

The public servant as analyst, advisor and advocate

David Bromell

“Much of the work of public officials – elected or appointed – involves choices amongst values Therefore, nothing is more dangerous to the well-being of the body politic than a public official who is technically competent or strategically astute but ethically illiterate or unfit.”

— Noel Preston, *Ethics for the Public Sector* (1994)

Outline

- analysis, advice giving, advocacy
- a Chalcedonian challenge
 - to distinguish, without separation or division
- encouraged and supported by
 - legislation and convention
 - codes of ethics / conduct
 - statements of organisational values
(but is that enough?)
- moral competence in public life
- moral leadership

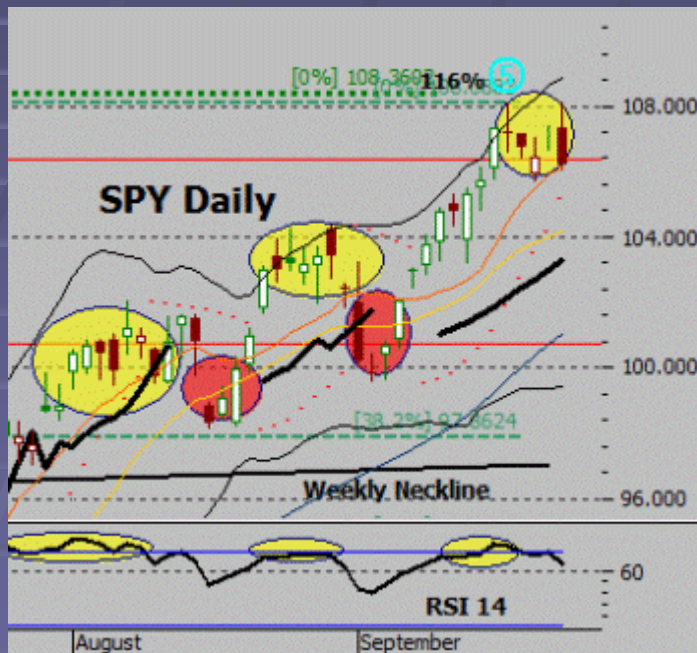
The analyst

Information

Facts

Numbers

- professional
- technically competent
- politically neutral
- evidence-based means to achieve government ends?
- value neutral?
- the problem is the problem!



"Well, is it or isn't it?"

“Casting and recasting the problem is one of the most important functions a policy analyst performs. Problems do not exist as objectively defined entities out there ‘waiting to be solved’. Rather, a single set of conditions can yield any number of problems depending, among other things, on the reference frame of interested parties.”

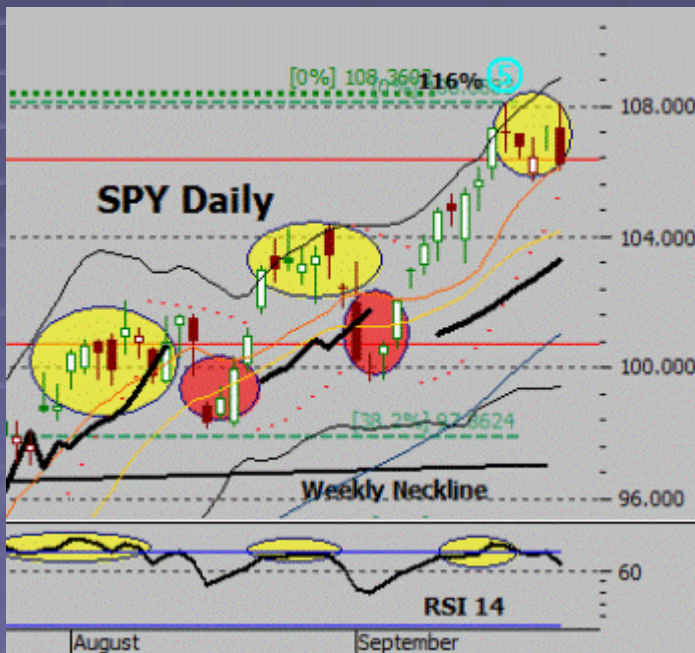
– Iris Geva-May, *An Operational Approach to Policy Analysis* (1997)

The analyst

Information

Facts

Numbers



"Well, is it or isn't it?"

- professional
- technically competent
- politically neutral
- evidence-based means to achieve government ends?
- value neutral?
- the problem is the problem!
- short-term responsiveness vs. long-term responsibility

The advisor

- ‘speaking truth to power’
- free and frank ...
- while ‘faithfully serving the government of the day’
- so what does ‘success’ look like ...



Is the advisor successful when:

- agreed policy 'outputs' are delivered within agreed timeframes?
- decision makers have been persuaded to adopt the advisor's recommendations?
- decision makers are helped to understand the complexities and dimensions of a policy choice?
- a policy is adopted that has broad public support?
- a policy is endorsed by key stakeholders or academic experts (with or without public support)?
- policy is consistent with the nature, aims and purposes of public services and the values inherent in these?
- policy once implemented can be demonstrated to have improved outcomes for citizens?

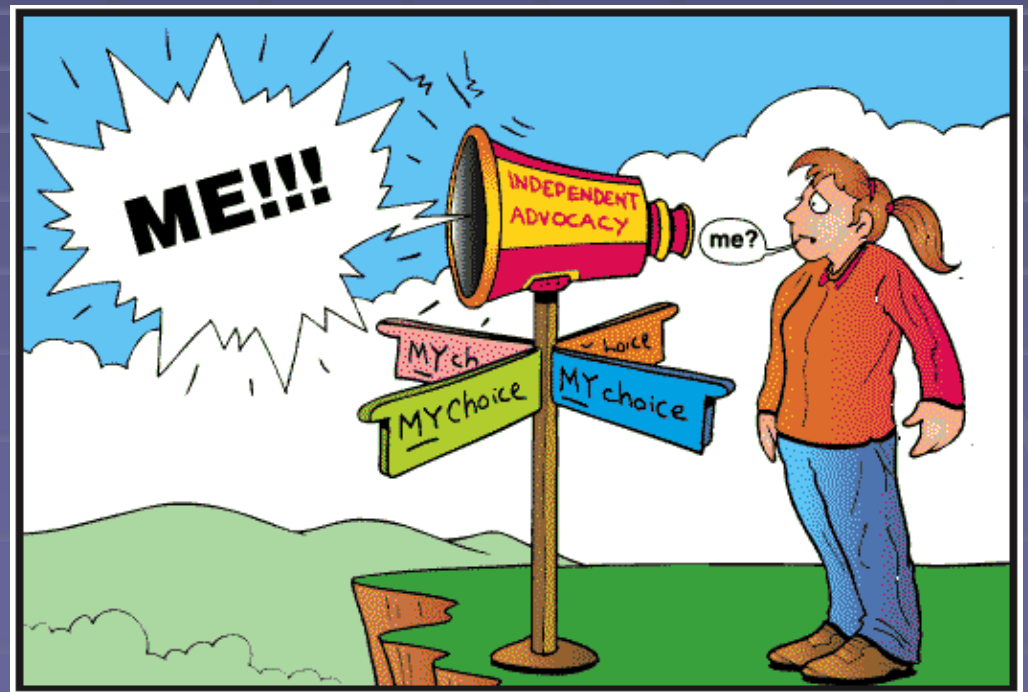
The advisor

- ‘speaking truth to power’
- free and frank ...
- while ‘faithfully serving the government of the day’
- so what does ‘success’ look like ...
- and who is the ‘client’?

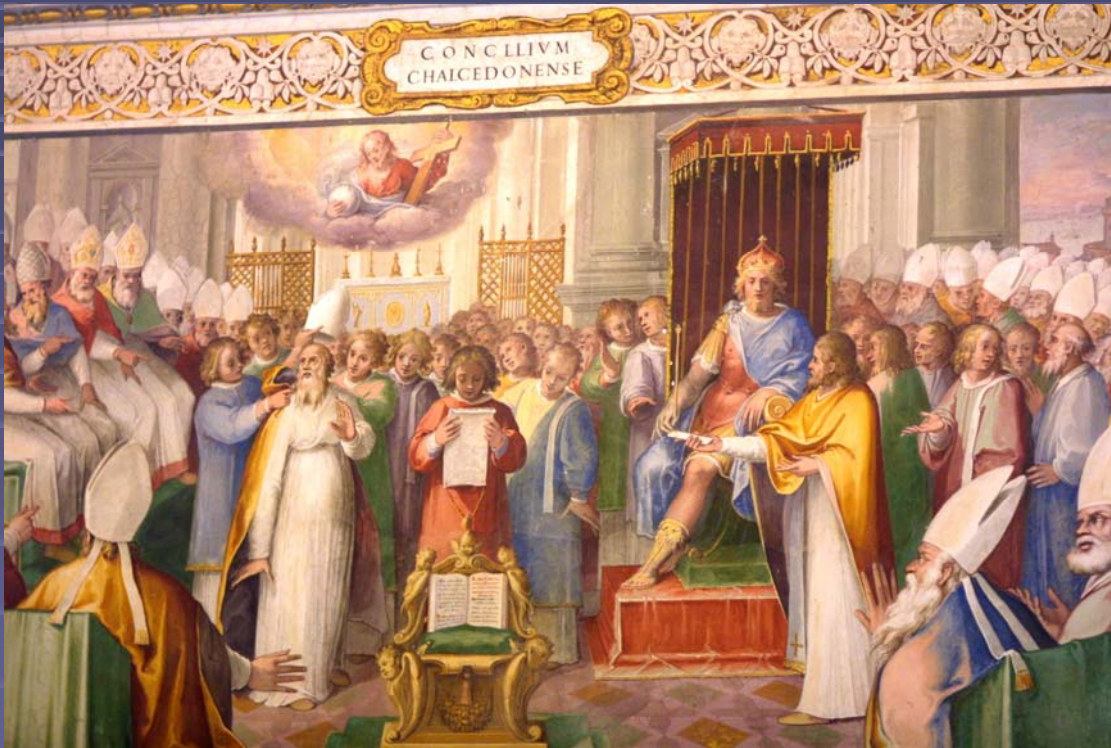


The advocate

- ‘imbued with the spirit of service to the community’
- wanting to ‘make a difference’
- ends as well as means?
- but whose ‘common good’?
- the perils of partisan advocacy



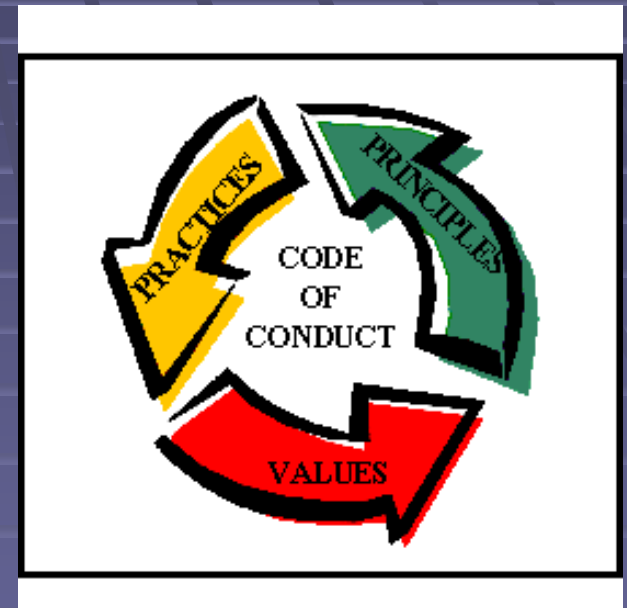
A Chalcedonian challenge



- to distinguish, without separation or division
- ... and to do so within inevitably imperfect democratic institutions and processes

Public sector ethics

- legislation and convention
- codes of ethics / conduct
 - aspirational
 - disciplinary
- statements of values
 - goal values
 - conduct values
- necessary, but not sufficient



‘Moral competence in public life’

(adapted from Kenneth Winston)

- **civility:**
the capacity to engage in reasoned, reflective judgment that makes itself accountable to a diverse public
- **fidelity to the public good:**
skill and responsibility in dealing with complexity and change along the horizontal continuum of time, cf. being merely responsive to the demands of the present moment and to vertical accountabilities
- **respect for citizens as responsible agents:**
active respect for the ‘agency’ and not only the ‘well-being’ aspects of persons; facilitates intelligent and effective citizen participation in self-government
- **prudence:**
the exercise of practical and not only technical reason; sound judgment on ‘doing the right thing’ in concrete situations.

Moral leadership

- recruitment and induction to a professional public service
- training, development and organisation of teams and work processes
- caught > taught
- moral leadership – beyond doing no wrong ...
... to doing the right thing
- but are current incentives and accountabilities adequate to promote moral competence in public life?

Correspondence

Dr David Bromell

Institute of Policy Studies, Victoria University of Wellington

PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

david.bromell@vuw.ac.nz

Ministry of Social Development

PO Box 1556, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

david.bromell001@msd.govt.nz