The provision of evidence-based policy advice is a core function of a Westminster-style public service. This facet of governance is typically examined either from the perspective of the public service organizations’ capacity to produce evidence-based analysis, or through the ethics of the public service-political bargain in providing advice aligned with the government’s political agenda. This presentation will explore how considerations of bounded rationality can improve our understanding of the constraints on evidence-based policy-making by political and bureaucratic players.

The lecture will focus on two aspects of bounded rationality: the cognitive biases associated with political partisanship (political actors), and the ‘functional stupidity’ of organizations recently identified by management scholars. The presentation concludes with a proposal to mitigate the effects of bounded rationality: the creation of a new tier of ‘partisan experts’ in the House of Commons and in Ministers’ Offices.
David Dubinski brings two decades of experience from working inside Parliament, politics, bureaucracies, and international organizations to his work at the Centre on Governance. He has worked as a policy professional in international trade, international labour, and cultural policy in four federal government departments. He has served on Canadian delegations for WTO and UNESCO negotiations, and was part of the team that carried out Canada’s efforts to negotiate the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. In the 1990s, David was part of the Federal New Democratic Party staff, serving as Assistant to the House Leader and then as Caucus Research Director. He has a PhD from the University of Cambridge in Modern History, and has lectured on British history, international relations, military history, and world history. His current research interests include the governance of global public goods, policy development processes within governments and political parties, and the politics of climate change.

The Governance Innovation Lecture Series is an initiative from the University of Ottawa’s Centre on Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences. The main objective of the series is to create a space for thinking about innovative solutions to address contemporary problems and challenges faced by governments. Senior Fellows, visiting researchers and faculty associated with the Centre on Governance will be the first asked to contribute to the series. The series focus on applied, concrete and targeted innovations and will aim at fostering dialogue between the academic, the government and the non-governmental sectors. The selected governance innovations should focus on public governance, public management, and public policy along with relationships between the government, the private sector and civil society in public policy design and public service delivery. The target audience is the academic community, civil servants, public and non-profit actors and the general public.

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