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**Broader Outcomes in Procurement Policy – A Case of New Zealand pragmatism**

**Structured Abstract**

**Purpose**: The purpose of this paper is to investigate how the underpinning ideas of public procurement allowed for Broader Outcomes - a more strategic form of public procurement - to emerge. The paper contributes to the literature on public procurement by empirically addressing the evolution of procurement as a government policy lever in New Zealand so as to demonstrate how policy pragmatism can ensure a shift without a complete overhaul of a complex system.

**Approach**: The paper has utilised a single country case study in order to examine a recent development in procurement policy. The objectives of the paper are achieved by adopting a unique conceptual framework connecting ideas, sensemaking and bricolage.

**Findings**: The paper provides empirical and conceptual insights about how bricolage, or policy pragmatism, aids in dealing with the constraints of ideational legacies. It demonstrates a particular form of targeting in procurement, common in public administration but not well understood in the procurement field.

**Research Limitations**: Single country case studies lack scientific generalizability. However, they add to the canon of knowledge that is lacking in the field of public procurement in this case. They also provide a stronger starting point for further research especially with respect to comparative studies.

**Practical implications**: The paper provides an excellent example of the development of procurement policy that is useful for procurement officials from other countries undergoing change or looking to update or create procurement policies. It shows a high-level process of implementation for government priority outcomes from a country well known for its quality of public management and governance.

**Social implications**: New Zealand has significant equity issues especially as related to its indigenous population. Procurement is being used increasingly as a lever to improve equity. This article includes information about New Zealand's uptake of social procurement.

**Originality**: This paper fulfils a need for greater understanding of how policy is 'put together' and the dynamics at major points of change or the implications of policy changes. This case study of procurement policy in New Zealand is original and we are aware of no other similar work emanating from New Zealand in the academic journals.

**Introduction**

Procurement is under the spotlight like never before. In the past year there has been more attention to procurement, supply chain and logistics, than possibly anytime outside of war. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role that a procurement system has in delivering urgently needed goods and services. Emerging examples of unethical behaviour related to the procurement of personal protective equipment demonstrate the susceptibility of a procurement system to political whim and the manipulation of the contracting procedures[(Bradley *et al.*, 2020; Sanchez-Graells, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/4nmC+GEzQ). Undertaking research that focuses on procurement, its successes and failures, is more critical than ever.

There is little academic research on procurement in New Zealand, despite being well known for high-quality procurement processes and unique policy approaches. New Zealand’s procurement policy is derived from a collection of expectations, principles, rules, regulation, procedure and best practice guidelines, sitting under an umbrella of trade agreements and domestic law. It was given excellent scores on the Oxford University’s Blavatnik School of Government International Civil Service Index for procurement effectiveness[(Blavatnik School of Government and the Institute for Government, 2019)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/cSrs) though challenges remain with transparency.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment(MBIE) houses the New Zealand Government Procurement and Property group(NZGPP), a centralized organisation to lead and oversee procurement activity across government. The 4th edition of the Government Procurement Rules came into effect on 1 October 2019 and *for the first time is explicit in assigning a wider role for procurement*. Procurement will be used to achieve ‘Broader Outcomes’, this means engaging the procurement function to enhance public value where possible. Put differently, a demonstrable balance must be struck between achieving efficiency and enhancing value and engaging organizational purchasing to pursue other objectives other than ensuring operations occur in the most cost-effective way. The New Zealand Government has laid out what these objectives will be, in a targeted approach, that aligns with wider Government policy and strategies.

We contend that procurement policy in NZ demonstrates ‘bricolage’ or policy pragmatism and the decisions that have been made around ‘priority outcomes’ fit the wider NZ political direction. Levers are being ‘pulled’ simultaneously, in an environment of complex external and internal drivers. As a single country case study, New Zealand is an important example of a system undergoing fundamental shifts, but without a complete overhaul of the policy arrangements.

The aim of this article is to investigate how the underpinning ideas of public procurement allowed for Broader Outcomes - a more strategic form of public procurement - to emerge.

The key research question is how we explain the embedding and uptake of a new policy direction in public procurement in New Zealand. This new policy direction includes an explicit pursuit of ‘public value’ and a clear trajectory towards greater use of buying lever for social and other economic outcomes. Theoretically, this research is grounded in the work of public policy scholars on ‘ideas’ and the ‘ideational paradigm’[(Béland, 2016; Carstensen, 2011)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/hu7h+tTed) and engages the concept of ‘bricolage’ to explore the implementation of the early stages of the new policy direction.

Undoubtedly, the field of public procurement research is growing[(Knight *et al.*, 2003, 2012; Wynstra, 2010;](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/kMSs) [Lange *et al.*, 2014; Lember *et al.*, 2014; McCue et al., 2018)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/xLIy+MgX5+RP6n+1FZo+VdoR), but from a policy point of view we still do not have a good understanding of how procurement policy is ‘put together’, the dynamics at major points of change or the implications of policy changes. This research is motivated by ‘unknowns’ - what led to a policy idea of ‘Broader Outcomes’? How has New Zealand arrived at what many might call, ‘Strategic Procurement’?

Thus, our academic contribution has three aspects. First, the specific case of New Zealand procurement is not well represented in academic journals. The New Zealand approach is by-and-large a successful example of procurement policy and practice and provides an important example adding to the global literature. Second, there are few studies of procurement policy in action; by this we mean an evolving model in real time responding to both internal and external forces. Third, our article extends the use of the concept of bricolage by applying it to a specific public policy area that has attention from various disciplines but rarely is brought together in an interdisciplinary conceptual approach.

By way of organization, the article outlines literature that presents the key ‘ideas’ related to procurement policy and then develops a conceptual framework for the analysis using sensemaking and bricolage. In methodology, justification for the case study approach is presented. We then look at actions New Zealand has taken that demonstrate alignment with the ‘ideas’ and evolution through pragmatic policy making. Bricolage is then re-visited as an analytic tool for understanding the nature of New Zealand procurement policy and then we conclude with comments about New Zealand and procurement generally going forward.

**Literature Review**

The aim of this literature review is to identify critical ideas embedded in key strands of the literature related to procurement policy development in New Zealand. We are not aiming to cover the entire field of public procurement. Our literature is organized into four categories. First, we provide a condensed synthesis of procurement policy that relates to the evolution of the underpinning ideas of public procurement. Second, we look at the emergence of ‘principles’ in trade that have become fundamental to public procurement in New Zealand. Third, we briefly explore elements of the literature on ‘green’ and ‘sustainable’ procurement and finally we grapple with the overlapping elements of social procurement and the move to align public procurement and social enterprise.

**Evolving procurement policy**

Procurement policy is the result of values and objectives being made explicit and asserted through norms, guidelines, regulations and law. Until the 1990s, procurement was a fundamental part of ‘industrial policy’[( Geroski, 1990; Dalpé, 1994)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/jKzg+s37G) that involved directed procurement for the purposes of regional development and manufacturing, often associated with defence and military technological development and shifting to procurement for, in and of innovation in industry settings[(Edquist and Hommen, 1999, 2000; Aschhoff and Sofka, 2009; Uyarra and Flanagan, 2010; Georghiou *et al.*, 2014)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/1X4g+CuOU+Hiko+DYA8+oe7T). Procurement has featured in political economy analyses; where decisions on spending through procurement become a struggle between political and social priorities[(McCrudden, 2004; McMurtry, 2014)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/iiz9+2DC9)

Reflecting the growing ubiquitousness of neoliberalism, the efficiency objective became the foundation of procurement in western-style democracies with the alignment of public management and marketisation emerging as New Public Management[(Hood, 1991; Dunleavy and Hood, 1991; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Boston, 1996)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/wIhD+pKUI+7uuI). A good example is the Evaluation of the Local Government Procurement Agenda project in England in the late 2000’s, one project of many driven by the Blair-era focus on driving efficiency through business principles applied in a public sector context([Allen and Walker, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 2009)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/IOKI+dhyX). While a shift towards ‘best value’ and commissioning for outcomes had begun, procurement policy remained mechanistic due to the risk averseness of public officials when it came to experimenting with different approaches[(McKevitt and Davis, 2015)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/u92O). There was, however, a growing recognition of the value of procurement as a way to drive ‘innovation’ and to some extent industrial policy evolved into ‘innovation policy’[(Edler and Yeow, 2016; Uyarra *et al.*, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/jQsC+PNwP) in Europe with reverberations elsewhere. Overall, procurement research has largely emanated from the North American and European regions[(Flynn and Davis, 2014; Lange *et al.*, 2014)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/51Um+MgX5) with interest growing in Asia and Australasia especially as related to sustainability[(Ho *et al.*, 2010; Jones, 2011)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/YGf7+iDuZ)

Procurement as a policy tool itself or lever[(Kattel et al., 2010; Grandia and Meehan, 2017; Obwegeser and Müller, 2018)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/g4Yr+gCHr+pAq5) has its provenance in the policy instrument literature[(Salamon and Elliott, 2002; Hood, 2007))](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/ONEu+JOD1) and legal and regulatory studies[(Laffont and Tirole, 1993; Arrowsmith, 2010)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/Laor+lFIo). Despite the presence of the state as an active player in the markets being highly controversial according to McCrudden[(2007)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/QdBS/?noauthor=1), there have been different waves of interest in using public sector purchasing power to variously promote prosperity and jobs, using supply chains to support community benefits, support regions and economic development, pursue environmental sustainability, increase public sector efficiency, and promote overseas development[(Erridge and Greer, 2002; Knight *et al.*, 2012; Wontner *et al.*, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/1FZo+X2Nf+X94X). Governments vary as to their ‘active’ use of the procurement instrument; membership in the WTO and other trade agreements have shaped the ways in which nations implement their procurement policies[(Woolcock, 2013)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/QI9L).

Comparative work has emerged such as that of the International Research Study of Public Procurement[(Brammer and Walker, 2011; Knight *et al.*, 2012; Walker *et al.*, 2012; Harland *et al.*, 2019; Lynch *et al.*, 2019](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/1FZo+GzP9+tpOL+ecrR+ZnyF)) and work undertaken to understand the role of procurement in aid[(Wild and Zhou, 2011; La Chimia and Trepte, 2019; Moshtari *et al.*, 2021;)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/FMPN+QJDh+1fit) as well as the descriptive and statistical information available from the OECD series[(“Government at a Glance”, 2019)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/HC0u). Yet, some researchers conclude that there is still no hard evidence for cross-country learning, and that if it does exist, learning is only implicit, at least as it relates to cross-country learning on public procurement on sustainability and innovation[(Nijboer *et al.*, 2017)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/I9ll) Undoubtedly some level of policy transfer is occurring; the EU has operated under joint rules and regulations and is watched carefully by other countries; Australia and New Zealand follow one another closely as do other regions due in no small part to close trading relations[(Thurbon, 2015)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/3CjJ).

This brief look at the public procurement literature demonstrates a shifting policy terrain, where procurement is a flexible and yet contested instrument used for a multiplicity of objectives.

**Trade and procurement**

This short section on trade and procurement in relation to New Zealand establishes the importance of principles-based procurement as a fundamental idea in policy making with respect to public procurement. While the topic of trade as it relates to procurement is a substantial theme in and of itself, the purpose of identifying it here is to highlight trends that have shaped the institutional policy space as it relates to procurement policy in New Zealand [(McAfee *et al.*, 1989; Woolcock, 2013)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/yDew+QI9L). From 1984 forward, nearly every aspect of the New Zealand economy was deregulated[(Kelsey, 1995)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/YGnw). As a country dependent on trade, there is a critical relationship between the evolution of procurement policy and New Zealand’s role and involvement in a series of trade agreements dating from the 1980’s. Each decade has seen increased involvement in international trade agreements from the NZ-Australia Closer Economic Relations (CER) in 1983 to more recently the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)[(Cheong and Tongzon, 2013; Townsend *et al.*, 2016)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/9Q4F+Igc9).

Trade shapes the way in which a country economically interacts with the rest of the world and with growing trade comes the need to equalise relations between trading partners. Procurement plays a part here, setting boundaries and rules about how a country designs in effective competition and at what level. New Zealand’s membership in a growing number of trade agreements, coupled with the domestic policy framework, was fundamental to how procurement would be designed and implemented from the 1990s onwards. While not yet embedded in the WTO-AGP or the myriad of trade agreements now in existence, New Zealand was an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) member from 1999, and participated in the development of, and endorsed the APEC Non-Binding Principles on Government Procurement[(Schapper *et al.*, 2006](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/3NpR); [Kacandolli-Gjonbalaj and Shiroka-Pula, 2018)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/f3zX).

The non-binding principles are important because APEC members were free to implement the principles in a manner that was *most appropriate* for their countries. The principles were very general though they contained the fundamental elements that would be found in nearly all trade agreements that included procurement, in the ensuing years. The principles were: value for money; open and effective competition, accountability and due process; fair dealing and non-discrimination.

The Non-Binding Principles include information on the implementation of the principles that while not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive, could aid policy designers in how to reflect these elements in their procurement implementation. Even at this time, the Value for Money principle describes Value for Money as “the benefit gained by means of identifying the product or service that provides the most advantage to stakeholders, when considered over the entire procurement cycle from identification of need to disposal of an asset. These advantages include price and cost but also relate to factors beyond these.”[(Review of the APEC Non-Binding Principles (NBPs) on Government Procurement, 2006)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/xHQ5). Under the non-discrimination principle, there is a provision that indirectly gives permission to include environmental outcomes or outcomes necessary to protect human, animal or plant life. The principles provided the policy ‘room’ to pursue sustainability, for example, but the New Zealand Government was not driving policy through procurement other than with light-touch guidance. Principle based procurement means that while NZ was embedded in a ‘rules-based’ trade regime, policy *could* include factors beyond price. One of these factors could be consideration for green or sustainable procurement.

**Green and sustainable procurement**

The literature connecting public procurement and sustainability including ‘green procurement’ and that related to climate change is expanding rapidly[(Brammer and Walker, 2011; Walker *et al.*, 2012; Correia *et al.*, 2013; [Igarashi *et al.*, 2017;](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/oyXQ+TJ2m+qDBM+Ruty+ecrR+ZnyF) Cheng *et al.*, 2018;](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/oyXQ+TJ2m+qDBM+Ruty+ecrR+ZnyF)  [Wang *et al.*, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/oyXQ+TJ2m+qDBM+Ruty+ecrR+ZnyF). Governments have had green procurement policies (GPP) and practices for some time and the literature reflects a shift from a purely technical exercise in line with gaining efficiency through sustainable practices to a wider recognition of the potential of sustainable procurement to meet a number of public objectives[(Smith *et al.*, 2016)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/11PO). McCadney[(1999)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/DzIv/?noauthor=1) reviewed early success in the United States with using government’s buying powers to create markets and found that the use of recycled paper products increased substantially with an Executive Order to implement green purchasing, noting the requirement for a high degree of public-private cooperation.

The procurement practices and policies of five Asian countries and Hong Kong were considered in research that showed government involvement in green procurement is found to directly determine its overall effectiveness, and having current information enhances delivery and performance[(Ho *et al.*, 2010)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/YGf7). Testa et al also found in Italy that intensifying information and raising awareness on Green Public Procurement(GPP) techniques strongly supports the development of public green tenders, along with the involvement of small public authorities with European, national and local supporting initiatives[(Testa, Annunziata *et al.*, 2016)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/L3lX).

In a separate study, limited use of green criteria were actually found in tenders, usually only appearing as technical specifications and award criteria, as opposed to a wider approach to developing an actual green approach in the building and construction sector[(Testa, Grappio *et al.*, 2016)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/dUda). Cheng et al.(2018) note, “GPP discussion has mostly focused so far on the specific impacts of GPP implementation, while the discussion on GPP as compared to other environmental policy tools, in terms of efficiency and innovation, is still lagging behind”(p.770). Where technical green procurement has become more strategic is in studies associated with the circular economy, envisioning an integrated process where procurers and suppliers work in a collaborative way to reduce waste and develop more sustainable business models[(Witjes and Lozano, 2016)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/x2eO). Norway has gone further, integrating green public procurement as a national strategy for sustainable development, with wide ranging legislation and initiatives, guidelines and actions plans how to integrate environmental and social responsibility in public procurement [(Fet *et al.*, 2011)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/8HqY). The literature demonstrates that while GPP as a policy tool may be lagging, there is a growth in understanding of how public procurement can be a lever for sustainability [(Amann *et al.*, 2014; Rizzi *et al.*, 2014)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/xWjM+rqC4).

**Social procurement**

Using public procurement to pursue outcomes in the social sphere is not new - McCrudden [(2007](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/QdBS/?noauthor=1); 2004) wrote about buying ‘social justice’ and the numerous linkages to the public interest through the ‘power of the purse’. However, *how* this is done is gaining increasing attention as governments grapple with the challenges of supporting domestic objectives while remaining active and principled trade partners. One of these routes is through social procurement - an all-encompassing term defined as “the acquiring of a range of goods and services by governments from private and non-profit firms, with the aim of creating social value”[(Barraket and Weissman, 2009, p. 265)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/C4K4/?locator=265). Social procurement may be undertaken through social enterprise, an umbrella term for a variety of organisations that use commercial methods, and business models, to achieve social and/or environmental outcomes. While conceptions and practices vary, the unifying principle of ‘social enterprise’ is the primacy of intent to create social impact, with commercial practices being used as the means to serve and achieve this purpose[(Allen *et al.*, n.d.)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/gSJI) Barraket[(2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/39Hl/?noauthor=1) notes that research is demonstrating the potential for social enterprises to utilise public funds effectively through procurement, uncovering innovative practices not seen through traditional contracting. For example, ‘Community Benefits’ - “socioeconomic criteria that are inserted in supply contracts”[(Preuss, 2009, p. 217)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/jTAT/?locator=217) are one such practice that link procurement objectives with social outcomes[(Lynch *et al.*, 2019; Wontner *et al.*, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/X2Nf+tpOL).

Quite recently we see the emergence of more explicit ‘social procurement policy’ - essentially social policy aimed at a specific group or groups using purchasing power. These are often called ‘set-asides’. Arrowsmith[(2010)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/Laor/?noauthor=1) defines set-asides as contracts reserved solely for certain groups and implemented through award criteria (giving credit to tenderers for the environmental or social benefits of their tenders)[(Sarter *et al.*, 2014)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/JWzH) or as a policy direction in the form of percentages of contracts ‘set-aside’ or held and handled separately in different processes.

The Australian Commonwealth designed an Indigenous social procurement policy involving set-asides, the Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy (CIPP) in 2015. This took the form of mandatory set-asides or a proportion of contracts designated for indigenous businesses. This approach was initially praised as presenting new possibilities for domestic contracts being awarded to indigenous businesses, increasing commercial opportunities and employment possibilities for indigenous people[(Denny-Smith and Loosemore, 2017)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/eC6S). The bluntness of this instrument and its cultural insensitivity has since come under criticism [(Denny-Smith *et al.*, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/rVZT). The New Zealand government was under significant pressure to do similar, having resisted pressure to carve out contracts for any particular group for many years.

Our literature review has shown the importance of key ‘ideas’ present in principles-based trade and procurement, the pursuit of green and sustainable procurement and the move to a greater use of social procurement in its many facets.

**A Conceptual Framework**

This article traces the role of ‘ideas’ in the evolution of public procurement policy in New Zealand. In this section we lay the conceptual groundwork to show how ideas in public procurement have driven change. We also explain the concepts of sensemaking and bricolage; these form the way in policy is understood and then acted upon to implement the ideas. The New Zealand policy of ‘Broader Outcomes’ has emerged from a number of ideas; other courses of action and objectives that have gone through a sense-making process and become integral to the procurement approach. Broader Outcomes resulted as a pragmatic point of ‘landing’.

The role of ideas in public policy has risen in importance as growing numbers of scholars have returned to the analysis of ideas[(Béland, 2016)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/hu7h). Drawing on the work of Kingdon[(2010)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/0b09/?noauthor=1), Beland[(2016)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/hu7h/?noauthor=1) noted that policy evolution and change is fundamentally impacted by ideas and how they take hold. The ideational paradigm of change in new institutional theory moves away from a focus on structures alone and looks at the interplay of ideas with action, how ideas emerge from both politics and organizations, and the interplay of these in policies, programs and philosophies or points of view about the world[(Schmidt, 2008)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/xK9d). Carstensen[(2011)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/tTed/?noauthor=1) suggests that actors must work actively and creatively with ideas and the institutions they use. In his view, structures do not determine their response to new circumstances, nor do they create policy ‘chains’ that might prevent change. Expediency is important, as is pragmatism to put ideas together that may not be logically compatible but rather answer political and cultural logics.

What then happens with ideas - they do not exist as a ‘thing’ in and of themselves. They are discussed, molded, embedded, acted upon, and grappled with. This is where sensemaking emerges. From Weick (1995) sensemaking involves making meaning, structuring the unknown, “highlights the action, activity and creating that lays down the traces that are interpreted and then reinterpreted”(p.13). The sensemaking literature is not unique in examining the construction of meanings or understanding, but departs from other interpretative approaches through its pragmatist stance(Farjoun, Ansell, & Boin, 2015) which emphasizes the social and enacted nature of cognitive processes(Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is essentially something actors do as they engage in practice. Building on Weick’s original synthesis of various sociological and social psychological theories(Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), the established literature conceptualizes sensemaking as an ongoing, situated process that involves creation of coherent understandings through interlinked observation(‘extraction of cues’), interpretation and action(‘enactment’). Sensemaking, through a process of learning and adaptation, will equip an organization to cope with a crisis by maintaining a coherence of identity and the capacity to act (Weick, 1993).

‘Bricolage’ takes sensemaking a step further and is a *mechanism of implementation for an idea*. “Agency often takes the form of bricolage, where bits and pieces of the existing ideational and institutional legacy are put together in new forms leading to transformation” (Carstensen 2011, p. 147). In order to enact or impose order, actors, through institutions, need some form of agency - a way to engage in making change. A discursive process takes place, where actors try to reconcile policy means and ends resulting in ideational and knowledge construction (Wider and Howlett, 2014).

Bricolage describes a way in which actors relate to their environments; organization studies has used it for some time and it has more recently appeared in public policy and political science (Duymedjian and Ruling, 2010; [Allain and Madariaga, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/WIZH). Bricolage is often related to organizational resilience where organizations take the form of ‘improvising systems’(Weick, 1998) and actors in these environments are characterized as bricoleurs[(Duymedjian and Rüling, 2010)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/swqR). Bricolage is also a way of ordering the world “against a backdrop of material and social constraint”(Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1990, p. 291). Bricolage works in the practical where new ideas and institutions must be grafted onto existing ideas and institutions, with resulting evolutionary change[(Carstensen, 2015)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/G8Y0). The existing repertoire is expanded that may include new ideas, new institutions and new modes of implementation. Bricolage is thus not a transformational mechanism producing completely new policies, nor is it an adaptive or path-dependent mechanism conducive to policy continuity - it is evolutionary in the sense that it changes certain elements while keeping others in place. New and old actors are attracted to the possibility of recombined ideas and policy orientations, that may also make new coalitions of relevant actors possible[(Allain and Madariaga, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/WIZH).

We operationalise bricolage for our analysis by drawing on management and service innovation research[(Baker and Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012; Linna, 2013)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/EtI9+BK8e+thgh). Two critical elements from [(Witell *et al.*, 2017)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/2Mzb), that of resource scarcity and improvisation provide a way in which to consider the evolution in New Zealand - resource scarcity is the policy room that is available for policy actors, and improvisation or making do is the recombination of policies and mechanisms of public management. Our conceptual framework simply depicts how ideas are then ‘made sense of’ through ongoing actions over time; followed by a form of policy bricolage - where pragmatic change takes place, not transformation but shifts in how ideas will be pursued through available mechanisms.

Ideas

Sensemaking

Bricolage

**Methodology**

The paper is motivated by the existence of gaps in both academic and practical policy knowledge about procurement, procurement in New Zealand and how this has evolved over time. The research task we have undertaken is to examine a recent development in procurement policy in New Zealand and answer the question as to how we explain the embedding and uptake of a new policy direction in public procurement in New Zealand. The new ‘Broader Outcomes’ guidance emerged in the New Zealand Procurement rules in late 2019, with a focus on ‘public value’ and a clear indication that procurement was to be used to pursue objectives beyond buying at least cost, for public value. We investigate how this new approach emerged and what led to the commitment to ‘public value’.

Among the vast range of types of case study(Blatter and Haverland 2012) this paper is a single country case study of evolving policy of a particular kind, namely the elements that constitute procurement policy. Pepinsky in discussing comparative politics (2019) noted that, ‘What makes single-country research an interesting challenge is the premise that the intensive study of a single country can yield general theoretical insights with comparative implications”(p.188). Barzelay considered that single case studies can yield several kinds of results, to be valued by all those interested in collective problem solving (1993). New Zealand is a case of intrinsic importance[(Lees, 2006)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/wPhC) and is a necessary and sufficient undertaking[(Flyvbjerg, 2006)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/ZS2f). We are working towards a level of knowledge cumulation that can lead to insights and comparative implications(Jensen and Rodgers, 2001).

This study uses secondary evidence drawn from policy documents, official publicly available papers such as Cabinet papers, other government documents such as those from the OECD, trade agreements, and draws on seminars and professional meetings the author attended in New Zealand since 2015. As this is interpretive policy analysis[(Yanow, 2007)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/0jCs), we undertake a meaning-making exercise within a specific context. The methodological value of narrative analysis with respect to public policy is well established[(Balfour and Mesaros, 1994; Feldman *et al.*, 2004; Feldman and Quick, 2009; Lejano and Leong, 2012; Feldman and Worline, 2016)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/BBTm+cVOY+HB0c+OceJ+7GOZ). While a single country case study limits generalizability of the findings, we contend that this study contributes to both global empirical knowledge of procurement and procurement policy and contributes to conceptual debates about ways to think about public procurement.

**New Zealand: Analysis**

Having established the ‘ideas’ of principles-based trade; ‘green’ and ‘sustainable procurement’, and ‘social procurement’ as building blocks of an evolving procurement policy in New Zealand, we explore how these ideas were emerging in policy and how sense-making took place.

First, New Zealand’s involvement in the negotiation of a series of trade agreements heavily shaped the approach to procurement in the years between 2006 and 2013 when the Government Rules of Sourcing emerged. Under the Rules in 2013, agencies were instructed to “Make balanced decisions – consider the possible social, environmental, economic effects and cultural outcomes that should be achieved”. This clearly signals that *government procurement could be used* to achieve outcomes beyond simply obtaining the goods and services needed. In addition to procurement procedures and disciplines (none of which make any specific reference to the strategic use of procurement to achieve broader outcomes), the Government Rules of Sourcing included “other” procurement related elements.

Aside from measures related to efficiency of procurement processes (for example, purchasing from all-of-government contracts and use of standardised documents) and governance measures (for example, approval of investment decisions), the policies that were to be implemented in procurement related to web standards, intellectual property rights, geospatial information and services, sourcing of timber and timber products, and protections for vulnerable workers. New Zealand’s Government’s Rules of Sourcing were ‘principles’ based and there was consideration given to a few particular areas of interest such as the New Zealand Timber and Wood Products Procurement Policy developed by the Ministry of Primary Industries but there was no appetite or policy level direction for set-asides. Non-discrimination at the trade agreement level and competition as a fundamental driver domestically meant that any form of social procurement was largely pursued through the application of strategic commissioning below threshold levels, which involves considering all the potential ways in which a service can be delivered and then working with partners to accomplish specific service-related goals. Policy activity was consistent such that procurers worked within the guidelines set out and did not attempt to stretch the rules in ways that would fundamentally raise any issues.

Local governments in New Zealand are not mandated to apply the Government Procurement Rules (encouraged not mandated) and so Councils were in a better position to expand the use of the procurement instrument and some pursued public and social value in a more direct way. Long before central government moved in the direction of social procurement, Auckland City Council’s Procurement Policy directed that, “all procurement will consider the potential to engage and enable Māori[indigenous population], deliver Māori customer-friendly services, make our size work for and with Māori and where appropriate we will work with Māori-focused organizations, central government programs or The Southern Initiative to facilitate outcomes” (Auckland Council 2013, p.3).

At central government level, trade agreements and the ongoing revisions to the procurement rules continued to leave the possibility open for procurement beyond lowest price - however in practice little had been done at a practical level to educate across the public sector about how procurement could be an enabler rather than an impediment to policy goals. There had been some activity vis-à-vis green public procurement, although not as much as the country’s ‘clean green’ reputation would have one believe[(Kaefer, 2014)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/SFlE).

The first wave of green procurement which essentially coincided with the sustainability movement of the 2000’s, brought attention to wider considerations within the procurement function. In New Zealand, the 2003 Govt3 programme (OECD, 2008) was aimed at helping government agencies improve the environmental sustainability of their activities and was an early foray into the view that sustainability includes environmental, social and economic elements. The aim was a carbon-neutral public service. The OECD ‘Eco-Innovation Policies in New Zealand’ details a reasonably ambitious programme and sustainability became more recognizable in policy direction[(OECD, 2008)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/kNLv). However, New Zealand was undergoing the world’s most direct application of ‘New Public Management’ and neo-liberalism was fundamentally embedded in the institutions, politics and processes of the country(for extensive coverage of this literature one could begin with Boston et al., 1996). From this point, New Zealand was unlikely, though able, to pursue varied objectives directly through procurement policy or the procurement function.

Despite the room for manoeuvre under the 2013 Rules, New Zealand was ‘purist’ in the sense of ensuring that the principles enshrined in the trade agreements, such as competition, fairness and non-discrimination flowed through to government procurement processes. This was somewhat different to other countries’ such as the UK. New Zealand did not have the package of EU rules based in legislation to deal with, but also did not have the raft of policies that tinkered with procurement approaches such as Compulsory Competitive Tendering, Best Value and Big Society as well as the 2012 Public Services (Social Value) Act. New Zealand committed to principles-based procurement, flowing from its Treaty commitments with no carve-outs for New Zealand suppliers or Indigenous groups. This was also in contrast to its largest trading partner, Australia, who through state-level public procurement policy programmes, had much more direct support for local suppliers and increasingly to Aboriginal groups.

Government procurement trade commitments are typically made on a reciprocal basis. New Zealand’s reliance on trade may have been a factor contributing to its “purist” approach. The initial foray into green procurement in the early 2000’s was overshadowed by the need for procurement to focus on cost savings and process efficiencies following the global financial crisis(GFC). Many countries responded to the global financial crisis with trade barriers and protectionist policies(Cernat and Madsen, 2011) but New Zealand maintained open, competitive government markets and used other policy tools(such as centralised purchasing of common use goods and services) to manage impacts of the GFC.

The readiness of the market to respond with environmentally sustainable goods and services or socioeconomic benefits also may have impacted the development of strategic procurement in New Zealand. While government focus was on ensuring that greater value would be achieved without unduly adding to cost or complexity, the Cabinet paper entitled “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Government Procurement Policy” also notes that “targeting avoids overloading any one industry…with too many requirements”. It goes on to note “…[we] want to ensure that additional requirements are manageable for government agencies and businesses alike.” (Cabinet Economic Development Committee, 2018). An example of market readiness to respond was recognised in the government’s approach to transitioning to a zero-emissions government fleet. While agencies are required to purchase low emissions vehicles, there was explicit acceptance at the time that “some vehicle sub-classes do not have a low emission alternative available”.

**Pragmatism in policy making**

In 2017 a confluence of events and trends emerged, leading New Zealand to take a more directed approach to government procurement. The world-wide concern with climate change was a clear and growing driver – the Paris Agreement coming into effect in 2016 had some effect in drawing attention at the policy level to new or renewed action to reduce waste, cut emissions and look at least rhetorically at the changes that would be required over time to contribute to the Paris objectives. In New Zealand, issues of well-being and social inclusion were seen at the top of the policy agenda, with a Labour-led Coalition government focusing on developing a Well-Being budget for its first term in power[(“The Wellbeing Budget 2019”, n.d.)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/Y4e8).

The Ardern-led government took a close look at the effectiveness of the existing government procurement:

“On 19 February 2018, Cabinet directed the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (the Ministry), Treasury and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) to report back to the Cabinet Economic Development Committee on whether existing procurement policies and processes are fit for purpose, particularly in supporting participation of New Zealand suppliers in government procurement” [(Government of New Zealand, Cabinet Economic Development Committee, 2018, p. 3)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/5g5I/?locator=3).

Reforming government procurement was an agreed Cabinet Priorities Committee initiative to help deliver responsible governance with a broader measure of success. In undertaking the review, officials considered the key objectives of government procurement policy were at that time to: strengthen accountability; enable agencies to obtain value for money; and facilitate the participation of New Zealand businesses in domestic and overseas government procurement markets. They noted that the policy framework promotes open competition where interested businesses can expect to be given full and fair opportunity to compete for government contracts on merit (not preferences). They also noted that the quality of procurement activity can depend on the procurement capability of the government agency and staff undertaking procurement activities and that data to show the level of participation in government procurement and contract awards to New Zealand business was limited and potentially incomplete.

This review concluded that existing policy was fit-for-purpose but that it could be enhanced to obtain more ‘benefit’. This was a key ‘sensemaking’ moment. It was accepted that New Zealand’s systems for public procurement worked and that trade-based principles of competition and non-discrimination remained fundamental to the framework, but more could be done within that framework.

Overall, New Zealand’s government procurement policy framework is effective. It treats businesses fairly, is open and transparent, and encourages good procurement practice. It promotes the use of simplified processes and documentation, early engagement with the supply market, and early notice of opportunities. It supports New Zealand’s exporters as tender responses are assessed on the basis of merit rather than country of origin. This enables New Zealand businesses to compete for government contracts in our trade partner countries on the same basis[(Government of New Zealand, Cabinet Economic Development Committee, 2018, p. 7)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/5g5I/?locator=7)

The report back also found that government contracts could be more explicitly leveraged, or enhanced to obtain more benefit, to support the Government’s economic strategy and broader outcomes, noting that governments internationally are increasingly leveraging public procurement to achieve social, economic and environmental benefits that go beyond the immediate aim of purchasing goods and services[(Government of New Zealand, Cabinet Economic Development Committee, 2018, p. 7)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/5g5I/?locator=7)

The *zeitgeist* of the times meant that change was coming. New Zealand officials had been working towards expanding the contributions of procurement to social and sustainable outcomes, including economic ones involving SMEs and indigenous businesses. The strategic use of procurement to achieve outcomes that go beyond the immediate aim of obtaining the goods and services needed has been described in different ways by different jurisdictions. For example, the United Nations Development Programme has used the term “sustainable procurement” and defined it as: “making sure that the products and services we buy are as sustainable as possible, with the lowest environmental impact and most positive social results” (UNDP, 2020). It has many other labels including secondary benefits, horizontal policies and social procurement[(Arrowsmith, 2010](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/Laor); [Barraket, 2015)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/Ix8K), but none of these titles were exactly right for procurement policy in New Zealand where procurement would be linked closely to the achievement of its own “outcomes”. Outcomes beyond lowest price had been undertaken before, for example the paper products under the government-wide office supplies contract are for the most part recycled. Attempts at green procurement were incremental movements in the right direction, but paper recycling was not a “game changer” per se that could have an impact on addressing some of New Zealand’s live issues. The government was interested in ensuring that procurement made a stronger contribution to economic development supporting a range of other policy outcomes - in other words, deriving greater value from its investment and expenditure on government procurement as a matter of routine. MBIE defined Broader Outcomes as: “the secondary benefits that are generated by the way a good, service or works is produced or delivered. These outcomes can be social, environmental, cultural or economic benefits, and will deliver long-term public value for New Zealand. Broader outcomes require you to consider not only the whole-of-life cost of the procurement, but also the costs and benefits to society, the environment and the economy”[(New Zealand Government Procurement, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2019](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/oc0A), p.33).

Once government agencies and other stakeholders realised that the government was not just open to delivering other policy outcomes through procurement but that it would be much more explicitly written into the guidelines, there were calls for procurement to deliver on a wide range of policy initiatives. However, the Government’s approach was to prioritise specific outcomes from specific procurements while at the same time allowing agencies sufficient flexibility to seek whatever outcomes they wanted from their procurement generally. Underpinning this approach was the premise that procurement cannot solve all problems at once and collective action by procuring entities is more likely to result in achieving the desired outcomes. Some examples included mandating that government buildings be made of wood, use of wool products by government, requiring payment of the ‘living wage’ in government contracts, enforcement of human rights in government supply chains, support for minority groups and elimination of the use of hydrofluorocarbons in government purchases.

**Target-based approach**

In order to manage the complexity, a priority-based system was implemented based on targets. The targeted approach would enhance the ability for government and its procuring organisations to develop strategies or systems for managing the difficulty of implementation. Containing the broad and varied possible outcomes and objectives to a set of four priority areas set against targeted contracts or sectors would also aid in accountability for results. A simple logic of decoupling of goals and actions, setting up targets, standardization of front-line behaviour, measuring achievement encompasses a well-known performance approach that also appeals to trust in numbers. Despite their association with ‘red tape’ hindering an organization there is an argument for targets, they actually help managers cope with complexity[(Van Dooren, 2017)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/gA6o).

Additional cost was a significant worry for procuring organizations who would be subject to the changes to the procurement rules. This is particularly where upfront cost accrues to the procuring agency and the benefits accrue to another agency or New Zealand more generally and may take considerable time to be fully realised. Expecting increased cost is the obvious and automatic reaction by procurers to requiring them to work for outcomes beyond lowest price, even if they already do it within their organizations. There is little research that can support or refute the claim that including social, green, or public value procurement will result in more costly procurement. What is counted and how it is counted is a perennial problem. New Zealand however is drawing attention to examples such as the City of Auckland’s The Southern Initiative project that employed eight Māori and Pasifica (indigenous groups) Trade Training graduates on a negotiated hourly wage of $20, while lesser skilled labourers contracted from labour pools cost approximately $28 per hour.

The high-level targeted approach to leveraging broader outcomes is as follows:

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| Priority Outcomes:  Increase New Zealand businesses’ access to government procurement: increasing the number of New Zealand businesses contracting directly to government and within the supply chain. This includes Māori businesses and Pasifika businesses  Increase the size and skill level of the domestic construction sector workforce: the government is leveraging procurement through construction to encourage businesses to increase the size and skills of their workforces  Improve conditions for workers and future-proof the ability of New Zealand businesses to trade: this priority protects workers from unfair and unsafe behaviour, and incentivises well-performing firms while ensuring they are not undercut by firms who have reduced costs through poor labour practices  Support the transition to a net zero emissions economy and assist the Government to meet its goal of significant reduction in waste by 2020 and beyond.  [(New Zealand Government Procurement, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2019)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/oc0A) |

To maximise the effects of these priorities government designates contracts or sectors where one or more of the priority outcomes must be implemented. For example, the All-of-Government motor vehicles contract is a designated contract for the priority: Support the transition to a net zero emissions economy. This means that agencies must take this priority into account when purchasing new vehicles(MBIE, 2019).

Designated contracts are connected to each priority outcome – agencies will have to target specific contract types for the four priority outcomes.

Table I here: Priority Outcomes and Designated Contracts - Based on MBIE, 2019 Government Procurement Rules 4th Edition.

Even as the new procurement rules were being published, there was significant activity behind the scenes as an election loomed and the climate change agenda was under pressure. Ardern’s Labour government won a majority in October of 2020 paving the way for increased use of the procurement lever as had been signaled pre-election. Covid-19 meant that the procurement function was extremely busy across government dealing with PPE issues, construction and infrastructure delays and workforce issues, market vulnerabilities, and ensuring that contracts were identified for risk and alteration if needed. Covid-19 recovery was part-in-parcel of the policy developments associated with indigenous business and clearly point out a deliberate plan to use government purchasing for economic outcomes related to equity.

“Māori enterprises are in line for greater opportunities to do business with government agencies under an initiative to spread the benefits of the economic recovery’...’we are looking for more ways to use this buying power to accelerate the economic recovery for Māori businesses” Māori Development Minister Willie Jackson[(“Procurement to promote jobs, Māori and Pasifika businesses and sustainability”, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/T1f7).

The indigenous Māori Party had re-entered Parliament with two seats and this quickly resulted in the translation of aspirational government policy as per the new government rules, to implementation in the forms of a new five percent target for public service contracts for Māori businesses. The troubled climate policy also moved forward with Government announcing that the public sector would be carbon neutral by 2025 and that government agencies would be required to purchase electric vehicles and reduce the size of their car fleets[(“Public sector to be carbon neutral by 2025”, n.d.)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/sCLb).

Broader Outcomes as Bricolage

Revisiting our frame for bricolage we consider the nature of the policy that has emerged and the improvisation and pragmatism underpinning the New Zealand environment. First, we discuss how the ideational and institutional legacies constrains but does not prevent policy change and how the New Zealand approach is able to adapt to the numerous pressures on it.

Ideas

Sensemaking

Bricolage

Principles underpinning trade: non-discrimination and competition; GPP and sustainability,social procurement

Making balanced decisions, remaining ‘purist’; pragmatism in face of market realities

Graft on ‘Broader Outcomes’ using priority outcomes and targets; retain option to change and expand

Existing ideational and institutional legacies, namely New Zealand’s critical relationships through trade agreements and the Government’s approach to public management have meant that the fundamental approach to procurement policy through policies and guidelines and agency flexibilities, as opposed to legislation and ‘sticks’ has not changed. The creation of ‘Broader Outcomes’ uses the *ideas* of horizontal policies and secondary benefits, aligns it with political ambitions associated with this particular Government, and grafts on an implementation approach using targets and specific directions. Flexible implementation, within the wider direction from central government, remains a key part of the approach building on the culture ‘as a resource’(Carstensen, 2010). Coherence and capacity to act are maintained and promoted by keeping the fundamentals of the Government Procurement Rules (3rd edition) in the 4th edition and integrating Broader Outcomes into the ways in which New Zealand officials are used to working, while leaving open the possibility for change with different outcomes and different methods of implementation.

Second, improvisation and ‘making do’ comes in the form of using specific targets in order to work towards the broad government ambitions. Using the tools at policy makers and managers disposal – in this case identifying particular contracts that need to contain new considerations – procurement officers will be able to adapt to new requirements(Weick, 1993) while remaining true to the principles-based approach. This pragmatic weaving of the levers associated with procurement is policy bricolage that maintains stability for the procurement function, but begins change that aligns with the Government’s objectives, and indeed change that will not happen without government involvement. Policy actors have responded to drivers including climate change as inherently destabilising with calls for divestment of polluters, calls for rapid reduction of emissions, and growing populism in many countries. Drawing on procurement levers has not been a part of the policy toolkit in New Zealand but now there is the political will, combined with these drivers, bringing attention to different possibilities. In attempting to answer the political and cultural logics arising from the changing circumstances(Carstensen, 2011) it now makes sense to adapt procurement and take what has been learned from other jurisdictions and apply it in a ‘Kiwi’ way. The fundamental ideas have shaped the sensemaking process and have actually allowed for, if not shaped the improvisation or bricolage process in the evolution of the procurement policy itself.

Making sense of these drivers and designing a resilient process – aligning the Government’s overarching plans, with a set of broader outcomes is how New Zealand public sector organizations are ordering the sometimes conflicting, and certainly complex, institutional and social requirements. Material and social constraint(Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1990) are always fundamental to policy maker’s environments and New Zealand as a small unique marketplace experiences its own particular form of constraint. The call from a wide range of public and social organizations to have procurement become a lever for all kinds of activity results in ongoing consultation and negotiation across a spectrum of interest. To get ‘buy-in’ from the private public and social enterprise sectors requires communication and openness, especially in the context of the needs of the Indigenous Māori peoples.

**Conclusion**

Pragmatism is often mentioned in association with New Zealand’s public policy and public management, sometimes to its advantage and sometimes to its detriment(Massey and Cameron, 1999; Scott, 2016). In the case of procurement policy this pragmatism that we have called policy bricolage has allowed for change, without a turbulent complete overhaul, that demands considerable resources in a complex policy area. The commitment to open trade is a critical characteristic of the marketplace and has made New Zealand into a modern and innovative society. New Zealand’s public management structure may also have contributed to the apparent lag in formalising a policy framework for the strategic use of government procurement to achieve other outcomes. Government agencies are funded to deliver agreed outputs and are autonomous in their operations, including procurement activities. They are incentivised to deliver outcomes that contribute directly to the agency objectives and deliverables. As a result, agencies are less likely to spend time and potentially money on benefits for other agencies or to New Zealand more generally. This mindset is exacerbated by variable procurement capability where the skills required to undertake procurement activities in a way that will generate other benefits may be lacking.

The necessity for adjustment was undeniable, given the climate change drivers and need for improvements for example associated with a struggling construction industry here in New Zealand. An adaptive approach was designed, putting focus on supporting business, capacity building and climate mitigation working across a range of policy areas at many levels. With some targeting, flexible implementation is retained that maintains agencies’ abilities to innovate and pursue their own objectives in line with Government’s ambitions. ‘Bricolage allows policy change within contexts of high status quo bias: where new ideas and actors cannot replace old ones -- as is the case with persuasion and policy learning - a successful strategy to render ideas politically viable is to blend them with existing ones’[(Allain and Madariaga, 2020)](https://paperpile.com/c/9j1pL1/WIZH).

Policy and practice implications

Bricolage emerges, underpinned by consistent ideas and ongoing sensemaking in policy design that suits New Zealand procurement policy at this time. Little by little, changes in procurement could have a transformative effect on related policy areas as implementation occurs over the next few years. Transformative or not, the policy bricolage approach in procurement is an important development that will be useful to watch especially for countries looking to implement forms of broader objectives within their wider procurement approaches. For developed countries immersed in numerous trade agreements, unless decisions are taken to leave the agreements or to purposefully work around their commitments, non-discrimination and competition will remain powerful principles that need to be followed. Yet with careful prioritization and targeting, it may be possible to further specific policy paths - be it sustainability or social procurement for employment or set-asides for specific groups. Targets provide focus and so long as some flexibility is retained for change within the wider objectives, they are at minimum a starting point to engage stakeholders in the necessary consultations and negotiations. For developing nations, there is also some possible guidance here. Clear procurement policy or guidance lays the foundations for organizing priorities and designing strategic procurement that can fairly and legitimately designate specific spending. For procurement officials in any setting, an ongoing program of procurement education will provide the confidence needed to adapt policy settings, utilise effective public management tools such as priority setting and targets, and the knowledge to evaluate and review on a regular basis.

Research implications

Our unique analysis suggests avenues for further research. We have suggested here through a conceptual narrative that policy pragmatism or bricolage has enabled New Zealand to move reasonably smoothly from a ‘purist’ approach to procurement policy to one that is more open to other forms of the policy instrument - namely social procurement and green or sustainable procurement that is more than just discourse but involving practical and pragmatic implementable plans. Further research would involve interviewing actors and stakeholders to test our hypothesis that change has come through policy pragmatism, even in the procurement area where ideational drag (rules of competition for example) is strong. In a practice-sense there are indications here that it is not impossible to shift procurement policy direction while retaining strong procurement frameworks. Freeman (2007) notes that, “for all the studies of learning, diffusion, and transfer in public policy, we know little of how things are put together (or not) .... to know more about policy learning in general and about bricolage in particular will require more detailed studies of practice.”(p.491) This study of New Zealand contributes to both of these objectives.

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