



# Has knowledge any power?

Why ruin a good story with facts?

Special OECD Seminar

“Evidence Based Decision Making – Reality or Chimera?”

To honour Jack Short – Leaving Secretary General of ITF and ECMT

Paris, 16 June 2011  
Arie Bleijenberg







## Power of images



“All Roman emperors were aware of the power of images, and so made sure to illustrate their policies and deeds through the media that were available to them, from monuments to coins”.

Forum Romanum

All Roman emperors were aware of the power of images, and so made sure to illustrate their policies and deeds through the media that were available to them, from monuments to coins. At the

Caracalle Thermea, Rome



## The questions

1. Infrastructure: vision or CBA?
2. Getting the prices right?
3. Wishful thinking in transport policy?
4. Administration: power or arguments?
5. A changing world?
6. Lessons learned?



CE Delft, transport economy

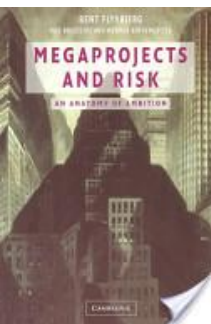
Transport Ministry the Netherlands, evidence based policy

TNO, innovation in mobility and infrastructure



## Costs and benefits

Bent Flyvbjerg, 2007  
Based on 258 projects



Averages	Cost overrun	Traffic volume
Rail	+ 45%	- 39%
Bridges and tunnels	+ 34%	
Roads	+ 20%	+ 9%

“One only knows when it is economic to build new infrastructure, if one knows when NOT to build new infrastructure”

White board Dutch Transport Ministry







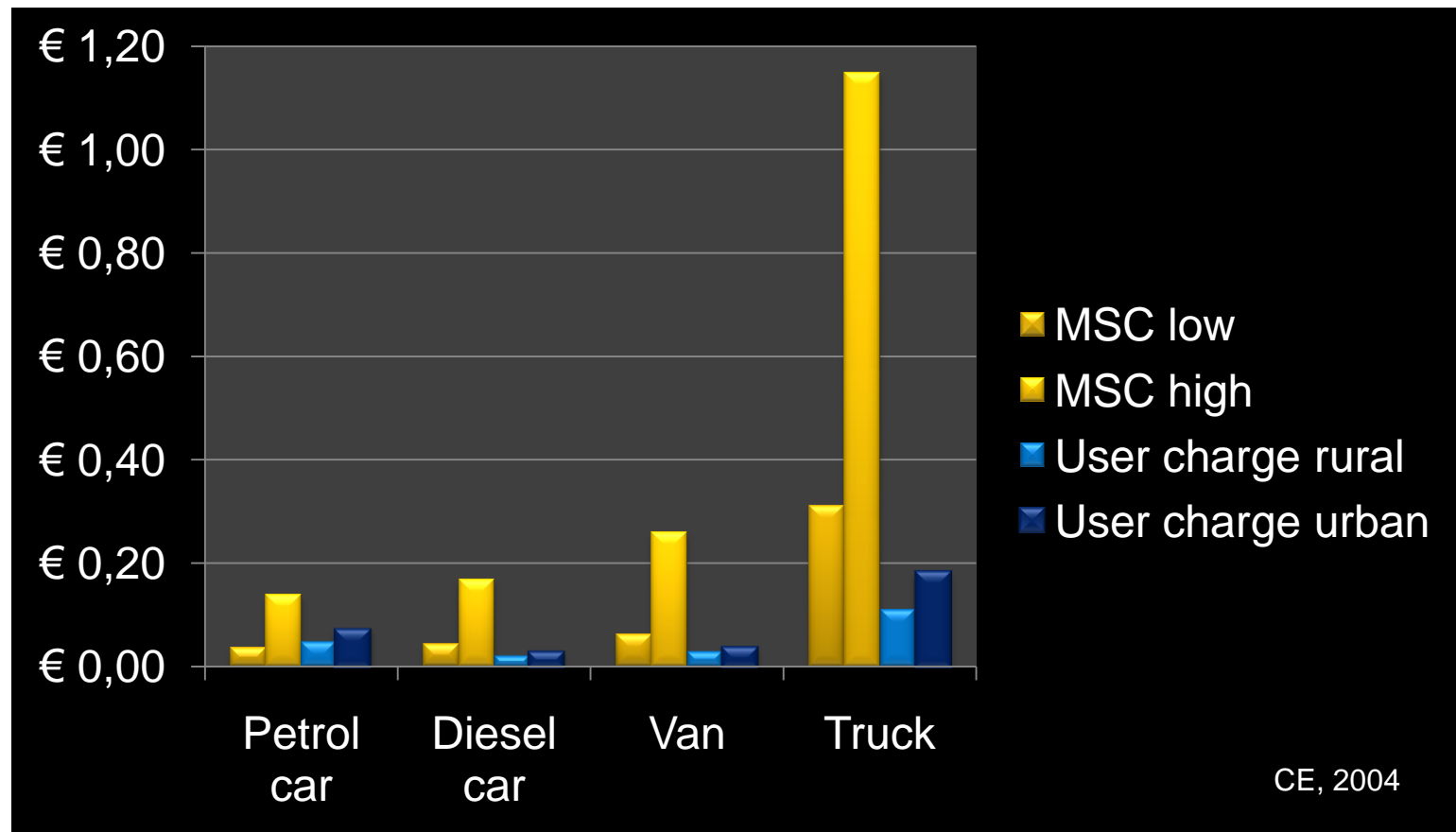
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## The image





## Marginal costs versus user charges



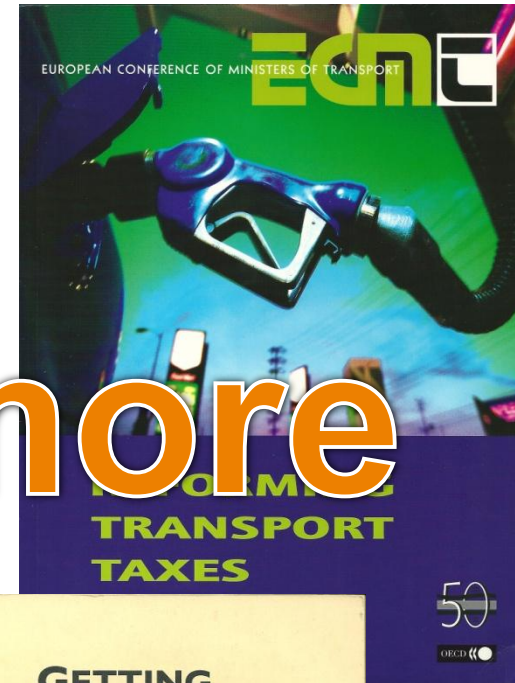


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**TNO** innovation  
for life

## The arguments

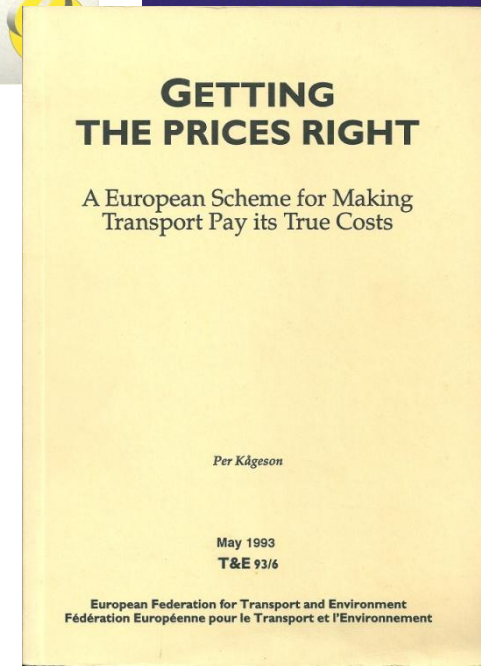
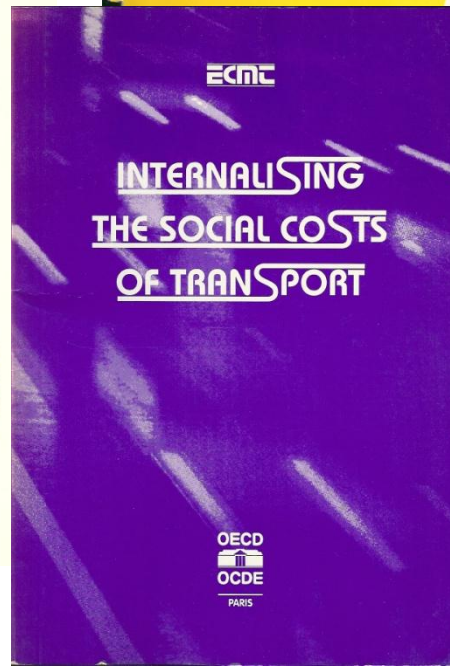
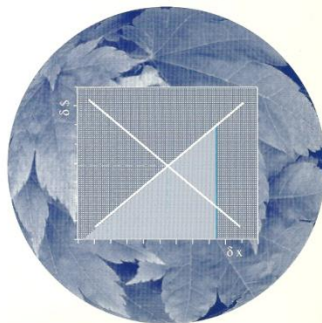
*CONFERENCE ON ROAD CHARGING SYSTEMS:  
TECHNOLOGY CHOICE AND COST EFFECTIVENESS*



# And many more



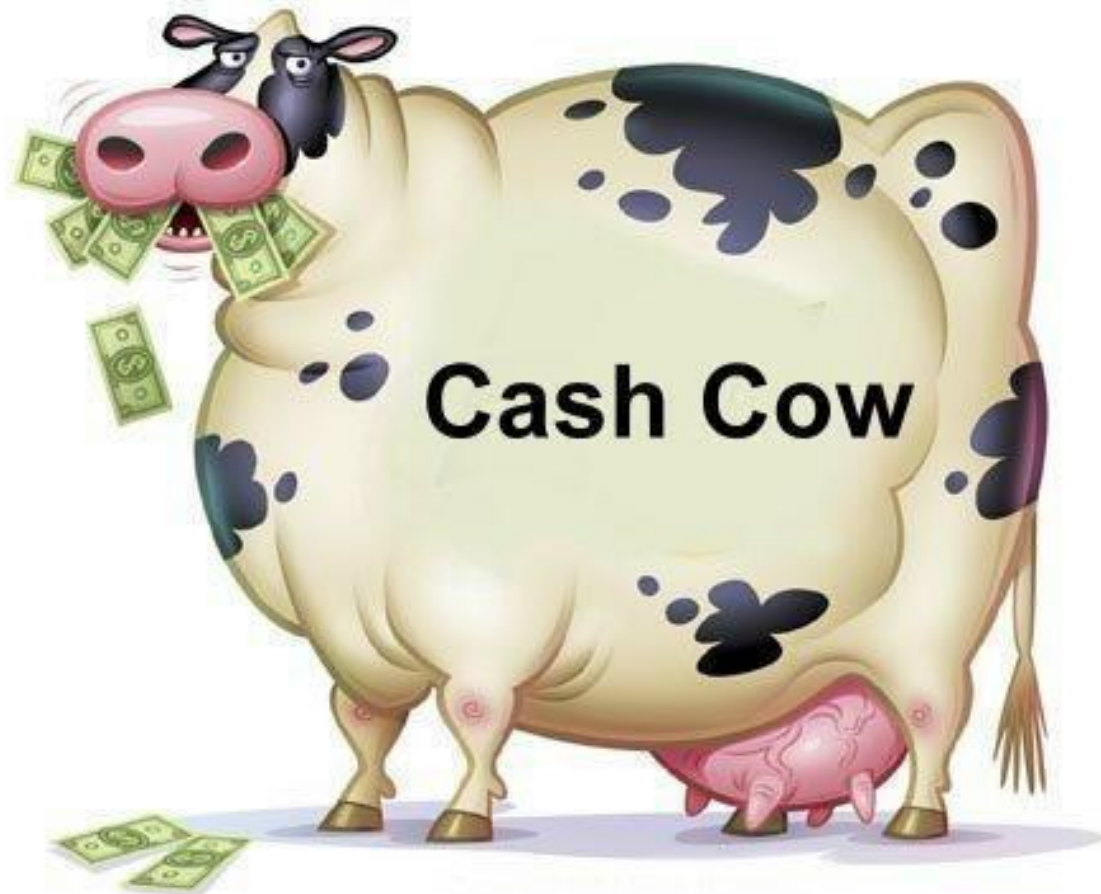
Policies  
for  
Internalisation  
of  
External Costs





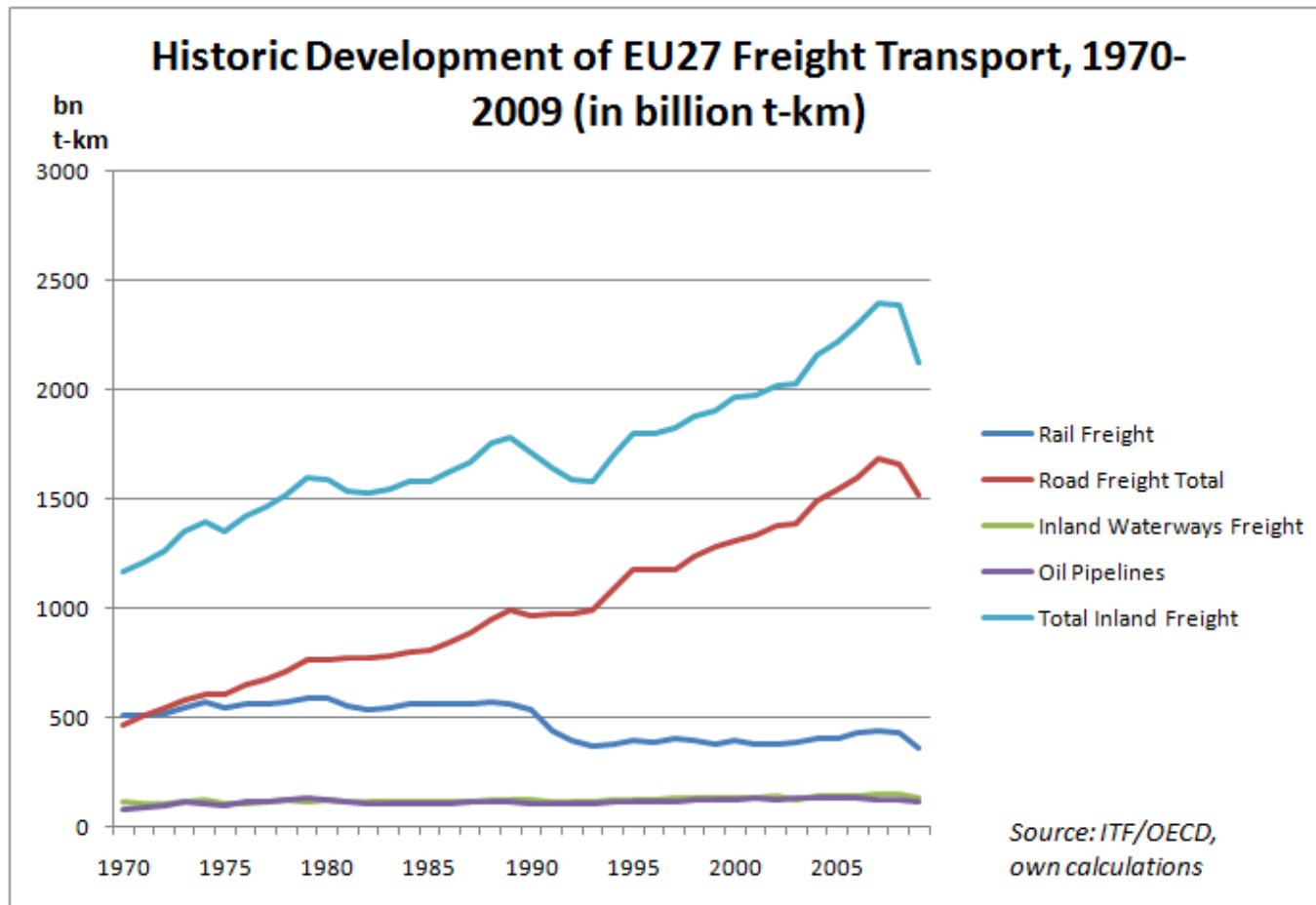


## The image





## Wishful thinking in transport: modal split 1990





## More wishful thinking in transport

- › Road building will solve congestion in metropolitan areas
- › More money to public transport will make transport sustainable
- › Better urban planning will solve the mobility problems
- › Many more







## Policy

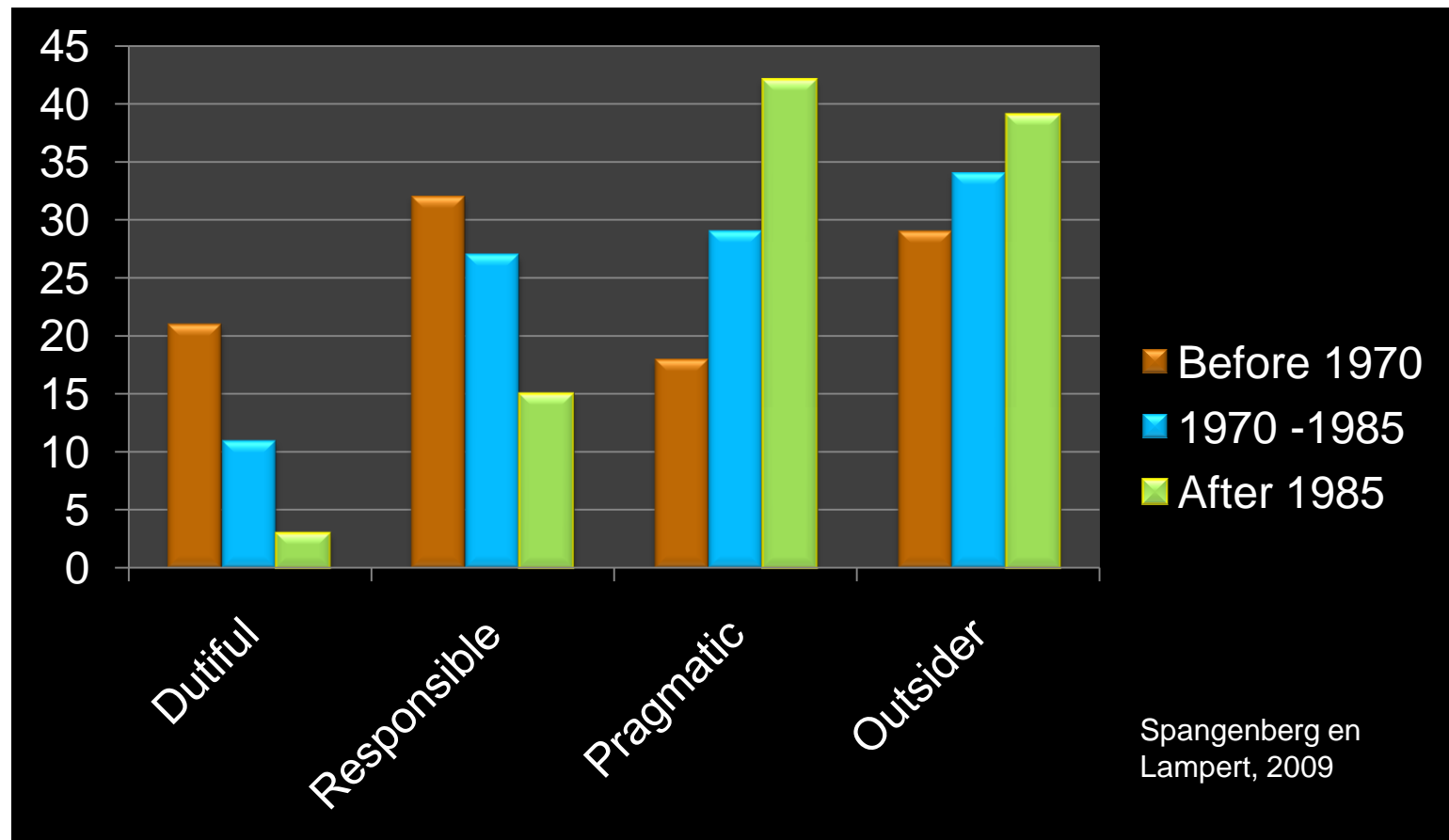
“Policy is not only the result of a contest for power and a trade-off between different interests. Policy is also the result of an exchange of ideas concerning alternative solutions for societal problems. Scientific knowledge and insights play an important role. Policy always navigates between knowledge and power”.

Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy, 2003



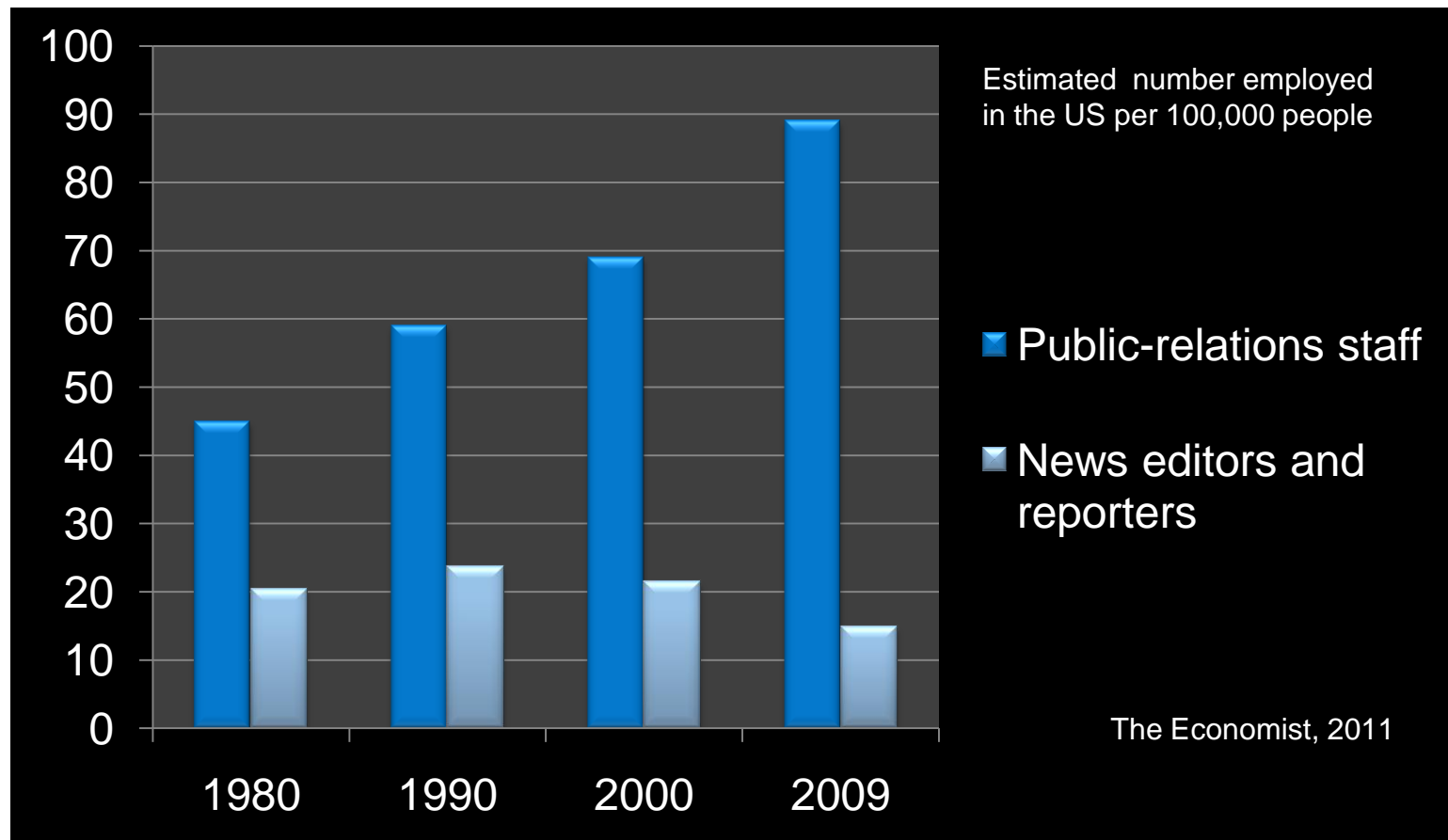


## Changing values





## The ascent of PR man







## Evidence Based Decision Making – Reality or Chimera?

Ratio	Emotion
Arguments	Statements
General interest	Special interest
Knowledge democracy	Media democracy
Transparency	Haze of power
Science	Image
Media searching for truth	Media searching for profit
Policy analysis	One-liner

How to navigate between these two sides?

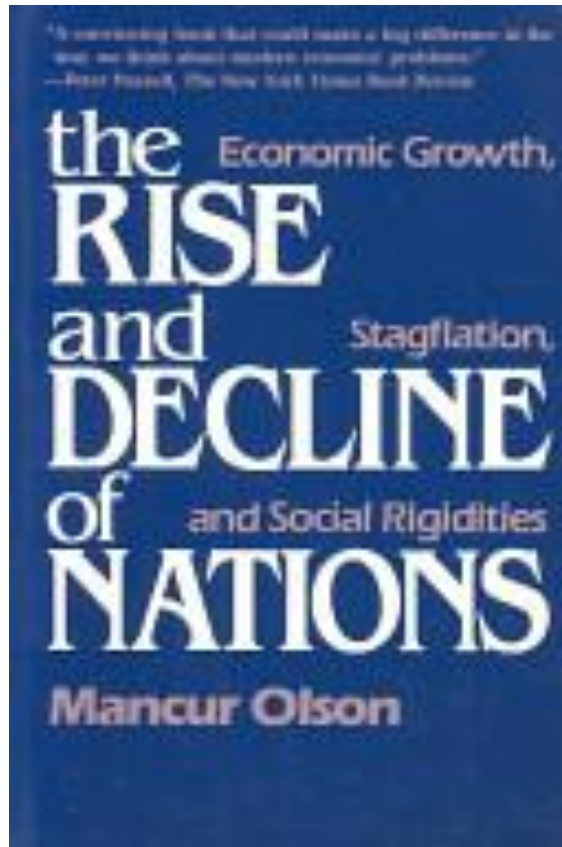


## Lessons learned

- › Transparent and 'neutral' overviews of the effects of policy alternatives are a democratic necessity (ex post and ex ante)
- › Facts and arguments do not equal political decisions
- › Interests, power and creating images are part of the political process
- › Legal obligations for CBA and EIA provide transparency
- › Strong and independent institutions as checks and balances
- › Joint Fact Finding creates shared facts and arguments
- › Cherish 'round tables' where arguments count
- › Use the power of images and emotions to create support
- › Investigative and independent journalists and media



## Conclusion



**Mancur Olson Award**  
*For chasing the general interest*

