Evaluation and Negotiated Order: Developing the Application of Complexity Theory

Introduction

The problem of the relationship between social theory, both formal and substantive, and methods has been widely acknowledged and has become particularly acute given the recent emphasis on evidence as the basis for social policy (Sanderson, 2003). The effect of government stress on achieving an evidence base has been to reinforce a pre-existing divide between empirical and theory based social science knowledge, in which the call for evidence is associated with an objectivist standard, and against which other forms of research are found wanting. This has reinforced a division in social policy implementation between conceptualisation and the empirical evidence with which it should work. As a result there has been a proliferation of empiricist studies, founded in the methods of the social sciences, without any consistent relationship to theory and related methodology (Walker, 2001). Theory based evaluation has represented one approach to address these issues but with limited success (Sanderson, 2003).

The problem is not simply one of failing to appreciate the insights available through a range of social theories. It is that, more importantly, the failure to be conscious of the ontological and epistemological basis of the knowledge derived has not only led to the theory blindness that Walker describes, but has undermined the possibility of social science to inform the policy implementation process. The real potential for using social science knowledge lies in a critical awareness of the nature of the knowledge produced. The objectivist/empiricist approach to what constitutes evidence represents a divergence which could eventually dispense with social theory altogether in favour of technical

methods. This appears to be a growing trend, propelled in a move toward the 'audit society' (Power, 1997) as government tries to employ linear ideas about implementation and associated evaluation across the range of its functions. This article aims to suggest an alternative to empiricist local description which draws explicitly on complexity paradigm and allows us to build on the work of Sanderson (2000, 2002) and of Barnes et al (2003) on the relevance of complexity to evaluation. It further identifies a potential for understanding the relationship of structure and agency in complexity consistent terms through an approach to social theory based on Strauss' work on negotiated order. Working from this level of theory we can develop research question and devise the means for interpreting the qualitative data which is the core data for much evaluative study.

From Weber onwards we have been aware that social science proceeds through a critical examination of the, often implicit, value bases of phenomena in the social world (Runciman, 1978). This is particularly important in policy, where the scrutiny of innovation must comprehend the power and interests of a range of actors in their relation to changing and contestable social structures. The questions that are important are not then, only whether the policy has technically achieved a desired outcome, but how both the problem and the solution have been conceived and the consequences of these conceptions for whose interests have been served and whose interests suffered. Such issues are central to the question of policy sustainability and lay bare underlying theories and values. Frequently because of their underlying assumptions, policy researchers commit the error detected by Reed and Harvey in the Parsonian approach of '*tipping the*

hat' to economic and ecological factors, 'as it rushed off to explore the cultural constitution of organisations' (1992, p366).

The recent debate on the place of theory has been a response to these forces and one important development has been the recognition of complexity theory in providing us with an alternative way of understanding the world within which attempts at engineering are designed (Byrne, 2001, Medd, 2001). This article will seek to develop the argument for an explanatory role of this theory for understanding and evaluating such interventions based on achieving coherence between ontological, epistemological understanding and substantive theory. It will argue that these levels are mutually implicating and, in consequence, an explicit appreciation of their impact is important, not only for evaluation design, but for the derivation and interpretation of findings. It will point to the value of complexity theory as a framework but will argue that the account needs to be developed further in order to have the tools to handle agency. This can be found in negotiated order which can provide such a complexity consistent account.

Complexity and evaluation

The value of complexity theory to the social sciences has been appreciated relatively recently (Byrne, 1998, Cilliers, 1998 Urry, 2003). While its propositions are becoming more widely known, for the purposes of this article the principal tenets are sketched to provide a basis for the argument that follows. A more developed discussion of the relevance of complexity theory for evaluation can be found in Sanderson (2000, 2002). A prime affiliation of complexity theory is its foundation in critical realism, based in understanding the world as a hierarchically layered, complex system which is characterised by feedback and in which the simple cause- effect relationships sought in

positive science can often fail to appear. In a critique of the experimental method Bhaskar (1997) points to the problem that in the real world, the absence of controlled conditions, can undermine causal accounts. He argues that generative entities are part of a system in which interaction sometimes promotes, and sometimes suppresses, causal relations.

This account of reality accords with our understanding that there is no such thing as unique determination, nor even any comprehensive explanation in the social sciences that fails to take account of the differential impacts of a range of conditions in the wider environment in relation to which a phenomenon occurs. The implication of Bhaskar's theory is that the nature of systems and settings is open and irreversible; they have history. Far from describing closed adaptive systems that seek always to return to a stable state, Bhaskar describes systems that are constantly evolving over time. As a result any attempt to develop predictive laws is inappropriate, but one can deal well with post hoc explanation and understand longer term tendencies, recognising that systems incorporate stochastic processes. Bhaskar describes a system of layered, dialectical entities which form part of a hierarchically structured, open system that is greater than the sum of its parts. Corresponding to such a world is a science of open, dynamic and historical, systems (Reed and Harvey, 1992). Causal movements are recognized as reciprocally interactive and therefore often create 'non-linear feedbacks that operate in staggered rhythms to produce a world of historically constituted, evolving constellations. This 'open interactive world of things and contingent tendencies constitutes the proper object of scientific investigation', (Harvey 2002, p165).

In deriving this account, agency is recognized as a capacity to transform things, and through reflexivity, itself. Its emergent character then comes to the fore.

The idea of human agency or praxis as transformative negation of the given (think of cooking a meal, mending a bike); and at the same time as both enabled and constrained by and reproductive or transformative of the very conditions of praxis, so that these conditions are activity dependent or autopoietic, conceptualized (concept-dependent but not concept exhausted) and geo-historically dependent (and thus themselves possible objects of transformation (Bhaskar 1994; 92-3- quoted in Harvey 2002)

Complexity theory conceives of systems that are open and evolving over time to create path dependence, but subject to internal perturbations which inspire non-linearities. This means that while prediction is not possible, explanation is. When applied to the social sciences it provides an epistemology for understanding the interaction between structures and human agents. The physical world depicted in a science of dissipative systems has much in common with the world that sociologists seek to explain.

We therefore have a clear place for structure and agency in the critical realism and complexity theory and can turn to sociological theory to consider how this can be accessed in empirical study. The problem of achieving an explanation of the relationship between agency and structure has exercised considerable sociological attention throughout the history of the subject (Dawe, 1970). Bourdieu's habitus is a notable attempt to encapsulate the embodiment of structure in a way that leaves place for agency (1990). Giddens duality, expressed in terms of structuration theory, equally claims to have overcome the divide 1979). Neither theory has been universally acclaimed as

solving the problem of uniting sociologies of social order and social control (Mouzelis 1995).

This becomes a problem for practice because these relationships have to be understood in any attempt to bring about change in the world or to achieve a policy target. The failure to understand the implications of this knowledge for policy is serious in its lack of consciousness of the impact of implicit understandings for developing evidence in evaluative research. It renders a claim to produce knowledge based on social science problematic and has been partly responsible for the retreat to a highly vulnerable, technocratic approach to methods identified earlier. Substantial consequences flow from the choices made. In examining policy processes and implementation we are reflexively monitoring their action in the world. This necessarily involves interpretation. In the realist ontology described by Bhaskar the distinction between transitive knowledge of the world and the intransitive nature of the world itself is important. He points out that all science is social activity and its practice gives rise to transitive knowledge of an intransitive world. Working between these two levels is the sphere of operation of an evaluative study. It acknowledges the process of evaluation as a construction, albeit one founded in a world that combines both the constructed and those relatively permanent elements, which have a structural quality.

We can adopt a view of self-equilibrating systems which tend to return to a stable state as Parsons did (1937). Alternatively, in adopting complexity theory, we conceive of the world as constituted by far-from -equilibrium systems which emerge from their conditions and their histories. These systems exhibit 'non-linear feedback mechanisms'

that give rise to ever increasing structural complexity. They are characterized by

interaction and this implies the impossibility of prediction. The stochastic processes

inherent in these systems are not amenable to a positivist approach to description and

prediction.

Sanderson (2002) has contributed significantly to thinking about the implications of this

for evaluation in questioning the relationship between knowledge and action and the role

of the evaluator in the modern policy context. The problem of prediction is clearly an

issue of significance for such studies while the importance of context is such that

explanations have to take place at the local[1] level. He quotes Rescher:

> The fact is that in situations of unmanageable complexity, practice in matters of public policy
> is often guided more effectively by localized experimental trial-and error than by the
> theorizing resources of an intellectual technology unable to cope with the intricacy of
> interaction feedbacks and in predictable effects.
>
> p.189, quoted in Sanderson 2002

At first glance the implication of this conclusion is that empiricist understanding is

adequate. Yet the complexity based formulation of the problem explicitly acknowledges

that no simple empiricism is possible. The paradigmatic nature of knowledge requires

that we situate empirical findings (Kuhn, 1970). Attempts to find out about the world as

well as attempts to change it necessitate such reflexive awareness. We need further to

engage with theory that explains the social world as not only structured and external, but

as also a construction of the actors within it. Such theory can be used to achieve a critical

understanding of the relationships that emerge.

In referring to Giddens, Sanderson argues that the loosening of tradition suggests

increasing reflexivity. There appears to be evidence to support this claim in the

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[1] Local refers to system rather than geographical locality although in the context of this article the two map
on to each other consistently.

relationships observed between professionals and consumers in the public services (Callaghan and Wistow 2006). This should not be taken to imply, however, as several writers have suggested, that reflexivity itself means that agents are freed from structures, (Giddens 1984, Lash and Urry1994). The relationship between agency and structure may be reformed but this is not sufficient to claim that one is freed from the other. In making claims for a new understanding based on complexity we need to work with this relationship to develop ways of understanding agentic behaviour in shaping the complex systems within which they interact.

Instead of deriving order-seeking systems emerging from new policy innovations, complexity theory suggests we must understand dissipative systems that contain innovative possibilities, which in certain configurations of circumstance can yield radical change. There is then no expectation of a 'return' to equilibrium but rather, new relatively stable states established in response to changing conditions which forms the basis of future boundary testing and perturbation (i.e. history). Barnes et al (2003) recognised the importance of this from their experience of the HAZ evaluation and made some observations on an approach to research. In this article these issues are considered further and an approach to researching them is developed.

The limitations of complexity

Complexity theory gives us frame for understanding but does not provide all of the tools required to explicate local action. If complexity-based evaluation is to inform the policy process this is a vital stage in developing an account because theory not only informs evaluation design, but shapes the explanation derived.

We need an account that can work with the complexity frame to develop understanding for the relation of action and structure at the local level. In order to develop a coherent local explanation of the social world has to be understood in terms of overlapping dualisms of structure and action, macro and micro levels. The dynamics of the operation of the system must be understood through an account of process that can recognise the existence of regularities, while at the same time acknowledging the contingent nature of their operation. Much of what we see in complexity based studies is explanation at the aggregate level identifying trends and system level indicators rather than the direct engagement with agency of individuals and collectives. Frequently when evaluating policy interventions that involve innovative service configurations and local pilot studies we are attempting to integrate such quantitative data with a large body of qualitative data. Complexity is a frame for explanation and we need an associated frame to allow us the means to analyse and explain the latter. Barnes et al (2003) have suggested a social constructionist account. Within this broad epistemology I will argue that we can draw upon negotiated order to posit the relationships and processes involved. We need to understand both the dynamics of system change over time, at the macro and micro level, but also to explain how that occurs through the meaningful action of individuals in the local setting. This is the level at which we can explain reproduction or change within systems.

Operationalising agency

A central absence in the practice of social science has been in applying the implications of these understandings to direct policy research. The separation between those working with theory in the social sciences and institutionalised empiricist social research has its

most damaging impact here. Questioning a technical-rational approach based on objectivism is fundamental and implies rethinking the nature and meaning of the process and research undertaken to examine it. One particular, and hugely consequential, implication of complexity theory for evaluation studies is that the transferable knowledge to be gained is not direct and cannot be based on extracting factors from context. What is of much greater value is the context-rich explanation that can be derived. The simple idea of 'roll out' from pilot studies becomes problematic.

The promise of theory based approach however is much greater. In moving away from objectivist, determinist explanations we can actually begin to make space for human agency. This understanding begins from a recognition that human individuals are not the 'cultural dopes' problematised by Garfinkel (1967) in his reaction to Parsonian systems theory, rather they act upon a material world to transform it. We can return to Weber for insights into the importance of reflexivity as a central feature of such human action (Shils, 1949). Nicolis and Prigogine (1989) put this in far-from equilibrium terms recognising the impact of individual projects and desires, often based on anticipated futures, which in combination with environment, shapes the dynamics of the system. It is the reflexivity of agents and their ability to anticipate and act accordingly that prevents the narrative of history from being a deterministic story.

The role of agency is less often theorised in studies that purport to understand the manifestation of cause and process in policy implementation because of implicit linear logic. Frequently the roles of 'champions' and 'reticulists' (Friend et al 1974) are treated in unproblematically voluntaristic terms. To develop that lens we can draw on the

concept of negotiated order to suggest the value of insights from social theory to understanding policy processes. This theory allows a fit between a complexity-consistent understanding of structure and action at the local level and from this foundation it becomes possible to identify ways of exploring and understanding the system and which can access meaning, individual and collective action.

The notion of negotiated order is premised in understanding how systems are not only structural entities, but are also fundamentally shaped in the context of the forces and conditions pertaining at the 'bottom' of the hierarchy, being created and re-created by the actors located there. Strauss (19363) developed the concept from his fieldwork in organisations in response to the clash between the perspectives of Parsons (primacy of order) and Dewey (primacy of change). He argued that within organisations order is negotiated and that this is an ongoing production of the actors involved. Organisational relations, therefore, although having a structural quality are the product of this continual process of making and remaking. The existence of structure is important in setting the positions from which individuals negotiate and, in turn, give these negotiations their patterned quality, but these products are historical and temporally shaped; always open to review and revision. The order that is produced is best described as negotiated because it relies on the daily decisions of actors within this context.

In a later article Strauss corrected an early overemphasis on the role of actors:

> What was omitted [from our first formulation of the negotiated order was]
> *actors' theories of negotiation* [and] detailing of negotiation *subprocesses*.
> Hence …no explicit specifying of conditions and consequences associated
> with these subprocesses… no working out of a paradigmatic analysis in terms

of *structural contexts* and *negotiation contexts* …virtually no references to the options for alternatives to negotiation: coercion, persuasion, manipulation of contingencies, and so on. Issues relating to rules, norms, and the like were handled explicitly, but others, relating to power, coalition, politics, and the like, were touched on only implicitly.

(Strauss, 1993. p249-250)

In negotiated order we can understand the structures as created but also as creating the context for action. This has echoes through Marx, '*Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp on the brain of the living*.' (2004), and Bourdieu, whose concept of habitus is the pre-conscious embodiment of this interactive relationship (1990). For Strauss the negotiation of order within organisations is essential to its operation. If we substitute the notion of system for organisation, these negotiations have particular characteristics that render them useful to complexity based evaluation. They involve a crucial temporal dimension, being constituted and reorganized over time in relation to the regularities established by the structures, the essentially patterned nature of relationships and forms of interaction.

Interestingly Fine (1984), in his discussion of negotiated order, described it as a metaphor rather than a theory because it provides a 'way of looking at the world' rather than testable propositions (p240). The same comment has commonly been made in introducing complexity theory to the social sciences. This paper is seeking to consider how these 'ways of looking' can be used to inform evaluation practice.

The four tenets of negotiated order are usefully summarised by Fine:

> First Strauss argued provocatively that all social order is negotiated order:
> organization is not possible without some form of negotiation. Second, he
> asserted that specific negotiations are contingent on the structural conditions
> of organization (a point occasionally deemphasized by his followers).
> Negotiations follow lines of communication, i.e. they are patterned, not
> random. Third negotiations have temporal limits, and they are renewed,
> revised and reconstituted over time. Fourth structural changes in organization
> require a revision of the negotiated order. In other words, the structure of the
> organization and the micropolitics of the negotiated order are closely
> connected.

(Fine 1984, p241)

Each of these tenets can be found in complexity terms, recognising the importance
of interaction, history and contingency. Positing the negotiated nature of order
recognises the significance of local action in shaping the system and the relevance
of interaction in bringing about change, whose nature may have been anticipated by
none of the participants. Such negotiations are regularly observable in the
compromises and reformulations of policy at the local level. They are based on pre-
existing structures which have formed historically through a sedimentation process.
This has been recognised as significantly shaping the actual nature of policy
implementation based on the interaction of new initiatives with pre-existing
configurations and organisational relations. Studies of such initiatives have

recognised the significance of history (Hudson et al 1999). Closely associated with structures are patterned ways of communicating within and between organisations which can be explored through the formal and the informal processes that each have their impact on its nature. In identifying the relationship between structure and micro-politics Strauss begins to identify what it is relevant to know. Together they provide a basis for evidence of why, for example, target-driven approaches are seen by complexity theory as undermining (Medd, 2001), and more broadly as distorting, the systems that they try to control (Bevan and Hood, 2006). These external interventions disrupt or reshape the negotiations that take place, bringing with them both intended and unintended consequences.

In evaluating policy Sanderson (2002) has pointed to the problem of attributing cause in complex, cross-cutting and multiple interventions. Such policy initiatives operate within the context a relationship of structure and agency in which negotiation plays a significant role. Negotiated order is complexity consistent, drawing attention to the multiplicity of perspectives which,' derives from differential statuses, experiences, and memberships in groups, organizations and local worlds (Strauss, 1993 p252). These negotiated elements can often be identified in the process of implementing rules and policies, originating from the centre, but taking specific local form. Using negotiated order, we can identify the impact of different organisational cultures and levels of professional power as well as the roles and legitimacies of other actors in the system In examining the impact of policy at the local level we are trying to grasp interactions between a range of, not always congruent, interests based in historical actions, which set the conditions and boundaries

around what is considered possible. An appeal to negotiated order theory allows us to identify a strong role for social science knowledge and, within this context, the relevance and possibility of building knowledge in successive evaluations across contexts. Rather than 'judging' outcomes as dysfunctional we can understand the particular order that has been, and is being, negotiated and to bring theories of power to bear upon that understanding. We can then revisit the kind of learning that can take place. Here several questions emerge once we reject the Newtonian version of science based on reductionism, determinism and objective knowledge.

If an existing order is a negotiated order in Strauss' terms then an evaluation of a new policy initiative seeks to examine these negotiations, informed by the interests of actors, based on the philosophies and ideologies of their professional practice and the organisational constraints within which they work. In evaluating cross-cutting and multiple interventions significant knowledge arises through understanding these negotiations. Constructionism is helpful in reminding us that these issues and the objectives of policy may be defined differently according to the standpoint of the actors involved. We need to go beyond that to understand the interaction of these elements to explain action at the local level, based in local histories and the contingency of causation. Thus for example, instead of bemoaning individual failures or suggesting professional intransigence in the face of new policy, we would develop an understanding of the persistence of the demarcation disputes and boundary setting activity that frustrates attempts to secure 'joined up' working (Alaszewski, et al 2003). Professional and organisational boundaries within the sphere of health and social care can be understood as negotiations in the context of structural conditions which may be embedded in, but

extend beyond, the organisational or professional remit to the wider systemic level (Callaghan and Wistow, 2006).

While it might be claimed that this knowledge could be deployed within a positive framework the point here is that this approach is epistemologically consistent with an understanding based in complexity theory. The latter sensitises us to what is the important information to seek. We are, then, looking for information about a world that is not at equilibrium but one in which small local variations can be decisive in both the magnitude and form of change in an intervention. Complexity theory helps us to understand what to look for. Negotiated order theory suggests ways of investigating these issues and identifying the processes and negotiations that shape policy. Rather than discounting local variation, it acknowledges that systems are characterised by local action and that such action forms a sedimentation of practices that gives the system history. The crucial thing then is to understand it. The value of this theory lies in taking us one stage further in applying complexity theory to creating researchable questions.

Conclusion

The methods based contribution that social science currently makes to policy purports to employ the rigorous methods of social science to build knowledge but has generally done this innocent of theory (Walker, 2001). Although it is claimed that the place of blue skies research remains the pressure for social science knowledge to have direct application has increased considerably. Walker has pointed to the many institutional and practical reasons for this. The argument here has been that the divide has implications beyond the

practical level in relying on methods without methodological foundation, ignoring the importance of their relationship to epistemology and, consequently, to what we can claim to know. The conventional evaluation, in making objectivist claims, purports to independence based on rigorous method but such evaluations frequently fail to be critical of the conceptualisations inherent in the policy process itself. This becomes an increasingly significant issue because of the institutional encouragement toward empiricism relying on an implicit acceptance of the dominant paradigm of traditional science. The very promise of social science begins with its ability to question the objectivist basis of such authority and indeed, to reflexively recognise the impact of such constructions on the processes themselves.

This article has attempted to suggest a way of reuniting practice with its theoretical base in order to inform policy research. Much valuable learning is missed in operating with a normal science conception of the world and a reductionist/objectivist conception of knowledge. The aim here is to develop the discussion, begun by Sanderson, to think about how we can conduct research based on the insights that complexity theory can bring in order to develop knowledge of value for policy-makers.

The prime value of the approach suggested here lies in the questions to which it can sensitise us. It has been argued that negotiated order provides us with a way of looking which can access the nested nature of reality proposed in complexity theory. In order to understand this we need to observe and to question, through a range of qualitative methods, how people work with those relatively permanent structures in the daily process

of making and remaking the world. Comparative case studies have long been employed in social science as a way of learning about how and why outcomes vary. Through complexity we can derive data that identifies outcome and long run changes and, through negotiated order, we can bring a way of understanding how the system gives rise to such change.

This understanding of context and history is crucial to evaluation at any scale. An example from a familiar (and what might appear to be a relatively micro level, observation) may serve to illustrate the point. The vexed question of who should provide a bath to an older person became notorious in the 1990s. The bath provided by NHS was free, while the bath provided by social care was charged for according to the means of the user. Both health and social services were under pressure to guard their own budgets and to avoid taking responsibility beyond their direct obligations to patients and users. On this basis each service was encouraged to define the need in terms of services provided by the other. The decision about which was provided was based on the resolution of a question about whether an individual needs a bath for their health or whether this is a social need. Professionals everywhere pointed to the impossibility of making such a distinction but were often, in practice, set in hostile relationships with professionals in the other service, in an attempt to defend their own boundary.

Evaluative studies that consider only organisational and professional elements tend to seek solutions to this problem in the co-location of professionals and 'blurring' professional and organisational boundaries. Policy responses such as 'Intermediate Care

for Older People' have directly employed this rationale. While such solutions clearly help, the causal explanation derived is limited, sometimes involving a judgemental attribution of blame to the agents involved.

The approach to this question using complexity theory suggests different questions. In the case of the boundaries between health and social care, we are encouraged by complexity theory to identify the effects of a systemic level, in which the co-existences of a 'free at the point of delivery' health care system, and a means-tested social care system, creates tensions which permeate everyday practice. The way in which the bath was resolved was through negotiations that went on on a daily basis between care managers and district nurses. Observation of how these issues are worked on in practice suggests that we explore the combination of professional role and organisational pressures, the history of practice within the locality, impacts of new policy from the centre, as well as those more enduring structural issues identified above. These negotiations were infused with the pressure to maintain organisational boundaries, but were translated into a quasi-professional decision about whether the bath was necessary for health or for social reasons. Solutions varied widely between localities and according to no simple rationale, but were achieved by agents (whose action was also patterned in terms of local history and professional ethics). It is by observing and unpicking how these issues shape the daily practice of professionals that we can understand and comment on the whole.

Consciousness of the contribution of the institutionalisation of local practice, brought about through the interaction of current agency with history, enables us to understand

how systems are reproduced and how they change. Using negotiated order theory we are alerted to the questions: How has the particular order been negotiated in this place by the actors involved? What structural conditions, patterns of communication, in what temporal scale, achieved the current order? What do changes, for example, in policy initiatives, create in renewing or reforming this order? Such questions point to the flaws inherent in the positivist conception of policy pilots, yet at the same time rescue the possibility of learning from them by reconceiving their role and nature in complexity terms.

Furthermore this approach suggests that the role of evaluation, rather than a judgement, can more properly be conceived as an exploration of the manifestation of complex causality. The aim becomes to provide a better understanding of how the current order has been achieved. Rather than seeking to draw direct and transferable 'rules' for practice from an evaluative study, it recognises that the nature of complex reality is that it has history and is local. It is more important then to understand the interaction of elements in a complex system to which policy-makers can respond by creating space for achieving system objectives (Bevan and Hood, 2006).

In social policy innovations fundamental questions of the relationship between structure and agency are ever-present matters of practice but they have frequently been ignored in service of a rational/technical approach to evidence. We are left with some accounts that rely on implicit structural/deterministic understandings, others that deploy structurally blind individualism, while more are based on some inconsistent combination of the two. In many respects this is an old complaint yet it seems important to resist the creeping

effects of empiricism in social science practice because it encourages an uncritical

approach to policy evaluation. In this article the case has been made for reuniting the two

using complexity, based on a realist ontology, to provide an associated epistemology

through which to explore these issues. The relevance of such theory is not in claiming

predictive potential, but in offering a way of looking, and thereby, the means to develop a

dialogue at the local level, acknowledging the structures and forces of relative

permanence as well as those of contingency. It has been proposed here that the theory of

negotiated order provides a way of exploring these phenomena and the processes

immanent within them as they manifest themselves in local policy implementation. From

this knowledge base there may be a role for generalisation, much in the way that has long

been appreciated by qualitative researchers, based on an in-depth understanding of

interactions and their effects within a given context.

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