Book Review:
Donald Kettl, Little Bites of Big Data for Public Policy

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In his book *Little Bites of Big Data for Public Policy*, Donald Kettl (2018) asks a critical question: Can policymakers and analysts work together to develop and implement better public policies for the sake of the people? In other words, can they coproduce better policy outcomes? Albeit an old question, but Kettl argues that big data has augmented its importance.

One significant barrier between policymakers and analysts is the information asymmetry, which arises between the two parties because: (1) scholars do not provide the necessary information; (2) decision makers are unable to understand the scholarly information; and (3) they are unwilling to use the scholarly information in any case. To address these issues, Kettl proposes that we, as policy analysts, can use big data analysis to tell the right stories and sell them to decision makers. Doing so can reduce the degree of information asymmetry and thus, improve the coproduction of better policy outcomes.

In Chapter One, Kettl discusses the reasons why the communication between scholars and decision makers is not as effective as it should be, and. He argues that the primary reason is the mismatch in the supply of and demand for information. Scholars produce information mainly for publication in scientific journals and monographs. Therefore, the supply of information relevant to policy analysis fails to meet the demand from decision makers. Decision makers want information that can be used in the real world to improve policy outcomes immediately.

In Chapter Two, Kettl argues that, "If we want to do better, we need to know better" (p.9). Yet how can we know better? We need to begin by asking the right questions and improving our answers. To this end, Kettl proposes five fundamental questions (p.9): (1) Hindsight: What does the past teach us about the future? (2) Foresight: How can we make good decisions to produce the best results? (3) Results: What have we accomplished and how can we do better? (4) Risk: What challenges do we face that could undermine what we want to do? (5) Resilience: How can we bounce back when, inevitably, bad things happen? Kettl then argues that if the proper pieces of evidence are assembled and presented, we can answer the above questions in a better way. Then, we can learn better and thus, help us to do better. Kettl believes that, "We can do better by knowing better–by improving the connection between analysts and decision makers" (p. vii) through enhancing the communication of information based on big data analysis.

Big data can help prepare evidence. However, there is still a long way to go from data to evidence. In Chapters Three and Four, Kettle discusses the way we can tell and sell the story based on better evidence. To tell the story well means that both decision makers and the public will accept it. Of course, as Kettl states, "data never speak for themselves" (p.29). Thus, we need to filter and use statistical tools to visualize the data. For example, we can use charts and maps to help tell make thedata tell a powerful stories underlying datay.

However, the remaining question is how data can enhance democracy–the performance and accountability of the government. In Chapter Four, Kettl addresses this question by suggesting that we should sell the story not only to the decision makers, but also to the general public.

In Chapter Five, Kettl concludes that we must speak above the noise. It is not only about analyzing, filtering, and visualizing data but is also related to the ways to tell and sell the stories based on the data analysis. Noise is inevitable and can distort information and thus compromise effective communication between decision makers and the scholarly community. Therefore, Kettl's suggestion to speak above the noise is relevant and practically important.

There are several issues I believe Kettl could have elaborated on more in this book.

First, Kettl does not clarify the difference between "big data" and traditional data, and why this difference matters in the process of coproducing better policy outcomes. Kettl discusses many visualization techniques, such as charts and maps that were used widely even before the internet was introduced. I think it would have been more informative had Kettl introduced some of the new analytical tools (e.g., machine learning) that can shrink the gap between bigger data and better answers and show more examples of ways to use big data analytical tools to get the story, tell the story, and sell the story.

Secondly, similar to decision makers' inability or unwillingness to understand scholarly research findings, scholars usually are not very good at telling and selling their findings because of their own inability and unwillingness. Not all scholars, even those in the public policy analysis and public administration fields, are motivated to focus on the practical implications of their studies. Coproducing better policy outcomes requires two-way communication. Kettl's argument focuses on increasing scholarly efforts to tell and sell the story without specifying ways to motivate scholars to do so. Scholars can master big data analytical skills through proper training. However, if they are unwilling to communicate the practical implications of their research to the decision makers, it is essential to provide incentive schemes to encourage them to do so. In addition, rather than motivating scholars themselves to tell and sell the stories, why not leave that job to think tank policy analysts and professional media experts? Nevertheless, Kettl does not discuss the fact that the division of labor in the knowledge business could be a potential solution.

Kettl is hopeful about using big data analysis to speak above the noise. However, just as the book admits, more data also could result in a nation divided even more deeply. The cCurrent American public opinion on a series of issues, such as Affirmative Action, the Black and the BlueCriminal Justice, and Climate Change, are obvious evidence of this division, and it is unclear whether bigger data can help unify the divided nation.

To Kettl, it seems obvious that "the bigger the data, the better the policies," because superior evidence enables enlightened policy making. However, big data do not guarantee that we know betterimproved actions. There are different types of individuals who have different information preferences. For those who prefer small data, big data are unlikely to change the way they acquire information and motivate them to know better (Li, 2017). Thus, we need more studies to understand the heterogeneous effects of big data on individuals with various information preferences. However, future studies do not necessarily have to use big data analysis. For instance, experiments can also provide insights into ways to nudge both decision makers and scholars to coproduce better policy outcomes (Li & Van Ryzin, 2017).

In sum, Kettl's Little Bites of Big Data for Public Policy provides a timely and insightful take on the big data analysis for public policy. The book can be a useful resource for those looking for coproducing better policy outcomes through data analysis and it could also be a helpful book for students who are interested in public policy and administration.

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