior bureaucrats actively maintain networks and regard this as essential to effective policy work. Public servants working in more statutory roles appear more likely to regard the maintenance of networks as falling outside of their normal duties. However, this research suggests that the creation and maintenance of informal networks can substantially improve the chances of successful policy implementation, and can aid in the provision of better policy advice.

The views expressed by many interviewees are consistent with Considine’s (1994:127) statement that “Networks may be defined as non-formal methods of system-wide learning and regulation. They are used on the shared need to trade information, to create agreed values and to ward off threats”. Consistent with this research, Considine (1994) also noted that the role of networking includes creation of agreed values and warding off of threats, and further, that networking is critical to effective collaboration between agencies.

However, while the majority of interviewees stated that networks were crucial to fulfilling their role, the importance ascribed to networking was varied, and for a small number of interviewees networking was considered relatively unimportant. The use of networks also varied. The view of most interviewees whose work was related to policy creation or review was that informal networking is "core business" for public servants. This view was also shared by most of the senior bureaucrats who were interviewed. In contrast, strong...
professional networks appeared to be of lesser importance to several technical specialists who worked in regulatory positions (Interviews 1 & 29).

Several interviewees noted that networking was not an important aspect of their work, nor did they ascribe any importance to networking to assist them to fulfil their duties (Interviews 1 & 38). Interviewees working in statutory roles (Interview 1 & 29) described networking through formal meetings; commonly which agendas were prepared beforehand and minutes of these meetings were recorded. While this form of “formal” networking through meetings was deemed essential to their work, informal networks were more likely to be viewed as "time wasting" (Interviews 1 & 29). Other interviewees noted that this view of networking is common amongst statutory officers, several expressing some concern that this ‘narrow view’ has limited the effectiveness of some government sectors (Interviews 5, 15, 16, 31 & 37).

There appears to be some evidence that networks are most influential when they include both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension is critically important to limit the amount of ‘filtering’ that may be imposed by differing layers of management, and to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to the task. However, the vertical dimension does not necessarily align within the hierarchical structure of the organisation. Several interviewees stated their concern that there is a band of middle-to-senior managers in the Western Australian Public Service whose tendency is to “block” any initiative or policy proposal that has potential to alter the status quo (Interviews 1, 3, 11, 21, 28 & 29).

Officers may work with public servants from other agencies to gather data or to garner support for a policy proposal. Several interviews related experiences where they had worked with technical policy specialists from other agencies to advance new policy positions, and for which they found channels of support through the other agency (Interviews 6, 11, 21, 27 & 34). This was a particularly important strategy where a “blocker” was located in the hierarchical agency structure, occupying a position where they could prevent the proposal reaching higher levels in the organisation. While circumventing the “blocking layer” was recognised as a “risky” strategy, it was often the only way to advance a policy position.

One agency head also complained that the middle management “blockers” had prevented several initiatives and reforms from being implemented and were a major cause of concern (Interview 20). Although aware of the existence of “blockers” within organisations, the
heads of agencies appear to have relatively limited powers to force the necessary changes to remove these blockages. One interviewee (Interview 45) stated that the existence of “blockers” in middle management levels was easily explained. Specifically, many of the public servants in these levels are middle aged baby boomers, who have survived successive governments, often instituting organisational restructures, by “keeping their heads down” and not taking risks (Interview 45). The least risky option for any public servant is to say “no”; any other answer just increases the risk of exposure to harm:

For a public servant there is little risk in saying ‘no’. Saying ‘yes’ may mean that you have to defend your decision. You can always find a basis for ‘no’. ‘Yes’ is risky if people start looking for scapegoats. (Interview 45)

Within a risk averse public service, fear of failure may be the most significant driver. Several interviewees noted that the “risk of getting it wrong” could have significant implications to the public servant(s) involved (Interviews 24, 28 & 29). Effective networking can reduce the risk, or at least to share it with others. Networking may also offer public servants opportunities to garner support for policies and proposals, to solicit advice and to share learning. Potentially, providing the conditions for, and encouraging formation of effective networks between technical policy specialists (and other public servants) may be the most powerful tool available to governments to engender a culture of “saying yes”.

The research provided some evidence that policy officers use networks to test the veracity of new policy proposals with their peers, thereby implying that they are important to effective policy processes. Several interviewees also stated that it is critically important when establishing good working relationships to not hold an expectation that for every favour given, a favour should be returned. One interviewee stated that, in their experience, returns could come from unexpected sources, and often not directly from people for whom favours had been done (in this instance the interviewee described “favours” as the sharing of useful information, or the sharing of contacts who could be of assistance) (Interview 34).

Networks and networking were identified as elements in policy development and are essential skills for policy actors in government. This is consistent with the position of Cross and Prusak (2002), who noted that technical specialists make extensive use networks both within their own organisation and with officers from other organisations for assistance. In keeping with the work of Considine (1994), this research found extensive evidence that
networks are vitally important to the work of policy officers and technical policy specialists, appearing primarily to be used for information gathering and influencing.

**Topic 6: Collaboration: Breaking Down Agency Silos**

Collaborative arrangements between government agencies and between government and the private sector are becoming increasingly common. Collaboration may also take place between individuals within government agencies. This form of collaboration is often ad hoc and occurs without formal endorsement. The research suggests that informal collaboration between relatively junior officers commonly takes place between government agencies, and may also extend to the private sector as well. The research also suggests that many senior public managers are aware that the collaboration is occurring and recognise the potential benefits to shaping effective policy. However, the hierarchical structure of government agencies commonly does not promote informal collaboration, and may at times even seek to prevent it.

The benefits of collaboration to address complex, or “wicked” policy issues have been recognised by scholars and public managers (Fells, 2008, Ney, 2009, Commonwealth of APSC, 2007, Osborne, 2010). Governments from across the world are realizing the importance of collaboration with others to realize their objectives (Fells, 2008:xi). In Australia and in many other countries, efforts have been made to improve collaboration between different agencies and tiers of government (Wanna, 2008a). Governments, recognising the need to break down bureaucratic barriers, look to collaboration for answers to solving “wicked” problems. The introduction to the Commonwealth of Australia Report Management Advisory Committee report ends with the following sentences:

> Whole of government is the public administration of the future. It offers links and connections to the global community of ideas, knowledge and understanding essential for the APS to face the governance challenges of the 21st century. It extols team-based approaches to solving the wicked problems that are endemic to public policy.

> Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia’s Priority Challenges is a valuable guide to participating effectively in that future. I hope it makes a difference. (AGMA, 2004:vi)
However, this final sentence perhaps describes the uncertainty that appears shared by some academics over the ability of collaboration to deliver its perceived benefits. Both O’Flynn (2008) and Fells (2008: xi), while noting that importance that has been attached to collaboration, also questioned if the rhetoric is matched by reality. O’Flynn (2008) has also noted that collaboration has at times been narrowly defined and distinguished from cooperation or coordination.

O’Flynn (2008) has noted that collaboration has at times, been narrowly defined in academic literature. However, policy practitioners are less likely to differentiate strongly between collaboration and networks. Interviewees tended to refer to networks as ‘networks that exist between individuals’. The term ‘collaboration’ was used to describe occasions when individuals or agencies worked together, as in ‘we were collaborating with (the other) agency’.

Experiences of interviewees in formal collaboration were varied, some involving negotiations at very senior levels of government, others occurred between bureaucrats in less senior levels. Some led to formal agreements being reached, while others did not. However, all believed that they had actively engaged in, at times initiated, collaboration between government agencies. Moreover, some agency heads were aware that their staff engaged in these activities and, recognising the potential benefits, encouraged staff to explore opportunities to increase collaboration. However, interviewees also related various barriers that made collaboration difficult, or prevented it entirely.

The importance attached to the use of informal networks varied between interviewees. Senior public managers, ministerial staff and officers working in strategic policy areas stated they were critical and they continued to maintain and utilize their “networks” to aid their work, particularly to inform and advocate policy positions. However, officers working in more statutory roles were less likely to attach importance to such informal networks, one interviewee even stating that they should be strongly discouraged (Interviews 1).

Several interviewees also described their role on formal collaborative committees or inter-agency working groups where they had little contact with other working group members outside of formal meetings. However, this was not always the case. Interviewees also
described instances where their involvement in formal collaboration had necessitated a very significant amount of communication with colleagues who were working in other agencies.

It was noted by many interviewees that collaborative arrangements between government agencies and between government and the private sector are being increasingly used to deliver services. Increasingly, technical policy specialists are becoming involved in collaborative efforts between agencies. The Western Australian Government has adopted a “Lead Agency” framework to promote collaboration between agencies. These “Lead Agencies” are tasked with ‘leading’ collaborative efforts in certain matters. For example, the Department of Planning has “Lead Agency” status with respect to “urban and regional land and significant housing development” (WA, 2011), including: major land supply proposals in the metropolitan and non-metropolitan area; strategic integrated land use, transport, and infrastructure project planning; public works (other) of state/regional significance; planning control areas (metropolitan and non-metropolitan); and improvement plans (WA, 2011:9).

Collaboration may also take place between individuals and groups of individuals within government agencies around specific issues. This form of collaboration is often ad hoc and without formal endorsement from the relevant agencies. Public managers may variously choose to ignore that informal collaboration exists, attempt to prevent informal collaboration from occurring, or develop strategies to support and utilize the benefits that may result from such informal collaborative arrangements.

Individual involvement in an interagency partnership or collaborative effort could be through nomination to a joint agency working group or committee, or through less formal means. While some interviewees stated that they had been tasked with the role of agency representative, others described how they had been influential in establishing collaborative arrangements. Several interviewees related experiences whereby their own informal networking had resulted in formal collaborative partnerships being established. One, senior bureaucrat, while speaking of policy development provided an example of how this occurs:

*Sometimes you shape some ideas and...you can bounce some of that thinking off others. I think that we often find that an opportunity - it may not present initially - but an opportunity comes to ‘sow the seed’ and in a sense, to sort of nurture it over a period of time, and we can have influence.* (Interview 31)
This interviewee (Interview 31) related that it may take some years before the opportunity arose to exercise this influence, stating that emergence of the influence relied heavily on the collaboration of other public servants. The interviewee was also a state government nominee on a Commonwealth – joint state collaborative working group. Working through this group provided additional opportunities to expand and maintain networks with officers working for other state and territory governments or for the Australian Government. Other interviewees supported this view. One senior manager stated:

It takes a long time to develop an appropriate response to some problems. It takes time to bring together people with the skills, and who were willing to assist, to research and identify potential solutions, and to gain the political support necessary. (Interview 31)

Another interviewee working at a senior level noted that “good networks can take much of the effort out of the job” (Interview 27). This interviewee described the requirements for sound networks as “trust, rigour, shared views or understanding of issues and alignment of thinking” (Interview 27). Both interviewees (Interview 27 & 31) related instances of where they had been influential in shaping major government policy, implementation of which was through formal inter-agency agreements for collaboration. Influence can also be exerted through membership on interagency technical working groups, particularly where these have been established to support high level collaborative committees.

Government representation on formal collaborative committees or boards is generally through one or more senior bureaucrats and / or elected representatives. It was also noted by interviewees that representation on the working groups is commonly through senior technical specialists or middle managers, whose knowledge of the topic area was, at times, limited. Several interviewees noted the importance and influence of the technical working groups which are formed to provide such committees and boards with information and importantly, recommend appropriate actions. Interviewees suggested that these working groups heavily influence the decisions of governing boards, and that they largely comprise technical specialists in either senior technical or middle management roles. One former senior manager noted the following while discussing their experiences of interagency collaboration:

...some of it (negotiation) was done by committee, but a lot was done in the background as well. You know, talking to people.... (Interview 24)
Membership of technical working groups was also viewed by many interviewees as both a means of exerting influence and of expanding their personal sphere of influence. One interviewee (Interview 34) noted that some years ago he had travelled to Canberra to represent his department on a collaboration working group while working in a senior technical role. He stated that his manager at the time had expressly asked him to “spend a few more days over there…to meet people…find out what is going on…and make some connections” (Interview 34). The interviewee (Interview 34) stated that the three days spent “visiting people” after the working group meeting were some of the most productive and valuable of his entire career. While his role in the formal collaboration process ended with a change of roles, he remains in regular contact with many of the people that he met during this visit.

One practitioner, a senior public servant, suggested that engagement needs to be at several levels (Interview 24). Formal engagement is essential between agency and university heads to establish frameworks for effective collaboration within the organisation (Interview 24). However, while providing support for collaboration, there was also need for an element of coercion:

"...so there is a sense of compulsion to think about engagement without being too prescriptive as this may lead to adverse outcomes.... A touch of compulsion is fine, but if it’s too heavy-handed it produces a negative effect... So if we become too prescriptive, we 'kill the goose that lays the golden egg'." (Interview 24)

Informal collaboration should be occurring between both senior levels and more junior levels within academia and the public service to increase opportunities for collaboration. Collaboration between senior and middle managers and their academic equivalent (Professors and Associate Professors) may be complimented through less formal forms of collaboration between academic researchers and practitioners. It was noted by some interviewees that there appears to be a serious lack of collaboration between academics and individuals working in the public sector. One practitioner offered the following advice:

"Often, it is a matter of finding the correct individual or individuals to engage with; aligning research interests with practice. In a sense, it’s up to the individual...to become part of a broader network...to find out what they are researching. Empirically, when we get engagement, it can be very enlightening." (Interview 24)
One interviewee (Interview 14) noted that collaboration between academics and ‘research oriented’ departments potentially provides more opportunities for effective engagement. This interviewee noted that often line and central agencies were focused on delivery, commonly working within relatively short timeframes that were not conducive to academic research (Interview 14). However, this interviewee also noted that the ‘research oriented’ departments were often researching issues well ahead of policy:

*I think that you get that in your research oriented departments where there is a research bent...you have (researchers) doing models long before these measures were even introduced, or even embraced by ministers.* (Interview 14)

Collaboration also occurs at different levels. This includes collaboration between an agency and the ministerial office of the minister responsible for that agency:

*It (the role) is different in that the Minister’s office is reliant on the advice coming through from the agency. We don’t have time in the ministerial office to do the analysis, to do the assessment in order to provide that clear, academic or theoretical debate. You can’t check all of the options. In this job, you have to rely on broad principles...you rely on feedback from the ministry and you set some goals...but those goals are then tempered very much by the public sector. You can have some reform goals, but if you don’t have ‘buy-in’ from your agency...it’s very hard to reform something without having the necessary backing of the agency...because if things are extremely complex...often it involves legal, financial complexity...it needs to be addressed and it can’t be addressed from the heady heights of the Minister’s office.* (Interview 14)

There was clear support for increased collaboration expressed by most interviewees, including ministers, senior bureaucrats, middle managers, policy specialists and technical specialists. Many noted that barriers to collaboration often stemmed from insufficient understanding or agreement over how collaboration should occur and the processes needed to formalize collaboration. There is no ‘model’ for bureaucrats to follow for establishing collaboration between agencies. One senior bureaucrat made the following comment regarding interagency collaboration:

*I think it is increasing. It’s increasingly expected. But it is sometimes easier to say than to put into practice, because people don’t know where to start....* (Interview 16)
While agency heads wanted to encourage collaboration, agency structures often constrained collaborative effort. Public servants wishing to collaborate often had to work against bureaucratic systems, doing so by seeking support from both within the agency at higher and lower levels, and externally from potential collaboration partners.

The evidence suggested that effective collaboration is most likely to occur where support is forthcoming from both middle management and senior bureaucrats. However, where support is lacking from *either* middle managers or senior bureaucrats, effective collaboration is less likely. Middle managers can facilitate collaboration, or they can work to block collaborative efforts:

> ...and there are still tensions over who’s playing in whose sandpit...and the idea that there you will have some levels of management, it could be quite low levels of management, or middle management, or even senior management who will discourage collaborative efforts because they can’t control the outcomes as much as they would like to. (Interview 16)

Where there is a divergence between collaboration at the top and collaboration below, collaboration is unlikely to be effective. As one senior manager noted in relation to increasing collaboration between academics and the public service:

> So if someone says that’s what we must do, we’ll all ignore it because that’s what we do with all of this other corporate stuff. It’s relatively easy to ignore because you simply can’t fit it in. (Interview 42)

Establishing the conditions for effective collaboration takes time and requires both engagement by middle management and support from senior levels. The challenge for bureaucrats at all levels is to work effectively to ensure that this alignment occurs.

Lack of communication between agencies is commonly cited as a reason for needing more collaboration (for example see: AGMA, 2004). It was commonly cited as such during interviews; many interviewees stating that they had formed strong working relationships with staff from other agencies, where interagency support was needed to address key issues. However, lack of open communication channels was cited as a barrier to interagency collaboration.
Many interviewees noted that it was easier to work with staff from some agencies than from others. One agency head stated that, in his experience, good working relationships between agency leaders facilitated cooperation between staff (Interview 20). On the other hand, where mistrust or poor working relationships existed between agency leaders it was difficult for agency staff to find “common ground” (Interview 20).

Earlier, it was noted that government ministers are extremely influential in creating and promoting collaboration between agencies. However, ministers may also be influential in preventing collaboration between agencies. One interviewee (Interview 29) described an instance where a poor relationship between two government ministers had made it very difficult for staff in their respective agencies to work collaboratively. The interviewee stated that relationships between the ministers declined to a point where “we couldn’t even talk to one of their staff without risking being dragged into the Minister’s office for a ‘dressing down’. This made maintaining even personal networks very difficult” (Interview 29).

Another agency head complained that an inordinate amount of time was spent “defending his agency’s turf” against other agencies that had an “expansionist agenda” (Interview 20). The interviewee noted that when this type of circumstance transpired, it often hindered interagency cooperation. The interviewee also noted that “when relations between agency heads are good, cooperation between staff of both agencies can flourish” (Interview 20). Interestingly, although central agencies were established in part as a response to issues stemming from agency “siloing”, several interviewees noted that central agencies often exacerbated these “turf wars” and had been known to promote the interests of some agencies at the expense of others. Central agencies were seen by some interviewees as collaboration facilitators, while others viewed central agencies as barriers to effective collaboration.

Most of the interviewees who expressed a view on agency “siloing” believed that more recognition of the role of networks and informal avenues of collaboration is necessary to strengthen relationships between agencies and facilitate cooperative policy development. Interviewees from all levels suggested that formation of strong networks between officers working at all levels of government was an effective way to open communication channels and limit the adverse impacts of siloing. However, many interviewees noted that bureaucratic agency structures do little to promote networking, with some suggesting that
networking was actively discouraged (Interviews 1, 11, 34 & 37). One interviewee stated that networking is viewed by some managers as “not being ‘core business’” (Interview 34).

One senior bureaucrat noted that it was critically important for agencies and policy officers to actively identify strategic allies for new policy proposals; they stressed that particular importance should be placed on finding the “corridors of support” (Interview 18). However, they also noted that there were likely to be agencies (or areas within agencies) in opposition to some proposals, and there were “corridors of indifference” where efforts to gain support would be wasted. This interviewee stressed the importance of finding the “correct individuals within agencies” in order to garner support from within the agency itself, noting that such individuals were not always senior executives (Interview 18).

There is also evidence that, in some agencies, collaboration (both internal and external to the agency) is discouraged by work processes. One former senior manager expressed concern that some policies were developed by a single person, rather than as a collaborative effort:

...what happens with the way it is done, one officer gets to do it...and although they are supposed to keep others involved, it never happens...and they just put their own slant on it.

(Interview 24)

Interviewees in line agencies expressed concerns that the central agencies appeared unwilling, or unable, to perform a coordinating role. Several interviewees expressed their opinion that each of the central agencies appeared suffer from siloing as often as the line agencies (Interviews 22, 36 & 44). Interviewees from central agencies did not share this view, instead stating that their role was to evaluate alternative policy options from line agencies and provide a balanced view (Interviewees 26, 30 & 43).

Accordingly, each agency will maintain its own view of the “correct” response to policy issues. Each will have its own reasons for engaging, or not, in collaborative efforts. However, as Davis, Wanna, et al. (1993) point out, there are many potential barriers to collaboration:

Individual state agencies have no monopoly on wisdom; each perceives the world in its own terms, tends to address particular constituencies, and contributes expedient solutions to aspects of particular problems. Theories of the state, therefore, need to recognise that the complexity of institutions means that agencies rarely work together in concert, and even if
attempts at coordination are made, coherence across the whole state is elusive. (Davis et al.,
1993:42)

Notwithstanding the above, this research has found that many people working in the public
service, in Western Australia at least, do at least attempt to work collaboratively with other
agencies. One senior bureaucrat for example, noted the importance of collaboration between
senior agency staff, ministerial advisors and industry in the (ongoing) process of the refining
of environmental policy in Western Australia:

It was a bit tricky because it hadn’t been done before, but some of these things, you’ve got to
take a risk. And you’ve got to have enough credibility and trust...not just within the agencies,
but within the very senior advisors to ministers and premiers...so you’ve got to be able to get
in there...and have some credibility...and get an outcome.... I think there was a view that let
us try to solve the problem at the front end, rather than let someone who was less familiar
with the (environmental assessment) process try to solve the problems. It was always about
not compromising environmental standards, but if you could do it quicker, then you could
actually get out of that (long drawn out) process. (Interview 12)

Collaboration is also important for bureaucrats working in the public sector. However, not
all of the technical specialists and middle managers that were interviewed engaged
extensively with networks; and some of the interviewees did not believe it was their role to
facilitate collaboration between agencies. Nevertheless, the research did identify a large
group of people working in these roles (and in more senior levels) who believed that
networking and collaboration were ‘core business’, and that engagement in such activities
was essential to successfully addressing critical issues. There also appears to be a high
degree of acceptance, perhaps even preference, among bureaucrats at all levels for critical
issues to be addressed at an interagency level.

Wanna (2008a:9) described an advantage of collaboration as potentially leading to mutual
learning and shared experience. Interviewees also noted that mutual learning and shared
experiences were not only an outcome of collaborative ventures, but also contributed to their
success. The research suggests that encouraging greater collaboration between officers in
organisations can have a substantial impact on both the organisation’s culture and capacity
for innovation. However, strategies and tools are needed to assist public managers to take
advantage of this largely untapped resource.
Low (2008:393) has previously noted that the problem faced by governments is how to act in the face of uncertainties, not in the face of facts. Collaboration is not in itself the answer to addressing these issues; however, in the face of uncertainty, it may assist to provide the means to the answer. This research indicates that participation from both middle managers and senior technical specialists is critical for collaboration success.

**Topic 7: Providing Unbiased Technical Advice or Actively Shaping Policy: Questions of Legitimacy and Bias**

There were significant differences between the views and experiences related by policy workers in line agencies (technical policy specialists) from those held by policy workers employed in central agencies or in specialist policy units (policy analysts). Although the “technical policy specialists” interviewed belonged to different professions and were working in agencies that had, at times competing interests, they shared several characteristics. Members of this cohort commonly worked entirely within their area of specialization, and held strongly to the “professional values” of the “profession” associated with their specialist field. It was notable that very few technical policy specialists viewed themselves as ‘policy specialists’, instead considering themselves members of the profession within which they had expertise. Policy is viewed as a component of a technical specialist’s role, but is not, in itself, central to the role. In comparison, policy analysts viewed their role to be primarily related to be policy analysis and development, the particular policy area being relatively unimportant.

Many interviewees noted that for policy advice to be relevant in a practical sense, it must relate in some way to the technical aspect of the policy. Several interviewees believed that one of the reasons that the policy training was of limited use was its lack of specificity (Interviews 37 & 46). Thus, environmental specialists seek solutions that are applicable to environmental policy, while transport specialists seek transport solutions, and so on. However, they may also seek additional negotiating and influencing skills to achieve better environmental outcomes through improved ability to negotiate with other, non-environmental agencies. Land use planners in particular work to balance many competing issues. As Hoch noted:

> Professional planners face a serious problem in our liberal society. Their professional judgement relies on theoretical and specialized knowledge of social, economic, political, and
geographic relationships. However, most of the problems that planners analyse and assess are practical. Officials, advocates, lobbyists, and citizens possess specific attachments that make them feel as if they are experts on the particular matter at hand. When professional planners offer advice that challenges the tacit expertise of those involved, they frequently inspire suspicion and resentment among the very clients they hope to serve…. Planners inhabit a precarious institutional and professional position in the United States, stemming from the tension between individual purposes and the common good and between professional judgement and citizen preferences. (Hoch, 1994:1-2)

These findings highlight an apparent ‘gap’ in policy literature. The impact of the managerialization of the public service has been explored in policy literature (for example: Ferlie and Geraghty, 2005). However, such explorations have typically been confined to consideration of upper levels. Impacts on the middle management and senior technical levels have been less well explored. There has been a particular lack of research that evaluates the consequences of the apparent decline in policy capacity that is emerging as policy development is increasingly tasked to inexperienced, junior officers. There is also limited data to determine if the current trend of employing more ‘professional policy officers’ (policy analysts) in central agencies is yielding superior improved policy outcomes. To the contrary, the at times, substantial failure of some recent policy initiatives in Australia (for example the “Housing Insulation Scheme” and so called “Malaysian Solution”) suggests that policy capacity has not improved.

In contrast to technical policy specialists, to whom detailed knowledge of a specific technical field (such as planning, environmental science, agricultural science, health or education) was deemed essential, policy analysts identified sound analytical capability combined with experience in general policy work as prerequisites for advancement in this area of policy (Interviews 26, 30, 36 & 43). While technical policy specialists often work entirely within their technical specialist field, policy analysts commonly work across a number of policy areas, often unrelated to the area in which they have formal qualifications. While the qualifications held by policy analysts and technical policy specialists may at times be broadly similar, significant differences exist between them regarding views on the importance ascribed to technical specialist expertise.

One interviewee (Interview 16) stated that if a raft of job descriptions were considered from within an agency, a lot of them would include criteria concerning the ability to select and to
write policy. This interviewee stated that policy shaping was not distinct from development, noting that in her experience the best policy people were those who had “done implementation” (Interview 16). The view that a policy implementation background contributed to policy workers’ capability was shared by several other interviewees (Interviews 11, 19, 23 & 24).

The views of technical policy specialists are somewhat at odds with the views expressed by some other interviewees (Interviews 14, 26, 27, 30, 31, 36, 38, 43 & 44). For example, policy analysts noted that they worked across a number of policy areas, often with limited time to research issues (Interviews 26, 30, 38, 43 & 44). While policy analysts noted that advice from technical experts was important, each stated that they were able to rapidly gain an understanding of the key elements of issues in order to evaluate policy options, and provide effective advice to the government. As one interviewee explained:

> At a central agency level its (sic technical expertise) not as important...we need technical expertise...to filter the information that we get from technical experts. So you do need to have some knowledge, but having a detailed practitioner’s understanding of an area isn’t as important as it would be if you were working in a portfolio agency that dealt with that particular topic or area. So, a lot of our work is around coordinating a government effort and not the actual policy issue. (Interview 26)

Opinions differed significantly over the level of technical expertise necessary for policy practitioners. Policy analysts working in central agencies believed that their broader experience enabled them to view issues with a more holistic view (Interviews 26, 30, 43 & 44). While they relied on information from technical specialists, they often had to weigh the merits of several competing positions proposed by different agencies. Policy analysts noted that technical policy specialists often adopt a “narrow view” of policy, responding to issues from their ‘own’ narrow professional perspective. However, policy issues are often complex and multi-faceted. Policy options presented by one agency may be opposed by some other agencies or, if implemented, may seriously disadvantage other agencies and the sectors of the community that they represent (Interviews 36 & 43).

Several interviewees also noted that while senior technical policy specialists are often able to shape policy, they must do so within the broad directions established by their department and the elected government. One interviewee described it thus:
In the public service, there’s certain levels where you operate under supervision...and then there’s levels where it’s understood that you operate with some independence. And I think that once you get to that level it’s understood...when you’re operating independently...it’s expected that there will be some motivation to achieve departmental objectives. (Interview 11)

The concerns expressed by policy analysts over the tendency for some technical policy specialists to adopt a narrow view of policy are consistent with some academic literature. In particular, Hoch (1994) related the experience of a planner who was dismissed from his position; who, although having very sound technical expertise, lacked political acumen and was not cognisant of the political landscape in which he worked. He noted that although planners believe that their professional opinions are based on fact and unbiased professional opinion, adopting an “authoritative approach” can undermine their legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders and decision makers (Hoch, 1994:56-65). Hoch (1994) cautioned against planners adopting the role of ‘the expert’ in negotiations with planning committees and advises planners not to set themselves apart from decision makers by adopting the role of ‘independent expert’, as this position is too easily discredited by adversarial negotiators who question the independence of the ‘expert’. Hoch (1994) further argued that, in establishing themselves as independent experts, planners effectively position themselves as ‘outsiders’, who might not be seen to have the community’s best interests at heart; he therefore advises planners to become part of the community rather than outsiders.

Notably, many technical policy specialists (and policy analysts) that were interviewed in this research stated that their role was to “educate” decision makers and stakeholders about the values and benefits of their profession: to adopt the role of Hoch’s (1994) ‘independent expert’. One interviewee stated that it was vitally important for public servants to “talk with authority, knowledge and credibility” (Interview 10) if they are to influence decision makers. Consistent with Hoch’s (1994) warnings, many of these same technical policy specialists complained also that their advice was commonly ignored by decision makers, and was also often contested as it was regarded as being self-serving or ‘interest based’.

Consistent also with Hoch (1994), many technical policy specialists also demonstrated very strong attachments to professional protocol and individual expertise. As noted above, technical policy specialists complained that their expertise is increasingly contested, some
noting also that they had been pressured to ‘alter’ their professional advice, complaining also that their superiors at times had altered their reports. The contestability of professional advice had come from people working within their own agency, from other government agencies, or from industry groups. Several technical policy specialists felt ‘pressured’, stating that they were under constant pressure to relax their professional standards (Interviews 1, 28, 29 & 34). However, as one interviewee noted:

Covering up the issues doesn’t make them go away. Just saying that something is all right doesn’t make it true. The issues are there. They will become apparent at some stage. And then someone will have to deal with them. And someone will ask ‘why weren’t we told about this before?’ Someone will get blamed when it all goes wrong. (Interview 29)

While some technical policy specialists held closely to the role of ‘technical expert’, others worked to avoid being branded as a ‘narrow technical expert’. One line agency middle manager noted that “anyone working in policy must learn the art of compromise” (and) “be able to pick up on political imperatives” (Interview 45).

While the responses from the interviews conducted with bureaucrats working as policy analysts (Interviews 26, 30, 38, 43 & 44) are consistent with the findings of Page and Jenkins (2005), who noted that policy workers generally did not have expertise in a specific area of policy, this was not the case for the responses from interviews with technical policy specialists. Technical policy specialists nearly always stated that expertise in the specific technical area was critical to providing good policy advice (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 34, 37 & 46). This view was also shared by a number of other types of interviewees, including government ministers (Interviews 13 & 40), statutory authority heads (Interviews 12 & 15) and senior agency managers (Interviewees 16, 20, 31 & 33).

The role of policy analysts in ‘balancing’ potentially conflicting advice from technical policy specialists working in different agencies possibly constitutes a valuable contribution to policy, the importance of which should not be underrated. Interviewees noted that policy analysts often work with line agencies to achieve compromises between differing agency positions. It was common for line agencies to develop policies that had been prepared from a ‘narrow’ agency viewpoint; at times proposing policies that could confer disadvantage on other agencies, or the communities they served (Interviews 14, 26, 30, 36, 43 & 44).
The interviewees from central agencies were commonly “generalists”, often working in fields for which they did not have specific qualifications (Interviews 26, 30, 36, 43 & 44). Policy analysts from central agencies also stated that they generally did not work in a specific area of policy for very long, shifting between areas as the need arose. These central agency ‘policy analysts’ also commonly stated that they were often given very little time to evaluate policy and prepare a response, one describing their work as akin to Lindblom’s (1959) “muddling through” (Interview 30). These interviewees also noted that they were under considerable pressure to deliver policy advice on ‘urgent’ policy issues; they frequently described working in a ‘pressure environment’ where timeliness of advice was crucial (Interviews 26, 30, 36, 43 & 44).

Policy analysts are also employed in line agencies, and although less numerous than in central agencies, some interviewees suggested that the number of policy analysts in line agencies is increasing (Interviews 14, 16, 22 & 44). However, descriptions of these positions indicated that there may be significant differences between the roles of ‘policy analysts’ in central agencies compared to those in line agencies. Specifically, the role of policy analysts in line agencies appears to be primarily related to the preparation of policy legislation rather than analysis of policy options. Policy analysts employed in these units commonly have legal qualifications or qualifications related to public policy or administration.

Notably, several policy analysts believed that working across a number of policy areas allowed them to adopt an unbiased, analytical view of the particular policy. Not having the time to form an “attachment” to a particular position was seen as an advantage by the ‘professional’ policy analysts (Interviews 14, 16, 22 & 44). The policy analysts noted that their role was not to make personal value judgements, but to assess each policy proposal on its merit. However, Scott and Baehler (2010:21) noted that “policy making almost always entails taking positions on value-laden issues”.

Furthermore, this also contrasts with the work of Sabatier (2007), who found that policy analysts, and policy makers looking at things from different perspectives are quite likely to see different things: “What they see will depend on the lens of simplifying suppositions they use” (Sabatier, 2007:5). It is likely that a physical scientist, or practitioner working in an area where normative values are prevalent may see the policy cycle as a valuable tool that depicts the policy process, while social scientists and others working within less normative fields are
less likely to accept what they may perceive as a "normative" view being imposed on what are essentially non-normative processes. It is, therefore, understandable that views and opinions held by policy practitioners on these issues will vary widely, dependant as they are on their background, position in the bureaucracy and experience in policy processes. Their perceptions about policy processes, and their response to policy, will transpire through the lenses of their personal opinions, and experience.

Time constraints also appear to be a major factor in the difference of views between technical policy specialists and policy analysts. Several technical policy specialists related examples where it had taken many years to “bring about” policy change (Interviews 11, 14, 19 & 31). Interviewees indicated that this was particularly the case where radical departures from existing policy were proposed. Interviewees provided several examples of policy that had taken a long time to develop (Interviews 14, 19 & 31). Several of these policies were described by interviewees as amongst the most important in the recent history of Western Australia (Interviewees 11, 12 & 15). Policy analysts noted that it was unusual to work on a particular policy for as long as a year, periods of three to six months being much more common (Interviews 26, 30, 36, 43 & 44).

For both technical policy specialists and policy analysts, the most significant training was gained through mentoring from more senior officers, and learning ‘on-the-job’. While some interviewees stated that formal training is important, all interviewees agreed that the most relevant form of training was that received ‘on-the-job’. Notwithstanding these views, many interviewees (including technical policy specialists and policy analysts) stated that more training (policy and specialist technical) is urgently needed, in order to improve policy skills in government agencies.

Policy and technical specialist learning can occur in a number of ways. The role of senior officers includes training and mentoring more junior staff, with interviewees stating that this learning was of critical importance (Interviews 5, 11, 24, 19 & 37). Several of the policy specialists suggested that the most common form of learning in government is ‘on-the-job’ learning or ‘learning by doing’ (Interviews 5, 18, 19, 24, 27 & 30). People working in policy learn through experience, which includes learning from peers, leaning from success, and learning from mistakes. Several interviewees noted the importance of practical advice from peers, noting that it is often in the form of “I did this and it worked” or “don’t do that, we
tried it and it didn’t work” (Interviews 5, 18, 19 & 24). Often this relates to the presentation of advice to decision makers, or engendering support for particular policy or issue.

There was also evidence presented during interviews that technical specialists commonly access professional and academic journals to inform of the latest developments in their field of expertise (Interviews 1, 5, 6, 15, 18, 22, 24, 28, 37 & 41). Several of the senior technical specialists that were interviewed also lectured on a part-time or occasional basis at local universities (Interviews 1, 24 & 41). Many technical policy specialists also attended meetings and conferences organised by professional associations, universities or non-government organisations. However, the most common form of learning appeared to be through informal conversations between professional officers, both inside and outside of the workplace. “Informal networking” was critically important to technical policy specialists and policy analysts alike.

**Topic 8: Policy Skill and Technical Education: Examining Technical Policy Specialist Position Descriptions**

The accounts of middle managers in the central and line agencies accorded with documentary evidence. Key skill requirements stated in published job descriptions for technical policy specialists included: conceptual and analytical skills, policy research and development skills, interpersonal and communication skills, and ability to write reports (Seek, 2011a). However, experience and educational requirements often varied, dependant on the specific role. For example, in addition to the above skills, strategic planners are commonly required to have sound policy, influencing, negotiating or project management skills (Seek, 2011a). Job descriptions for technical specialist and technical policy specialist positions also commonly list specific specialist qualifications. For example planning officers require a minimum of an undergraduate degree qualification in a field in (or closely related to) land use planning; environmental officers require a degree in environmental science or related field. An example is found in the following extract from a September 2011 job advertisement for a Senior **Strategic** Planning Officer (technical policy specialist position), which states the following:

> The Department of Planning holds a state-wide leadership responsibility in planning future community development.
The Planning Reform Branch within the Strategy, Policy and Projects Division has an opportunity for a:

- **SCL3, Senior Planning Officer – A permanent part-time position (0.5FTE)**

This senior planning role focuses on planning and policy development. To be successful in this role you will have well developed knowledge of the WA planning system and be confident in your ability to effectively communicate and build relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

This is an exciting time to join the Department of Planning as we have moved into our new “eco-friendly” home at 140 William Street, which is conveniently located above the Perth underground train station.

People from diverse backgrounds are encouraged to apply. The Department upholds a working environment that is free from discrimination in accordance with Equal Opportunity legislation.

**POSITION DESCRIPTIONS**

Reviews and develops policies and guidelines on a range of planning matters within the context of the planning system of Western Australia, and makes recommendations on policy initiatives and proposals that may impact the Department of Planning, the Western Australian Planning Commission, other government agencies, local government authorities, the public and the Minister of Planning.

**WORK RELATED REQUIREMENTS**

Please submit a comprehensive CV together with a covering letter, of no more than two pages, outlining relevant skills and experience in the context of the work related requirements outlined in the Job Description Form (jobs.wa.gov.au, 2011c).

Work related requirements listed in the attached Job Description Form are as follows

In the context of this position, able to demonstrate: **ESSENTIAL Specified Calling Level 3**

- A degree relevant to urban and regional planning and/or development or transport planning or environmental sciences.
- Substantial experience in the development, implementation and review of land use planning policy and/or infrastructure policy.
• Well-developed conceptual, analytical, problem solving and research skills.
• Well-developed oral communication, interpersonal and presentation skills, with extensive experience interacting effectively with internal and external stakeholders.
• Well-developed written communications skills.
• The ability to set work priorities and achieve deadlines.
• Substantial experience in working in a team environment, including participating in the mentoring and professional development of team members. (jobs.wa.gov.au, 2011c)

Job requirements are similar to those of other technical policy specialists, for example, water policy specialists (Jobs.wa.gov.au, 2011b). Notably, while a “degree relevant to urban and regional planning” is listed as an essential requirement for a person working in a Senior Statutory Planning Officer position (technical specialist position more akin to Lipsky’s (1980) “street-level bureaucrats”), the stated experience requirements differ significantly:

In the context of this position, able to demonstrate: ESSENTIAL

• A degree relevant to urban and regional planning and/or development or transport planning or environmental sciences.
• Considerable knowledge of the principles and practice of urban, rural and regional planning and Town Planning Legislation.
• Considerable experience in urban and regional planning at either state or local level or in private practice.
• High level of conceptual and analytical skills.
• High standard of verbal and written communication and presentation skills.
• Proven ability to liaise effectively with internal and external stakeholders.
• Proven ability to work effectively as a team member, including participating in the mentoring and professional development of team members. (jobs.wa.gov.au, 2011a)

Notably, requirements for “Substantial experience in the development, implementation and review of land use planning policy and/or infrastructure policy”, while critical to the “Strategic” position, are not listed as essential requirements to the “Statutory” position. However, both positions list well-developed communication skills and the ability to liaise effectively with both internal and external stakeholders as essential criteria. As will be seen
in the following topic, good communication skills are essential for all policy workers, whether policy analysts or technical policy specialists.

Experiences and views related in this research varied according to the role of the people interviewed. Many of the experiences (and views) related by policy analysts in central agencies were consistent with those related by Page and Jenkins (2005). However, these views contrasted with those expressed by technical policy officers.

In contrast to the findings of Page and Jenkins (2005), the majority of technical policy specialists working within line agencies in the Western Australian Government appear to have specialist degree level qualifications in their specific technical field; such as environmental science, planning or health. For example, the essential qualifications for a Senior Planning Officer include “A degree relevant to urban and regional planning and/or development or transport planning or environmental sciences” (Jobs.wa.gov.au, 2011 b) and essential qualifications for a Senior Policy Officer in the Department of Water include “Tertiary qualification in Environmental Science or natural resource management, or other relevant qualification” (Jobs.wa.gov.au, 2011 b).

Several interviewees who have also worked in other Australian states or countries other than Australia noted that Western Australia differed little from the other countries in which they had worked (Interviews 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 25, 27, 31, 37 & 44). These views were also consistent with the technical policy specialist positions advertised in Australia and New Zealand (Seek, 2011a).

**Conclusion**

Sound understanding of policy processes, sound networking and negotiating skills are essential skills for bureaucrats who work in development of, or in planning the implementation of, public policy. These skills must be combined with technical specialist knowledge to ensure that policy issues are properly understood. Combination of these skills should be critical to policy work at all levels. These skills are of equal importance to policy analysts, technical policy specialists, agency executives, political staffers and elected representatives, and are critical for the effective development, endorsement and implementation of policy. However, policy workers may lack one or more of these skills, and the importance of these skills can be undervalued.
Policy literature suggests that sound understanding of policy process and analysis should be essential learning for anyone considering working in the field of public policy. There is certainly no shortage of books aimed at undergraduates and policy practitioners to assist this learning process (Althaus et al., 2007, Scott and Baehler, 2010, Bardach, 2009, Dye, 2004, Fenna, 2004, for example see: Hill, 1997, Hill, 2005, Hill and Hupe, 2002). Therefore, when researching policy processes within the bureaucracy, it should be reasonable to expect that interviewees working in the policy field will have some formal policy education. However, few of the interviewees had undertaken any formal policy education or training. Further, although several interviewees had taken short courses in policy analysis, many were of the opinion that the courses were of limited value and did not adequately describe their work. While several interviewees expressed a strong desire for relevant policy training, policy courses were often described as being “a little light-on”, some interviewees stating that they seldom offered any new insights for experienced practitioners. Interviewees nevertheless demonstrated a sound understanding of policy processes during the interviews, some even offering fresh insights into the policy process.

Policy analysts commonly stated that they were given only limited time to research policy and had to acquire knowledge of the relevant area within a short period of time. However, Dunning and Kruger (1999) have cautioned that people lacking knowledge are often unable to self-assess their competence, believing that their level of competence is significantly greater than it actually is; and further, by lacking knowledge themselves, they are unable to even identify knowledgeable individuals that could help.

The need to take action without the benefit of all of the relevant facts, and in the face of uncertainties, is a problem for governments (Low, 2008:393). Collaboration is not in itself the answer to addressing this issue, but in the face of uncertainty, collaboration may provide the means to finding an appropriate policy response. Critical to collaboration are the middle managers and senior technical specialists.

In contrast to some policy literature (for example Page and Jenkins, 2005), many interviewees noted that technical expertise and experience in a particular technical specialist field are critical to policy work. While Page and Jenkins (2005), found that only 76 percent of the bureaucrats they interviewed had a university degree, all of the bureaucrats interviewed in this research had undergraduate degrees; most also had postgraduate
qualifications. Several interviewees stated that at least 10 years’ experience working in a specific technical specialist area is required to develop sufficient understanding to develop sound policy. Experience provides sound insights into policy issues, and conveys knowledge of what has been tried before, including knowledge of what has succeeded and failed. Experience also confers the ability to recognise how policy issues have evolved over time, and how such changes have impacted on various stakeholders.

While Hoch (1994) noted that expertise is essential to the work of planners (technical policy specialists), he also noted that this must be supported by sound negotiating and political skills. There were many consistencies between the stories described in Hoch’s (1994) examination of land-use planners in the USA and the experiences related by interviewees working in the Western Australian government.

In contrast, the views of policy analysts were consistent with Page and Jenkins (2005), noting that expertise and experience in policy is of critical importance to policy work. Policy analysts ascribed little importance to the possession of sound expertise or experience in a particular technical specialist field; on the contrary, they believed that this was less desirable as it could potentially lead to biased policy advice. However, policy analysts did note that they relied heavily on advice and information obtained from technical specialists in the analysis of policy options.

There was substantial evidence that it was uncommon for policy analysts to develop policy options themselves. Their role was more likely to be that of a ‘gatekeeper’; balancing options that were developed in line agencies prior to them being presented to elected officials. The role of policy analysts was commonly to prepare a ‘cost-benefit’ analysis for policy options, conducting risk analysis and determining possible political implications for the government or political party in power.

Previous research has identified the ability of bureaucrats to influence policy creation through membership to policy networks (Davis et al., 1993, Sabatier and Weible, 2007). However, research conducted into the role of bureaucrats has commonly been to determine their impact on the effective implementation of the policy, and their actions within the broader stakeholder groups or actor networks (Wallace and Wallace, 2008) who join together to achieve a certain policy outcome or promote policy streams (Zahariadis, 2007).
Less research has been conducted into the role of policy specialists, and the ways in which they create their own policy networks within the public sector to promote new policies or more effectively implement existing polices.

Tensions were identified between policy analysts and technical policy specialists, each group believing that their particular skill set is critical to the policy process. The research identified not only a difference in ideals, but also in values and practices that often created tension between the two groups. There was a significant difference in views expressed by interviewees over the desirability of holding strong views or opinions. Several policy analysts noted that they had worked in a number of policy areas in which they had little experience; expressing the view that this allowed the issues to be viewed more objectively than if they had more detailed knowledge. This contrasted with the views of the majority of technical specialists that detailed knowledge is essential to understanding and responding effectively to an issue. This group generally held the view that deep understanding of issues provided the basis for sound professional advice. Technical specialists commonly expressed a strong commitment to achieving the “best” policy outcome for their area of expertise or client group.

Senior managers tended to hold a balanced view of the two groups, often noting the important role of each in the delivery of sound policy advice. However, even at senior levels of government, there existed tension between the line agencies responsible for specific policy areas and the coordinating central agencies. Some line agency officers expressed frustration that their efforts to deal effectively with issues were hindered by financial or operating constraints imposed by central agencies. Several central agency officers noted their frustration at the difficulty to coordinate actions between agencies, particularly those with competing interests or where “agency turf” was contested.

The influence of the personal and professional networks that exist between technical policy specialists working in line agencies, policy analysts working in central agencies and policy officers working in ministerial offices has not been well understood. Even less well studied is the way in which these networks are formed, and the ways in which they are able to influence the formulation of policies and their implementation. This research suggests that these networks are critical to the work of policy, being used both to gather information and to influence policy decisions. The evidence suggests that there is a positive correlation
between policy influence and network capability. This research also suggests that the presence (or absence) of strong networks between technical policy specialists working within agencies is often a contributing factor to the success (or failure) of interagency collaboration. However, this area warrants further research to determine the extent to which this remains true in other jurisdictions.

Collaboration was identified by the majority of interviewees as being an essential component of policy work in government. While interviewees differentiated between networking and collaboration, they believed the two were more closely related than some literature appears to suggest (see O'Flynn, 2008). Several interviewees described how they had been influential in establishing collaborative arrangements between agencies, relating instances where their own informal networking had resulted in formal collaborative partnerships being established.

Many interviewees expressed views that are largely consistent with the statement by Ansell and Gash (2007:544) that “As knowledge becomes increasingly specialized and distributed and as institutional infrastructures become more complex and interdependent, the demand for collaboration increases”. However, the evidence suggests that where there is a disjunction between collaboration at the top and collaboration below, collaboration is unlikely to be effective.

Effective collaboration is most likely to occur in circumstances where support is forthcoming from middle management, senior bureaucrats and elected officials. It was noted by some interviewees that in situations where support from senior bureaucrats or the relevant government ministers was withheld, collaboration between agencies was stymied. However, one interviewee noted that even when collaboration between two agencies had been actively discouraged by their respective ministers, it was not entirely precluded. Middle managers are also influential; they can either facilitate collaboration, or work to effectively block collaborative efforts. However, as one senior bureaucrat noted, just telling people to collaborate will not necessarily make it happen; they must be first be given the tools and necessary support, and most importantly, understanding of the process.

The evidence suggests that effective collaboration is most likely to occur where support is forthcoming from both middle management and senior bureaucrats. The middle managers and senior managers themselves certainly appear to believe this to be true.
The research does not suggest that the role of elected officials and senior bureaucrats is diminished, or not critical to the collaboration process. Nor does the research suggest that a great deal of collaboration effort is initiated by elected officials and senior bureaucrats. On the contrary, a number of interviewees stated that senior bureaucrats and government ministers were the most influential actors with respect to creating avenues for collaboration between agencies. Evidence from the research suggests that middle managers and senior technical specialists play an important role in effective collaboration and that it is relatively common for these actors to be the agents that initiate collaboration.

The capability of public servants (tasked with developing implementation strategies) varies dependent on their skills and experience. Their ability to influence policy is also largely dependent on their position and role in the organisation; the organisational culture within which they operate; the level of support for, or opposition to, a given policy; and the type of policy itself. It was also noted by many the work of public officers working in the policy arena is influenced by the degree to which they are personally committed to the policy itself. Importantly, sound networking and negotiating skills are critical to policy work at all levels. Such skills are of equal importance to policy analysts, technical policy specialists, agency executives, political staff and elected representatives, and they are essential skills for the effective development, endorsement and implementation of policy.

This chapter has examined several critical aspects of policy work and has more clearly defined the role of technical policy specialists in the development of policy and the shaping of implementation strategies. It has identified the importance of technical specialist expertise and policy training to policy development. It has also highlighted the importance of networking between technical policy specialists in breaking down agency silos and improving opportunities for interagency collaboration. The research presented in this chapter presents a rich picture of policy as described by policy practitioners. It suggests that technical policy specialists are influential in the creation and shaping of new government policy. However, it also suggests that technical policy specialists can be highly influential in blocking new policy initiatives. The implications of these findings for policy research are examined in the next chapter.
Chapter 8: Discussion

Introduction
This research examines the roles of the various policy actors in the policy-making process and some of the factors that enable, and impede, their effective participation in this process. The role of specialist officers and middle ranking public servants who formulate and implement policy, in line agencies of a state government in Australia, were examined to determine their influence and effectiveness as policy actors. To answer the research question, “What is the relevant influence of policy actors in government?”, it was necessary first to establish where policy is developed within government agencies.

The research examines the roles of policy specialists in government, focusing on the role of technical policy specialists. The thesis has attempted to determine how influential technical policy specialists are in promoting and formulating new policy, and to identify the characteristics that distinguish technical policy specialists from other technical specialists whose role is primarily to implement policy. Attention was given to determining factors that make policy actors effective and the methods they use to shape and influence policy.

The research also examined the links between policy development and implementation to determine to what extent new issues-based policy arises from implementation; and the respective roles of different policy actors in these processes. Focusing on the role of policy workers, the research examined the actions of these workers during the implementation of government policy and their perceived or actual ability to shape or influence policy. In addition to this overarching question, the research sought answers to the following related research questions:

1. Who are the policy workers in government, where are they located, and what roles do they occupy?
2. Are there any traits or attributes which characterise effective policy workers?
3. What skills make these policy workers effective policy actors? How important are influencing and negotiation skills to their role?
4. How important are policy networks to policy actors in government? How significant are policy networks in their work?
5. Is there a positive correlation between the formation of strong policy networks and effective policy?
6. To what extent does new policy arise from within the government line agencies commonly tasked with implementation?
7. To what degree is the creation of new policies driven by implementation?

The findings suggest that the extent to which public policy is influenced by, and arises from within, line government agencies appear to have been vastly underestimated. The ability of service or “line” agencies to shape existing policy and propose new policy, and the extent to which collaboration between relatively junior policy actors within these agencies empowers them to influence government decision making, has been somewhat neglected in the literature. In particular, the role and influence of technical policy specialists as the originators and proponents of new policy has been largely overlooked in mainstream policy literature.

During a series of in-depth interviews with public servants, interviewees described their experiences in policy implementation and development. Interviewees discussed their use of networks and their engagement in collaborative partnerships to shape government policy during implementation. Importantly, interviewees provided evidence that technical policy specialists are commonly engaged in the development of new policy, as originators, promoters and lobbyists for new policy positions. In short, technical policy specialists are commonly active as ‘policy entrepreneurs’ in government. Effective networking and collaborative engagement were identified as critical factors that make policy actors effective.

It has been noted that policy literature often adopts a top-down approach, focusing on the upper levels of bureaucracy, elected officials and the role of influential policy actors within and outside of government (Page, 2006). However, some policy literature suggests that bureaucrats actively engage in policy development and are influential policy actors, shaping and influencing government policy (for example: Colebatch and Radin, 2006, Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006, Stewart, 1999). This research describes the work of several cohorts of policy actors who perform specific, though not necessarily exclusive, functions in policy development and implementation. Principal policy actors were found to include ministers, agency executives, ministerial staffers, policy analysts, technical policy specialists and technical specialists. Each has a specific, although not always separate and distinct, role in
the role of technical policy specialists has largely been overlooked in policy literature. This research suggests that technical specialists are significant policy actors in government who initiate and develop considerable amounts of government policy. However, the role of technical policy specialists is commonly overlooked in the ‘top-down’ policy literature, which often focuses on the actions of elected officials, agency chiefs and policy advisors.

Edwards (2001) has noted the importance of recognising the competing interests of different agencies; of considerable importance were the existence inter-organizational rivalries, or situations where uncertainties existed over areas of responsibility. Edwards (2001:9) stressed that such matters were of particular concern in instances of “complex and independent cross-portfolio policy making which demands that the relationships between policy areas be assessed before ministers take decision”.

Hill (1997:84) has warned of the dangers of treating public servants as a unitary group or class, noting that there will be differences of interest, experience and culture within the bureaucracy and, in particular, between staff within different departments. Hill (1997:86) also noted that organisational factors play an important role in determining the influence that a policy actor can exert over the development of policy, and in influencing the direction of policy. This research provides evidence that while individual policy actors perform a variety of roles in the policy process, the amount of influence they exert is commonly dependent upon timing and circumstance.

The role and influence of technical policy specialists has not been well researched, and is not elucidated in the policy literature. Policy literature commonly examines the role of ‘policy specialists’ (for example: Edwards, 2001, Page and Jenkins, 2005), the focus of the literature being on senior bureaucrats, or those who work in dedicated policy units or in ministerial offices. Some academics argue that bureaucrats should leave policy to the politicians (for example see: Wanna et al., 2010), the role of bureaucrats being to implement policy, not to create it.

The research presented in this thesis does not suggest that the role of elected officials and senior bureaucrats is diminutive, or that they are not critical to the policy process. On the contrary, several interviewees stated that senior bureaucrats and ministers are the most
influential policy actors in government. They are directly responsible for authorising policy activity in agencies, endorsing policy proposals and are critical actors in creating avenues for collaboration between agencies. However, evidence from this research suggests that middle managers and senior technical specialists also play an important role in policy and it is relatively common for these actors to be the agents that foment and formulate policy.

This research has provided evidence that specialist officers and middle rank managers are largely responsible for development of policy in government agencies. They are also the initiators many government policies, often acting as ‘policy entrepreneurs’, promoting and lobbying for new policy positions within agencies and across government. Commonly, they are technical specialists without policy analysis education. The research also suggests that policy development and implementation are more closely linked than is suggested by mainstream policy literature.

**The roles of respective policy actors**

Examination of the roles of policy actors provides some insight into some of the questions relating to the work of policy development and implementation in government. These questions examine the extent to which policy development arises from within government agencies and the relationships between various policy workers in government. They also consider to some extent, the extent to which new policy arises from implementation.

The empirical research of Page and Jenkins (2005) supports the concept of a policy continuum in which policy formulation continues into the implementation stage as bureaucrats shape policy and give it form to achieve the broad goals of government. Public servants are central to the policy process, evaluating policy options, assessing consequences, and recommending policy options to elected officials. These findings are consistent with those of earlier works (for example: Lindblom, 1959, Lindblom, 1968, Hogwood and Gunn, 1984, Hogwood, 1987), which noted that the bureaucracy cannot be separated from the policy-making process. However, while empirical research commonly examines policy creation during the inception and development stages (see for example Page and Jenkins, 2005), it necessarily limits such examination to specific aspects of the policy process. This research has identified areas of policy development that are less well researched, especially the initiation of issues-based policy from within line government agencies.
Colebatch (2006e-b) has noted that empirical accounts of policy not only differ from some policy theory, empirical accounts of the policy process may also include different perspectives of the policy process:

So in our investigation of the nature of policy work, we are confronted by a diversity of accounts, including divergent accounts of the policy process itself of the problem being addressed and of the practices of policy workers. In particular there is a divergence between ‘official’ accounts, which focus on the putative outcome and emphasise clarity and instrumentality, and accounts which focus on the process and stress its interactive and interpretive character; accounts from experience are much more likely to be in the second category than the first. (Colebatch, 2006e-b:318)

This research highlights some of the difficulties in studying policy processes in government. As expected, public servants and elected officials described different roles in policy. Less expected were the differences described by policy actors who appeared, at first, to be working in similar roles. For example, while the three elected officials interviewed had substantial experience as elected officials, their experiences differed significantly. They also described different aspects of and opinions on, the policy process. In particular, while two believed that the majority of policy is developed in line agencies, the other believed that policy primarily arose from the rank and file of political parties, although he also stated his concern that policy was increasingly being driven by “professional people” within the political parties.

Governments employ large numbers of policy workers, the majority of whom are based in ‘line agencies’ rather than in central coordination agencies. The role of policy actors working in government, whether working in line agencies, central agencies or ministerial offices is to provide ‘balanced’ policy advice to their minister, and through their minister to government.

The process described by Western Australian interviewees is one where policy is initiated and developed in line agencies, then ‘refined’ by central agency policy analysts. Policy analysts who were interviewed in Western Australia described a process of shaping policy to ‘make it workable’, with respect to implementation. The evidence from this research suggests that the work of technical policy specialists is commonly to develop policy. Policy analysts consider its political acceptability and how it will be implemented. Each cohort of policy specialists appears to provide a specific aspect of policy advice, and exert the most
influence at distinct and different stages in the policy process. They also excel, at least in respect to other policy workers, at particular aspects of policy work.

**Examining the relationship between Policy Analysts and Technical Policy Specialists**

The role of policy workers in central agencies is, in many ways, consistent with policy literature (for example: Page and Jenkins, 2005, Scott and Baehler, 2010). They tend to be ‘generalists’ and their specialist expertise is in ‘policy’. Policy analysts and advisors are considered to be ‘policy’ professionals. In contrast, the specialist expertise of technical specialists is in their technical specialist area. They are commonly not recognised as ‘policy’ specialists in academic literature, nor do they consider themselves to be policy specialists. However, the evidence of this research indicates that technical specialists are significant policy actors in government who initiate and develop a considerable portion of government policy. They also may play an important role as the ‘blockers’ of some policy initiatives, acting to impede the implementation of policies that conflict with their professional values.

Some policy literature suggests that policy analysts and advisors are central to the policy process. This certainly appears to be the case in Western Australia. Scott and Baehler (2010) noted that policy analysis is a multi-disciplinary activity and that policy analysts should have the capability to synthesize information from the necessary fields of expertise in order to analyse policy issues. However, this research suggests that while policy analysts and advisors are influential policy actors and do play an important role, their role is commonly to refine policy that has already been initiated and developed by technical policy specialists, who are normally located in line agencies. It appears to be relatively uncommon for policy analysts to initiate new policy themselves, or to involve themselves in a detailed technical examination of the issues that are to be addressed by a particular policy, as such activities more commonly fall within the role of technical policy specialists.

This research found that the role related by policy analysts in central agencies was primarily related to ‘negotiating’ policy outcomes. Interviewees related a process of negotiation, of weighing often differing agency advice, and attempting to find policy options “that were palatable” to the relevant agencies as well as politically acceptable”. As such, policy analysts in central agencies commonly influenced policy development, at times ‘blocking’ some policy options, while promoting others. Interviewees noted that policy analysts must consider a variety of things, including: the political acceptability of policies, the implications
for other agencies, cost and other implications for government; their role was to consider the costs and impacts of implementing a policy, and how this implementation could be practically achieved. The role described by interviewees was often more aligned to authorising and assessing the political impacts of implementation than to conceptualization and development of new policy. This view of policy analysts is consistent with descriptions of policy work by Scott and Baehler (2010), who considered that “policy” is a professional field in its own right.

Several interviewees noted that many policy failures could be attributed to the increased politicization of policy advice in central agencies and requirements to formulate politically acceptable policy responses within very short timeframes. Faced with short timeframes in which to provide policy advice, policy analysts face major challenges that may constrain their ability to deliver effective policy advice. Interviewees noted that there is commonly pressure to deliver policy advice that is ‘politically acceptable’. However, policy analysts must also respond to pressure from individuals or agencies, from inside or outside of government, who may have vested interests or hold a ‘narrow’ policy position. Pressure may also be applied to find a ‘quick fix’ to a policy issue so as to accord with ‘political’ timeframes.

However, several factors may adversely affect the ability of policy analysts to deliver sound policy advice or to select the most appropriate response to address an issue. Firstly, while the intuitive responses of policy analysts are likely to be accurate with respect to policy processes, without deep understanding of the issue that is to be addressed by the policy and without substantial experience working in a relevant specialist area, their intuition in relation to the issue can be less reliable (Kahneman, 2011). It is more likely that the intuition of technical policy specialists, whose specific area of expertise encompasses the issue, will prove to be more reliable than those of policy analysts (Kahneman, 2011). Secondly, while having a high degree of expertise in the area of ‘policy’, policy analysts who lack technical expertise in a specific area of policy are likely to overestimate their expertise. They are also likely to lack the ability to identify relevant experts, and differentiate them from those who are not experts in the relevant area, who nevertheless may be promoting a particular policy response (Dunning and Kruger, 1999). Notably, these limitations also apply to technical policy specialists who lack specialist expertise in the specific relevant area.
While the expertise of policy analysts, understanding ‘policy’ processes, analysing policy options and understanding of political complexities, is essential to the development of policy pertaining to issues spanning multiple areas of expertise, it must also be based on sound understanding of the issues. Policy analysts have a significant role to play in the provision of sound policy advice to government; however, they are often given insufficient time to develop sound understanding of the complexities of the issue, even including the knowledge of who to turn to for advice. This is not meant to imply that policy analysts are unimportant, nor that their advice is always flawed; but rather, to point out that they operate in an imperfect environment, with potential constraints upon their ability to offer sound advice.

The relationship between policy analyst advice and technical policy specialist advice is an area meriting additional research. It is suggested that some of the areas that would benefit from research are: studies into the way in which policy analysts in central agencies obtain and evaluate advice from technical policy specialists in line agencies; studies examining the credibility that policy analysts attribute to such advice; and studies seeking to determine the ‘weighting’ given to the advice of technical policy specialists. Additional research is also required to identify ways to improve the link between technical specialists’ advice and policy analysts’ advice.

It has become evident in this research that the role of technical policy specialists is often not clearly understood and their importance previously may have been underestimated. They were described by many interviewees as the initiators of the majority of government policy. Although their importance is often not recognised in mainstream academic ‘policy’ literature, in practice government agencies rely on their ability to initiate and develop policy. Almost without exception, the interviewees contacted for this research were aware of the significant role played by technical policy specialists in the shaping and instigation of policy.

Technical policy specialists are distinct from policy specialists whose work has been described in policy literature. They are distinguished from ‘policy analysts’ by the mandated qualifications and expertise in their specialist technical field. While there are exceptions, policy analysts are more commonly generalists, often working across a broad field of policy, their primary expertise being in understanding of the policy process itself. Technical policy specialists related the importance of a deep understanding of the issues in preparing advice that that could only be gained through years of experience working in the particular field.
The research presented in this thesis suggests that the majority of policy work in government is undertaken by technical specialist officers who work in senior technical or middle management positions. These technical policy specialists appear to be the ‘engine room’ of policy in government, their role being to provide policy advice based on sound technical expertise and experience. They are often the ‘creators’ and ‘promoters’ of policy.

The research identified several defining characteristics of technical policy specialists: they are commonly well educated in their specialist field, though they typically lack formal policy education; they commonly have worked for many years in their specific area of expertise; they are relatively mobile; and, they commonly develop strong professional networks. The picture painted by interviewees was one of engaged professionals, whose professional responsibilities often extends beyond their role in government; sound networking and influencing skills are particularly important to engender support for policy initiatives.

Technical policy specialists noted that expertise in their specific field is critical to their work. It was vitally important for technical policy specialists to remain current on what was happening in their professional field. The majority were closely engaged with their relevant professional community, often being members of professional associations within their specialist field. More than half were active in mentoring junior officers, and several even taught at universities on an occasional basis.

Interviewees identified the following characteristics as those contributing to the capacity of technical policy specialists, working in either senior technical or middle (technical) management roles, to respond to emerging policy issues: possessing sufficient expertise and experience in the specific technical area to be able to identify the underlying issue, assess its likely impacts and formulate an appropriate response; possessing detailed knowledge of previous attempts to address such issues through policy and having the capability to understand factors that contributed to the success, or failure, of these prior policies; having sufficient political awareness to determine whether support is likely to be forthcoming from the government of the day; having the ability to utilize professional networks to determine what other governments may have done to address an issue, and the capability to evaluate how successful those attempts had been; and possessing the ability to effectively utilise their own time and resources, or that of their team, to initiate development of a policy or to
undertake the requisite research and evaluation necessary to bring an issue to the attention of their agency.

It is the technical policy specialist’s combination of experience and relevant education that provides them with a deep understanding of policy issues. The unique skills of technical policy specialists enable them to consider in detail, and predict with considerable accuracy, the impacts and implications that a policy will have on their specific area. However, while technical policy specialists commonly share a high level of technical professional expertise, the extent of ‘policy expertise’ is considerably more variable. The majority of technical policy specialists were found to have a sound understanding of policy processes and the workings of government, however, several interviewees lacked sound understanding of government policy processes. Hence, the comments made earlier in relation to the limitations of policy analysts’ understanding of technical issues can equally be applied to technical policy specialists’ understanding of policy and government processes. As noted earlier in this chapter, further research is needed to understand the relationship between policy analysts and technical policy specialists, and to determine how the sharing of expertise can be improved between them.

Teams of technical policy specialists, when combined with specialists of differing specialisations to form a multidisciplinary team, can be particularly effective in evaluating and developing effective policy. Interviewees noted that policies that are developed by strong interdisciplinary teams are commonly found to be robust and highly effective. Several interviewees pointed out that policies initiated by technical policy specialists are much more likely to succeed if they had strong support from technical policy specialists specialising in other areas or from policy specialists working in other agencies.

It was found to be common for technical policy specialists to initiate and develop policy themselves, to adopt the role of policy entrepreneurs, similar to those described by Kingdon (1995). However, it was also noted that some technical policy specialists acted to promote ‘narrow’ policy positions within their parent agency. They could, at times, adopt positions that were not supported by their own agency, or that were potentially disadvantageous to other agencies and the community sectors they represented. Several interviewees also pointed out that ‘narrow’ policy positions were sometimes also adopted by the heads of agencies or by the agencies they headed.
It was noted by many interviewees that technical policy professionals tended to establish and maintain very strong professional networks. At times, these networks are transient and issue-based, bringing together policy actors from different fields to address a particular issue. The issue-based networks that were described by interviewees appear to bear a striking similarity to Sabatier’s advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Weible, 2007, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). However, it was more common for professional networks to be enduring, rather than transient and issues-driven, arising from shared professional interests. Both types of networks were commonly used both as means to obtain information and as avenues to find ‘like-minded’ people who might support a policy initiative. Several high ranking bureaucrats also stated that strong networks had been essential to their career progression. It was notable that several interviewees who did not ascribe particular importance to networks perceived that their opinions were commonly overlooked.

Middle (technical policy) managers and senior technical policy specialists tasked with leadership of teams working on aspects of policy implementation were identified as being particularly influential in shaping policy direction. Interviewees pointed out that senior technical policy specialists and middle managers of technical policy specialists are commonly given a broad directive to research or develop a policy or strategy to address a given issue. Such directives may be very broad, for instance: “Develop a strategy to guide future development in a region for the next 30 years” (quoting a directive to the author of this research). However, this research also indicates that it is also relatively common for bureaucrats working in these roles to initiate the research or development of a policy to address an issue that they had themselves identified.

Many interviewees expressed concern that policy expertise in government was diminishing. Several also noted that there has been a significant reduction in technical specialist expertise within line agencies, and that this is hindering the government’s ability to develop sound policy. This research proposes that some of the decline in policy capacity may be due to a lack of understanding of the importance of technical specialist expertise to developing policy, resulting in greater contestability of their advice.

**When Professional Opinions Conflict with Government Objectives**

“When Professional Opinions Conflict with Government Objectives” examines how technical policy specialists respond when government policy conflicts with their professional
values. It also provides some insights to the questions “What is the relevant influence of policy actors in government?” and “How important are influencing and negotiation skills to their role?”.

The interviews conducted in this study provide considerable evidence that technical specialists are active participants in shaping government policy. Technical policy specialists, in common with other policy actors, are often able to present policy options in a manner such that their preferred option is likely to be chosen, or to present only limited options to government. Technical policy specialists may also influence decisions by choosing to present options that are consistent with their professional opinion or ethics in a positive light, while highlighting the negative aspects of other options.

Many senior technical and policy officers stated that they were not willing to compromise their professional principles. If the elected government’s position conflicted with their professional principles, they would continue to act in accordance with their profession. Several stated that to do otherwise would amount to an abdication of their professional responsibility to provide ‘frank and fearless’ advice to the government.

Technical policy specialists can at times pursue policy objectives that are not a priority for government or are inconsistent with government policy. They may also attempt to change official government policy. Proponents of the top-down view of the policy process (for example: Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989) considered that these are not legitimate actions for public servants. Some policy literature (for example: Wanna et al., 2010) has warned that public servants should not attempt to make policy. However, this view has been contested by others (Bromell, 2010, Colebatch, 2010b, Cerny, 1990, Croker, 1986, Elmore, 1980). Evidence collected during this research suggests that the view, that bureaucrats should not attempt to shape policy, is not shared by many bureaucrats, or by some of the elected officials to whom they report. The majority of bureaucrats and elected officials who were interviewed during this research stated that the role of bureaucrats in shaping policy was not only legitimate, but was in fact essential to the proper functioning of government. As noted by Cerny (1990), the political executive simply does not have the capacity to develop policy and service agencies are more likely to take a lead role in the development of policies and strategies. This research notes that most of the work to develop policies and strategies in these agencies is undertaken by technical policy specialists.
However, it was also noted by interviewees that bureaucrats act to shape policy within strict boundaries and it is the elected officials who decide which policies are enacted through legislation. As one senior bureaucrat noted:

*I think they (public servants) have varying influence. I think the degree of influence depends on how cogent their arguments are, how big the problem is and how much traction the problem is getting in the media and how much consensus there is in the community about the issue, and if they are able to provide a practical solution. If they can’t provide a practical solution, they just become sort of the ‘town crier’ so to speak. They don’t actually provide an option (sic to government). To really have influence, they need all three. I’m not saying it’s every time, and I’m not saying it’s always effective, but over the longer haul I think generally the advice of the public sector can win the day. Over the longer time, it can take up to 20 years before...I mean in agriculture...the public service has been advising governments of various persuasions for more than 20 years before finally getting to the deregulation of (sic. agricultural) industry sectors. It’s been over 30 years, but those various entities gradually got chipped away and deregulated. I think that it was a combination of academic and public sector pressure that led to that happening. And I can give you more examples as well....* (Interview 14)

This view is consistent with Bromell’s (2010) description of policy workers as analyst, advisor and advocate. While noting that moving into an advocacy role may be a risky strategy for a bureaucrat to adopt, Bromell (2010) noted that there is a convention for the public service to offer ‘frank and fearless’ advice to government. The majority of technical policy specialists expressed opinions that their role included provision of this advice, even when it conflicted with government policy. Most interviewees also noted that such ‘frank and fearless’ advice was directed to superiors in government and did not include making statements in the public arena. However, within the arena of the public service, technical policy specialists and other bureaucrats can and do, attempt to shape government policy.

The research suggests that considerable effort is often spent by technical specialists gaining agency support prior to seeking endorsement from more senior levels. Accounts of bureaucrats waiting for the ‘right’ moment to put forward a policy contrast with some policy literature that describes policy development as a systematic process that occurs within relatively short timeframes (for example Althaus et al., 2007). Several bureaucrats, notably almost all technical policy specialists, described personal experiences where they had
worked to develop policy over lengthy periods of more than a decade from inception to endorsement by government. Some described how they had waited until the ‘right opportunity’ to present a policy initiative, a process that appears more ‘opportunistic’ than systematic.

O’Leary (2006:3) has asserted that bureaucrats can, and do, engage in clandestine ‘guerrilla’ activities at many different levels, ranging from unwillingness to implement policies that they believe are unfair to actively undermining the public’s trust in government, or in government policy. There was evidence presented by some interviewees that individual bureaucrats can promote positions or policies that are inconsistent with the agency’s, or the Government’s, official position. Several interviewees, notably all of whom were technical policy specialists, stated that they believed their responsibility included acting in the public interest. These interviewees also stated that they could not support policies that were inconsistent with their professional values or that would result in harmful impacts to their particular community sectors. Several senior bureaucrats stated their concern that some agency staff had followed their own personal crusades, promoting their own positions in opposition to government policy. This could be, it was noted by one senior executive, a “career limiting strategy” (Interview 15) for a bureaucrat to adopt.

The boundary between legitimate actions of a career bureaucrat to alter or shape policy and those of a ‘guerrilla’ employee are indistinct and, aside from very extreme actions, can be hard to define. Whether the boundary between legitimate and ‘guerrilla’ action is crossed can be a matter of perspective. The researcher must ask the question “When does an employee cross the line between legitimate action and guerrilla activity?” Did all of the bureaucrats identified by O’Leary (2006) recognise that their actions were those of ‘guerrilla’ employees, or did they believe that their actions were legitimate? The research conducted for this thesis suggests that whether activities are legitimate or ‘guerrilla’ is determined by the contract that exists between employee and employer: acting outside of what is expected, even in an accepted manner, constitutes ‘crossing the line’. The evidence from this research also suggests that whether engaging in legitimate or ‘guerrilla’ activity, bureaucrats can, and do, actively work to shape public policies and their implementation.

In contrast to the actions of ‘guerrilla’ employees as described by O’Leary (2006), many of the bureaucrats who were interviewed during this research stated that they ‘worked within
the boundaries’ of the public service, to shape policy advice. They believed that their actions were legitimate, and not those of a ‘guerrilla employee’. Several interviewees had worked actively to change government policy, championing new directions for government. However, they had acted legitimately within the boundaries of sanctioned government activity. Notably, these actors, while seeking assistance and support to develop their policy proposals within government, had formed coalitions of supporting technical policy specialists, who were located both within and outside of their own agency. These coalitions of support appear to be similar to the “advocacy coalitions” described by Sabatier and Weible (2007). For example, several interviewees also stated that they had, at times, sought support also from actors outside of the state government in order to elicit support for certain policy positions. Nonetheless, all interviewees noted that there were limits as to how far a public servant could go in order to impose a policy position. Interviewees noted the importance of understanding the ‘legitimising environment’ in which they worked. Commonly, the majority of the group’s effort was aimed at gaining support for the proposal from executive levels in government.

Several interviewees stated that their efforts had resulted in new policies that were eventually adopted by government, with at least one interviewee receiving formal recognition for their role. However, interviewees also gave examples of instances where their attempts to alter policy had failed, or where they were continuing in their attempts to alter government policy. Several of the latter continued to wait for the ‘correct’ alignment of political actors in government, or for the issues to reach sufficient critical mass in order to gain the necessary support for acceptance.

Raadschelders and Stillman (Raadschelders, 2008, Raadschelders and Stillman, 2007) have noted that public servants can, and do, exert significant influence on policy, and far greater influence than has been acknowledged in some policy literature. They have further pointed out that erosion of trust in bureaucracy is central to the argument for the top-down approach to policy implementation. This thesis suggests that, while some academics and elected representatives may lack faith in bureaucrats’ ability, and do not trust bureaucrats to develop sound, unbiased policy, this view is not universal.

The evidence presented here suggests that differences in professional values between technical specialists commonly create tensions between agencies, leading to conflicting
advice to government. While management of agency relationships has been seen as the responsibility of senior bureaucrats and ministerial staffers (for example Edwards, 2001), this is commonly the role of policy analysts and technical policy specialists. However, the evidence from this research also suggests that middle managers can be very influential in shaping cross-agency policy. Notably, the role of policy analysts in central agencies is commonly perceived by technical policy specialists to be that of providing frameworks for the resolution of competing technical specialist advice.

**Training + Experience = Expertise: The Critical Equation for Policy Work**

Consideration of the topic of “Training and Experience” provides insights to the questions “Are there any traits or attributes which characterise effective policy workers?” and “What skills make them effective policy actors?”. It was noted earlier in this chapter that the combination of experience and relevant education is what gives technical policy specialists the deep understanding of policy issues necessary in formulating effective policy. Policy analysts rely on their strong analytical skills and sound understanding of the political environment and policy process. As noted by Kahneman (2011), intuition is more likely to be more reliable when the person making the decision has high levels of expertise. Where expertise is lacking, intuitive decisions are more likely to be unreliable. However, this research provides some evidence to suggest that there may have been a simultaneous reduction in expertise within government bureaucracies and increased reliance on ‘intuitive reasoning’ by policy makers and bureaucrats to guide policy decisions.

The majority of technical policy specialists who were interviewed stated that there has been a significant reduction in technical specialist expertise in the Western Australian government and this is hindering the government’s ability to formulate sound policy. Many interviewees also stated that insufficient training is provided by many agencies for development of essential skills, or to establish and maintain expertise in specialist fields. Training is more commonly gained through working with more senior officers. However, it is becoming increasingly common for relatively junior officers to be tasked with working alone to research or develop policy.

Some interviewees stated that it was more common for senior technical policy specialists to attend conferences than to attend training courses, while also noting that it was also
becoming more difficult to obtain funding to attend conferences. Conferences and subscriptions to professional journals were the most frequently cited ways to keep up to date with developments in a technical specialist field. Interviewees typically obtained access to specialist journals through individual as well as corporate subscriptions. Interviewees stated that, due to time and budget constraints, it was becoming increasingly important to select conferences or courses that provided the greatest value to their work. With the exception of practitioners working in central agencies, the majority of policy practitioners interviewed did not read policy literature unless it related specifically to their specialist field.

It was noted that there is insufficient policy training provided for either policy analysts or technical policy specialists. However, although policy training appeared to be generally lacking amongst technical policy specialists, several technical policy specialists who had attended policy training courses said they were of ‘limited value’ and they would not attend another course. Policy processes taught in these courses were described by interviewees as ‘simplistic’ and they were not consistent with the processes they experienced in practice. This view is consistent with Howard (2005), who has previously observed that the policy cycle used in some policy courses is a simplistic model that does not relate to actual processes. While he did not apply this statement to policy training generally, he did note that policy has become so complicated now that it is difficult to describe with simple models.

However, opportunities were found to exist to increase policy learning within government agencies, particularly through increasing the level of engagement between policy analysts and technical policy specialists, and by expanding opportunities for collaboration between individuals and agencies. Collaboration between academics and policy practitioners was also identified by several interviewees as an avenue for improving research capability and policy learning in government agencies.

Improved collaboration and engagement between academics and policy practitioners is likely to be mutually beneficial for several reasons, not the least of which is improving the ability of the public service to provide sound policy advice. Academics have much to offer policy practitioners: improved understanding of policy processes; access to current research and knowledge; and access to data from case studies in specific areas of policy. In return, improved collaboration with practitioners may increase opportunities for academics to gain
The preceding discussion is not meant to suggest that collaboration is not already occurring between the academia and the public service. To the contrary, close collaboration and engagement does exist in several government sectors. For example, the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANSOG) is a partnership between governments and academia to provide tailored learning opportunities for future leaders of the public sector (ANSOG, 2011). Currently, membership includes 10 government and 16 University partners. One interviewee stated that training provided by ANSOG had been both relevant, and valuable, to their work.

Nevertheless, the benefits of collaboration with academics in the ‘policy field’ were not well recognised by all of the public servants who were interviewed. Nor did it appear to be the norm for public servants to be involved in collaboration with policy academics. While some interviewees were currently, or had previously been, involved in collaborative efforts with academia, this largely appeared confined to technical fields of research. For example, one middle manager who currently works for the Department of Planning is also a member of the board of management for the Cooperative Research Centre for Urban Design, a research centre that was established through a partnership between the Department of Planning and two Western Australian universities.

Severe potential barriers to collaboration between academia and the public service exist. These include distrust, political sensitivities, confidentiality of information, and time constraints. Limitations may also be imposed by differences between the standards for academic research and the expectations of policy practitioners. For example, practitioners who were working in central agencies generally stated that they worked to very strict time constraints and usually did not have sufficient time to fully research issues. Some practitioners working in line agencies stated that constraints were often imposed by budget restrictions, including the amount of funding allocated, and time limits within which the budgeted funds had to be spent. Others stated that budgetary uncertainties at times created issues, noting that there was often little certainty as to whether funding would continue to be available for projects beyond the current financial year. These types of budget limitations potentially formed a constraint to entering into the longer-term agreements typically
necessary for collaborative efforts. Finally, the time needed to establish a collaborative effort was cited by some practitioners as a potential barrier to collaboration; several interviewees believed that this was also a potential barrier to working with other government departments. Several interviewees stated that frequently it was just easier to engage consultants than to attempt to form collaborative partnerships. These comments do not imply that there was a lack of support for collaboration, or that these barriers were insurmountable. In fact, many practitioners expressed considerable support for increased collaboration.

Overcoming the potential barriers to increasing collaboration between policy academics and practitioners is not an insurmountable task. Of course, there will be public servants that will choose not to collaborate with academics, just as some academics will choose not to collaborate with public servants. However, the empirical evidence from this thesis suggests that many practitioners share a willingness to improve engagement and to share in policy learning. An opportunity currently exists for policy academics to engage with new elements of the bureaucracy. This engagement will not only improve the ability of these practitioners to produce policy advice to governments, but also provides opportunities to engage more widely with government departments. Importantly, the real beneficiaries are likely to be the communities to whom these policies are applied.

**Networks and Networking: Breaking Down Barriers to Inter-Agency Collaboration**

This section informs on the responses to several research questions: “How important are policy networks to policy actors in government?”, “What is the significance of policy networks in their work?” and “Is there a positive correlation between the formation of strong networks and effective policy?”. The section also provides insight into two research questions relating to skills essential for effective policy work: “Are there any traits or attributes which characterise effective policy workers?” and “What skills make them effective policy actors?”.

It was evident that the people interviewed in this study work in a complex and demanding environment. Many of the interviewees expressed views that effective implementation of government policy often involves the introduction of implementation strategies that can be contentious, and may be difficult to achieve within fiscal and resource constraints. However, the capability of public servants tasked with developing implementation strategies varies
according to their skills and experience. Their ability to influence policy is also largely dependent upon: their position and role within the organisation; the organisational culture within which they operate; the level of support for, or opposition to, the policy; and the type of policy itself. It was also noted by many that the work of public officers working in the policy arena is influenced by the degree to which they are personally committed to the policy itself. Importantly, sound networking and negotiating skills are critical to policy work at all levels. These skills are of equal importance to policy analysts, technical policy specialists, agency executives, political staffers and elected representatives; they are essential skills for the effective development, endorsement and implementation of policy.

In common with many other bureaucrats, technical policy professionals typically establish and maintain strong professional networks. Some of these networks are based on shared professional interests and membership of these networks is often from within individual professions. Other networks are issue-based and bring together policy actors from different fields. This research suggests that all these networks are critical to the work of policy, and are used to both to inform and influence policy decisions. However, interviewees’ accounts of networking effectiveness varied considerably, some interviewees even noting that networking was not part of their normal work. Notably, interviewees who did not ascribe importance to networking commonly complained about difficulties finding support from within their agency for resolution of policy issues.

Considine (1994) noted that the role of networking includes creation of agreed values and warding off of threats; he further noted that networking is critical to effective collaboration between agencies. Evidence in this research suggests that technical policy specialists make extensive use of informal networks to collect information and influence policy decision-making. Many, but not all, technical policy specialists and senior bureaucrats actively maintain networks and regard this as being part of the “core business” of policy work. The research undertaken for this thesis suggests that the creation and maintenance of informal networks can substantially improve the chances of successful policy implementation, and can also improve the quality of policy advice.

The majority of interviewees believed that more recognition should be given to the importance of networks and that tangible efforts must be made to strengthen collaborative relationships between agencies in order to facilitate cooperative policy development. There
was some evidence that formation of strong networks between officers working at all levels of government may be effective in limiting the adverse impacts of agency silos. However, many interviewees noted that bureaucratic agency structures and protocols militate against networking, and there was some evidence that networking is even actively discouraged in some agencies.

Several interviews related experiences where they had worked with technical policy specialists from other agencies to advance new policy positions, and for which they found channels of support through the other agency. This strategy was particularly important when a ‘blocker’ was located in the hierarchical agency structure, occupying a position that enabled them to prevent a proposal reaching higher levels in the organisation. While circumventing the ‘blocking layer’ was recognised as a risky strategy, it was often the only way to promote a policy position within the agency. Further, there was some evidence that powerful middle management ‘blockers’ may also discourage networking amongst junior staff, potentially also diminishing their ability to develop effective policy.

Notably, while agency heads are often aware of the existence of powerful ‘blockers’ within their agency, they appear to have limited powers to force the necessary changes to prevent the emergence of ‘blockers’, or to limit the effects of their activities. One interviewee (Interview 45) explained that the rationale behind the actions of “blockers” in middle management levels is simple to explain: many of the public servants in these levels are middle-aged ‘baby boomers’ that have survived successive governments, and often organisational restructures, by “keeping their heads down” and not taking risks. The least risky option for any public servant is to say “no”; any other answer increases the risk of exposure to failure. ‘Blockers’ therefore seek to limit personal professional risk by preventing actions by others that they perceive as possibly exposing themselves to risk. The use of this strategy by ‘blockers’ often prevents agencies taking effective action to remove them from their positions of influence.

However, there was also evidence to suggest that individuals and networks can simultaneously act as both policy promoter and policy blocker. Dunleavy (1980) and Hill (1997) have stated that professions often adopt a unified view of the world. Consistent with these statements, several interviewees noted that the professional values held by technical policy specialists are largely shaped by their professional training. Strong professional values
are commonly formed while studying at university and these are subsequently reinforced or strengthened by working with colleagues sharing similar values. It was noted by interviewees that it is not uncommon for technical policy specialists with different training and backgrounds to propose conflicting views or advice based on differing sets of professional values.

The research suggests that it is relatively common for technical policy specialists to promote policies that are consistent with their professional values. Also, they may attempt to block policy initiatives that conflict with their professional values or potentially jeopardise a policy they are promoting. It was noted that professional networks are commonly used to establish support for a policy, or to enlist aid in blocking a policy proposal.

Consistent with descriptions of conflicting professional values, Edwards (2001) noted the importance of recognising the competing interests of different agencies. Stating that instances of independent cross-portfolio policy making were of particular concern, Edwards (2001) noted that resolving conflicting agency views has often been seen as the responsibility of senior bureaucrats and ministerial staffers. Evidence from this research suggests that technical policy specialists commonly advise senior bureaucrats and ministerial staff on these decisions, using their professional networks to establish support for their position both within their own agency and from technical policy specialists located in other agencies.

The evidence from this thesis suggests that there may also be a positive correlation between policy influence that can be exerted and the strengths of the network. The existence of strong networks between technical policy specialists working across participating agencies are likely to increase likelihood that a policy proposal will be supported by government. It was further noted that effective professional networks may also contribute to the success of interagency collaboration.

Collaboration was identified by the majority of interviewees as an essential component of policy work in government. While interviewees differentiated between networking and collaboration, they believed the two were more closely related than some literature appears to suggest (see O'Flynn, 2008). Many interviewees also noted that bureaucratic agency structures do little to promote networking, with some suggesting that networking and
collaboration were actively discouraged or that it was viewed by some managers as not being ‘core business’. While agency heads stated that they wished to encourage collaboration, agency structures often constrained collaborative effort. Public servants wishing to collaborate often had to work against bureaucratic systems, doing so by seeking support from both within the agency at higher and lower levels, and from potential collaboration partners external to the agency.

The evidence suggested that effective collaboration is most likely to occur where support is forthcoming from both middle management and senior bureaucrats. However, where support is lacking from middle managers, effective collaboration is less likely. Middle managers can facilitate collaboration, or can act as ‘blockers’ by working to block collaborative efforts. Notably, many of the ‘blockers’ identified earlier were employed in middle to senior management levels. It was noticeable also that while some of the ‘blockers’ who were identified by interviewees were ‘professional managers’, just as many were technical policy specialists who had risen to senior management positions. Technical specialist expertise therefore appears not to have a great influence on whether a person will become a ‘blocker’.

Within government agencies, interviewees noted that networks are most influential when they include both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension is critically important to limit the amount of ‘filtering’ that may be imposed by differing layers of management, and to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to tasks. However, the vertical dimension does not necessarily align within the hierarchical structure of the organisation. Several interviewees stated their concern that there is a band of middle to senior managers in the Western Australian Public Service whose tendency is to block any initiative or policy proposal that has the potential to alter the status quo.

Raadschelders and Stillman (Raadschelders, 2008, Raadschelders and Stillman, 2007) have stated that the interactions between organizational members deserves more attention than their relations with external stakeholders. While this research found some evidence that an individual’s professional networks often included members from within and outside of government, this was not found to be the case for issue-based networks. There was some evidence to suggest that the membership of issues-based networks of technical policy specialists working in government is largely confined to public servants. In addition, there appears to be much less engagement with policy actors in the private sector.
Some practitioners believed that academic knowledge has become so remote from the actual work of policy that it is no longer of much relevance to practitioners. However, other interviewees stated that it was of vital importance that meaningful ways to exchange practitioner and academic knowledge be found. Significantly, the evidence suggests that policy capacity in government is declining, in part due to a growing lack of understanding of the policy process. This research has noted that more and more policy is left to relatively junior officers. However, it was also noted that with the introduction of ‘professional managers’ into senior positions in line agencies, it is becoming more common to find that even relatively senior people can possess limited understanding of the issues relating to policies or even, of the policy process itself.

While opinion was divided, many interviewees stated their belief that increased collaboration between academics in professional specialist fields and technical policy specialists would significantly improve policy outcomes for government. Academics offer the public service strong research abilities that are particularly suited to situations that involve a high degree of uncertainty over the effectiveness of potential solutions or those where there is a high risk that unintended outcomes may arise. In the face of such uncertainties, academic research may aid policy-makers to formulate policy solutions. The participation of middle managers and senior technical specialists is critical for such collaboration to occur.

**Increased contestability of technical expertise and reports of a decline in the policy capacity of Government**

Edwards (2009) has previously noted that the introduction of New Public Management is contributing to a decline in the policy capability of public services. While this research does not examine in detail the contribution of New Public Management to policy decline in the Western Australian Government, there was some evidence in this research to support this proposition. In particular, this research found evidence that, in line government agencies, the capability to develop policy has diminished. It was also noted that many government policies are never fully implemented, often because the policy process had not been well enough understood by those tasked with developing the policy. However, many interviewees stated the major cause of the decline in policy capacity is that increasingly, policy development is tasked to people with limited understanding of the issues. Interviewees noted that in recent years there has been a trend towards policy development being tasked to junior officers,
where formerly this had been the role of relatively senior officers or teams of technical policy specialists under the guidance of senior officers.

The majority of the technical policy specialists that were interviewed also believed that their advice was increasingly contested, or ignored. Some noted that it is becoming common for bureaucratic advice to be contested by vested interests, increasingly taking the line that bureaucratic advice is biased and caters to particular self-interests. Hoch (1994) also described this tactic, pointing out that it was commonly used by developers to contest the advice of professional planners. Hoch cautioned that planners must become more politically aware and not rely solely on the efficacy of sound technical advice to inform decision makers.

Some interviewees also believed that the growing reliance by elected members of government upon generalist policy officers and ministerial advisors has also contributed to the diminished capacity of the public service to offer meaningful policy advice. However, this view was not shared by other interviewees, notably several policy analysts, who believed that the ability to adopt a balanced approach was crucial to good policy. Notably, the views of elected members of government were divided on this issue. Notwithstanding the opposing views of a minority, the majority of interviewees expressed the view that policy analysts have a significant and important role in policy development, particularly in situations where policy involves multiple agencies. The majority of interviewees noted that the loss of expertise, rising contestability of advice and growing politicisation of the bureaucracy are the key factors contributing to a diminishing capacity of government to produce sound policy.

Many interviewees expressed concern that a decline in policy capacity is increasingly leading to policies that are ineffectual or that create unintended adverse outcomes. Nevertheless, this research also suggests that ‘good policy’ can also result when the correct balance is achieved between sound ‘technical specialist’ and ‘policy’ and/or political advice based on appropriate levels of learning and experience. Unfortunately, the evidence also suggests that this balance is commonly not achieved, to the detriment of policy.

Empirical evidence from these interviews suggests that understanding the diversity of views held by policy practitioners is fundamental to understanding how policy is delivered. In
contrast to the views of some technical policy specialists, policy analysts expressed concern that there is a tendency for some technical policy specialists to adopt a narrow view of policy. It was notable that many technical policy specialists demonstrated very strong attachments to professional protocol and individual expertise. Technical policy specialists complained that their expertise is increasingly contested, some noting also that they had even been pressured to ‘alter’ their professional advice. Also, at times, their superiors had simply altered their reports. Primarily, the contestability of professional advice had come from either within their own agency, from other government agencies, or from industry groups. It was less common for technical policy specialists to state that policy analysts were contesting their professional opinion.

Many technical policy specialists stated that their advice was often contested by ‘vested interests’ or advocates for industry groups seeking to lessen or circumvent restrictions imposed by government. It is also becoming increasingly common for individuals or industry groups to engage their own technical policy specialists to contest agency advice. It was noted that, although these groups had an apparent vested interest in shaping outcomes to favour themselves or their clients, they commonly attempted to also attack the credibility of technical policy specialists by questioning the objectivity of their advice.

As noted earlier, these accounts of contested technical advice are consistent with accounts recorded by Hoch (1994), who described how land developers had used this same tactic successfully in the United States to undermine the credibility of the advice of land use planners employed by local planning authorities. However, interviewees’ accounts also included occasions when technical specialist advice was contested by technical policy specialists or policy analysts from other government agencies. It was also noted that it was not unheard of for agencies to align themselves with an industry lobby group to support their position when contesting advice from another agency.

The general decline in levels of experience and policy knowledge of bureaucrats who are tasked with developing and implementing policy was a cause of grave concern for many interviewees. The apparent attrition of policy experience and knowledge does not appear to be well addressed in policy literature, nor have the ramifications for policy been explored. These findings highlight an apparent ‘gap’ in policy literature. However, although the
literature has commonly considered the effects on the upper levels of agencies, the effects on the middle management and senior technical levels have been less well researched.

In particular there is a lack of research that evaluates the impacts resulting from the apparent decline in the level of policy capacity in government agencies. There is also limited empirical evidence to determine whether the current trend of employing more ‘professional policy officers’ (policy analysts) in central agencies has resulted in improved policy outcomes. To the contrary, the failure of some recent policy initiatives in Australia suggests that, in some areas at least, policy capacity may not have improved and may have suffered attenuation. There is a clear imperative for both academics and policy practitioners to find ways to achieve a meaningful exchange of knowledge. This is an area warranting substantial research.

This research suggests that while technical policy specialists are the originators of, and are responsible for, initiating and developing most government policy, their influence may be declining. Interviewees at all levels of government also noted that as this change has occurred, the capacity of government to develop effective policy has also significantly declined. Anecdotal evidence from this research suggests that there may be a correlation between the two. There is an urgent need for research to determine whether there has been a decline in the policy capacity of governments in Australia, and if this has been influenced by the lessening importance placed upon technical policy specialist advice.

Technical policy specialists and middle managers can be effective in shaping or promoting new policy, acting as policy entrepreneurs to promote policy positions from within government. While as individuals they are relatively lacking in power, as a group in government they are highly influential. This research also suggests that technical policy specialists can act to block the development or implementation of policies that conflict with their professional values. As O’Leary (2006) has noted, ‘guerrilla’ activity takes place at different levels and to varying degrees. The activities of guerrilla employees can often go undetected; they “can do it to you in ways you will never know” (O’Leary, 2006:93).

**Conclusion**

This research was undertaken in order to improve understanding of the roles of respective actors in the policy process. Focusing on the development of implementation strategies and
the creation of new policy arising from within so called “line government” agencies, this research attempted to identify the relative influence and effectiveness of different cohorts of policy actors and define some of the factors that make policy actors effective. The first task of this research was to establish where the majority of government policy originates, and where policy is developed, in government agencies.

This research, to some degree, challenges the top-down view that policy should be created by politicians and implemented by bureaucrats (for examples see: Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1989, Sabatier, 1986, Wanna et al., 2010). The empirical evidence collected during this research suggests that these authors are incorrect in their shared assumption that policy is created and developed by elected officials. In practice, bureaucrats are commonly engaged in the creation of public policy. Far from being passive implementers of policy, bureaucrats are active participants in policy shaping and development.

The role of line agency officials is far from subordinate; it requires them to develop initiatives, possibly on sensitive topics, and interact with ministers, senior officials, and those external to their department. Interviewees related experiences that were often not entirely consistent with the view of policy processes described in most policy literature. The policy processes examined in this research cannot be adequately described by either top-down or bottom-up approaches to policy. Rather, they appear to combine elements of both: top-down approaches applying to some aspects, bottom-up approaches applying to others. Notably however, many of the policy processes described by interviewees can be best described as “middle-out”. Accounts of the policy process collected during this research suggest that the majority of government policy is developed in line agencies by people whose role is to shape policy and policy implementation strategies. The policy that arises from this process is then endorsed by the ‘top’ and implemented by the ‘bottom’.

The empirical evidence collected during this research supports the findings of earlier research that relatively junior public servants are actively engaged in policy formulation and development (for example: Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006, Colebatch and Radin, 2006e, Gill and Colebatch, 2006, Hoch, 1994). This research suggests that the amount of influence exerted by technical specialists on policy may be greater than that suggested in some policy literature. Technical specialists are central to policy processes in government and indeed appear to be the initiators of the majority of government policy.
Notably, policy officers with experience outside of Western Australia related similar experiences working in other jurisdictions. This apparent oversight in mainstream academic policy literature itself has the potential to create adverse policy impacts. Colebatch (2010:76) recently stated that if practitioner knowledge and academic knowledge seem to point in different directions, it is academics who should examine the basis of, and the evidence for, their assumptions. As has been previously noted by Page and Jenkins (2005:145), top-level civil servants are not the only ones to watch if we want to understand the development of public policy.

This research also supports the notion that there is a lack of coherence between the practice and theory of policy analysis. This was particularly evidenced by the level of policy analysis that was found to occur outside of the “policy profession” commonly reported in “policy” literature (for example descriptions of the "policy profession" in Scott and Baehler, 2010). In examining the respective roles of generalist policy officers and technical policy specialists, this research has identified differences that appear to arise from differing roles, and from the differing epistemological viewpoints of policy generalists, technical policy specialists and senior bureaucrats. While these findings are consistent with some policy literature (for example: Hill, 1997, Colebatch, 2006c, Colebatch, 2006, Gill and Colebatch, 2006), the influence that technical specialists exert during the implementation stage and through development of new policies may previously have been underestimated by some academics (for example:Rhodes and John, 2007, Wanna et al., 2010).

Generalist policy officers commonly believe that deep understanding of political priorities and of the policy process, combined with a broad understanding of the issues being addressed are essential attributes of policy workers. Their focus is primarily to meet the political aims of the elected government. They tend to be generalists, working across a number of functional areas and specializing only in the field of ‘policy’.

Technical policy specialists believe that deep understanding of the issues being addressed combined with general understanding of policy processes and political priorities are essential attributes of policy workers. Technical policy specialists commonly develop detailed knowledge of specific issues within their specialization and may work for years, even decades, developing and refining issue-driven policies. While often cognisant of the priorities of the elected government, technical policy specialists may also promote responses
to issues that lie outside the scope of the currently elected government’s agenda. Technical policy specialists may work to develop policies for periods of years or decades, time periods during which there may be one or more changes in the elected government.

This research has identified a rich area for further research in public policy. Evidence from this research suggests that the role of technical policy specialists has changed in recent decades and is likely to continue to change in the foreseeable future. What is the future for technical policy specialists as effective policy actors? There was some evidence that the ability of technical policy specialists to propose policy may be declining. The evolving relationship between policy generalists and technical policy specialists is an area deserving of more research. The ability of technical policy specialists to block policy appears to be unimpeded, including the ability to delay or block the implementation of endorsed government policies, and to block policy initiatives emerging from within government agencies. There is an urgent need for additional comparative studies to determine if the reported decline in technical policy specialists’ influence is actual or perceived, and to compare the role and influence of technical policy specialists in other jurisdictions.

In this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate that of equal importance to either ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ is the ‘middle layer’ of policy development; not ‘top-down’, not ‘bottom-up’, but ‘middle-out’ policy shaping. In some ways, ‘top-down’ approaches rely on the middle levels. ‘Top-down’ levels do not have the time to develop or to write policy themselves; for this they rely on middle ranking bureaucrats, particularly technical policy specialists. However, the research also suggests that technical policy specialists, in particular those in senior technical or middle management positions, can be highly effective in blocking policy initiatives that conflict with their professional values.

The role of technical policy specialists and the influence they exert on policy is an area deserving further research. Unfortunately, these officers are often employed deep within the government bureaucracy, creating difficulties for researchers wishing to collect data. Notwithstanding these difficulties, examination of this relatively unexplored area of research is important in order to improve the understanding of policy processes that occur within government agencies. This has particular relevance to the policy education needs of the professional public service and has significant implications in respect to the outcomes for the communities they serve.
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### Appendix 1: South-West Framework Taskforce

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<th>Job Title</th>
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# Appendix 2: South-West Framework Stakeholder Group

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Appendix 5: Diagrams

Diagram 1. Reporting Relationships in the Western Australian Planning System

Western Australian Government Cabinet

Ministerial Advisors → Premier

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Minister for Planning → Ministerial Advisors

Western Australian Planning Commission

Department of Planning

Local Government Authorities

(Unpublished document, Department of Planning 2012)
Diagram 2. Hierarchy of Planning Policies in the Western Australian planning system

(Unpublished document, Department of Planning 2011)
Diagram 3. Links between WAPC – Department of Planning and other State Agencies

(Unpublished document, Department of Planning 2011)
Diagram 4. Internal Relationships between policy workers in the Department of Planning

(Unpublished document, Department of Planning 2011)