Kettl, D. (2016) “Making Data Speak: Lessons for Using Numbers for Solving Public Policy Puzzles.” Governance. Vol. 29, No. 4, 573–579.

“Analysts need to speak in a language that policymakers can understand”

A lot of policy decisions are made without proper use of data this has 10 reasons:

1. It is easy to act without data.
   1. Policy makers revert to making decisions based on experience and common sense
2. Some of what we know is wrong
   1. People can believe information because it is repeated a lot while this may be wrong
   2. Common knowledge can be clouded by frames or misinformation over time.
   3. Eg. People believe Obama to be a muslim while he is Christian.
3. Data do not speak for themselves
   1. Policy analysts believe that decision makers will interpret the data the same as they do.
4. Anecdotes often speak louder
   1. People like clear anecdotes rather than lengthy reports.
5. We often do not focus on helping anecdotes speak better
   1. Data researches spent little time on connecting data to anecdotes.
6. Data for policy decisions often do not connect with data for policy implementation—and vice versa.
   1. Data analysis results often do not line up with policy decisions in terms of scope, problems etc.
7. Sometimes policy analysis takes policymakers down the wrong road
   1. (unforeseen) Policy analysis errors stick harder than the wins.
8. Pictures often speak better than numbers.
   1. Data is not tangible for people. Clear visualizations do.
9. Better data can help policymakers cross boundaries—but boundary-crossing data often are not available
   1. Data is not always easily available.
   2. Eg. If you need to spend hours of searching and combining databases, people are not going to use the data.
10. Research findings and policy decisions are often out of sync
    1. Eg. Research might be focused on long term consequences while policy makers focus on the short term.

There is no magic solution to every problem but being aware of the use and portrayal of data may help data analyst to get their results across and support the policy making process.