

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

Policy Analysis

Aidan R. Vining and David L. Weimer

The Foundations of Public Administration Series is a collection of articles written by experts in 20 content areas, providing introductory essays and recommending top articles in those subjects.

Policy Analysis

Aidan R. Vining, Simon Fraser University and David L.

Weimer, University of Wisconsin-Madison

What collective actions would promote the good society? Public policy analysis seeks to answer this question. Most often, governments and their constituent units provide forums for collective action, but sometimes other organizations, such as international agencies, nonprofit firms, or public corporations, do so as well. Although finding actions that promote social welfare almost always involves assessing the status quo and often involves evaluating actions that have taken place in the past, policy analysis is prescriptive and therefore must also be predictive. Professionals who specialize in policy analysis can increasingly be found in public service. Perhaps even more relevant to students of public administration, public managers must often serve as their own policy analysts when they advise political decision makers or when they exercise delegated discretion in pursuing the missions of their agencies. Consequently, developing skill in policy analysis has general value to those preparing themselves for public service.

We argue for a narrow definition of policy analysis that requires both a specific client and a substantive focus on advancing social values. We distinguish it from policy research, which shares the substantive focus but not the requirement of a specific client, and from political/organizational, or stakeholder, analysis,



Aidan R. Vining is the Centre for North American Business Studies (CNABS) Professor of Business and Government Relations in the Segal Graduate School of Business, Simon Fraser University, in Vancouver. He has been at the SFU business school since 1984. He has also held a number of administrative positions and is currently the Academic Director of the Executive MBA at the Segal School. Previously, he was a faculty member at the Faculty of Commerce at the University of British Columbia.

vining@sfu.ca



David L. Weimer is professor of political science and public affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research focuses broadly on policy craft, institutional design, and health policy. He is working on several research projects in health policy: the role of report cards in promoting improved quality of care, the social and fiscal net benefits of screening for Alzheimer's disease, the organ transplant network as a model for medical governance, and the proper measurement of social costs associated with the regulation of addictive goods like tobacco. His other research addresses issues in energy security, natural resource policy, education, and research methods.

weimer@lafollette.wisc.edu

which has a specific client but an instrumental rather than substantive focus. In addition, we recognize research on the policy process as distinct from, but nevertheless, potentially informative for political/organizational and policy analysis.

Definition(s) of Policy Analysis

At its broadest, public policy analysis can be defined as advice to decision makers in the public sector. David Weimer and Aidan Vining (2011, 24), however, adopt a narrower view of policy analysis that stresses the professional role of giving advice to specific clients: “policy analysis is client-oriented advice relevant to public decisions and informed by social values.” Many scholars provide definitions of policy analysis that are similar to Weimer and Vining (for an insightful discussion of different definitions, see Gormley 2007). Both Arnold Meltsner (1976) and Norman Beckman (1977), for example, propose definitions that are similar in spirit to Weimer and Vining in that they incorporate an explicit client orientation.

Other scholars place more emphasis on the analytic content and structure of policy analysis and relatively less emphasis on the roles of specific clients. For example, Walter Williams (1971, xi) proposes that “Policy analysis is a means of synthesizing information including research results to produce a format for policy decisions (the laying out of alternative choices) and of determining future needs for policy relevant information.” Similarly, William Dunn (1981, ix) suggests: “Policy analysis is an applied social science discipline which uses multiple methods of inquiry and argument to produce and transform policy-relevant

information that may be utilized in political settings to resolve policy problems.” Despite their differences in emphasis, all of these definitions focus on the *instrumental* aspects of the content and structure of policy analysis and are, therefore, variations of client-oriented, if not directly focused, “policy analysis.” This is so because the instrumental focus on structured analysis (problem analysis, synthesis, solution analysis) implies some form of advocacy, which in turn implies an attempt to influence some set of decision makers in a given policy arena, even if the particular set is implicit, contingent, or both.

In contrast, scholars such as Garry Brewer and Peter deLeon (1983, 6–17) adopt an even broader perspective on policy analysis, which can be summarized as the “policy sciences” perspective. Sometimes this term is expanded to include the policy process, as well (Lasswell 1970). Although these scholars think in terms of an audience, the policy science perspective generally lacks a specific client perspective. Policy sciences, in turn, can be viewed either narrowly or broadly. The narrower perspective focuses on social science-based research that explicitly aims to enlighten public policy choice, if only through the elimination of some undesirable policy options (Coleman 1972). This has been labeled as “policy research.” Policy research is usually not closely tied to public decision makers. The most direct audience for policy research is the academic community, although its wider audience does include politicians, public managers, and public intellectuals. Despite a name that emphasizes both policy analysis and public management, most of the research published in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and*

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

Policy Analysis

Aidan R. Vining and David L. Weimer

Management could best be described as policy research of this kind.

An even broader perspective on the policy sciences would recognize that the objective of almost all social science research is the development of theories that eventually may contribute to a better understanding of society. However, there are some identifiable differences between policy research and social science research writ large. Whereas academic research looks for relationships among the broad range of variables describing behavior, policy research focuses on relationships between variables that reflect social problems and other variables that can be manipulated by public policy, that is, a more or less verified hypothesis of the form: if the government does *X*, then *Y* will result. Whether a narrower or broader perspective on policy sciences is adopted, the most germane social sciences from a policy perspective are economics and political science, although sociology and psychology are also important sources of background theory. The audience (in contrast to client) for the policy sciences is society in general. However, the accumulation of empirical evidence and the Darwinian-like evolution of competing theories often eventually influence the worldviews of policymakers (see, for example, Hall 1990).

Policy Analysis Taxonomy

A fine and somewhat arbitrary line often separates policy analysis from policy research/social science research (hereafter, we simply use policy research). As Table 1 summarizes, we use the presence or absence of the client orientation to distinguish between them. The

top two cells in Table 1 summarize some of the other characteristics of **Policy Analysis** (NW cell) and **Policy Research** (NE cell). Especially in the client-oriented Weimer and Vining formulation, economics is the pre-eminent disciplinary perspective (Gormley 2007, 299–301). Policy analysis in this formulation focuses explicitly on problem solving. The problem solving focus is also comprehensive (at least in aspiration): thus it covers both “problem analysis” and “solution analysis” (Weimer and Vining 2011, 343–376), which give policy analysis similarity to the clinical professions that diagnose and prescribe (Geva-May 2005).

Problem analysis consists of an analysis of both market and government failure and some synthesis of the balance of these failures (see below). Solution analysis includes some explicit consideration of policy alternatives and policy goals and an evaluation of alternatives against the posited goals. In some cases, the focus is on allocative efficiency, as exemplified by cost-benefit analysis (Boardman et al. 2006; Weimer and Vining, 2011, 384–424). In the majority of cases, however, the focus is on multi-goal analysis that includes efficiency, but also considers equity, government revenue and expenditures, and potentially other goals as well (Weimer and Vining 2011, 354–362).

Program evaluations are an important source of information about how policies affect social values. Depending on the circumstance and purpose of its conduct, evaluation may be either policy analysis or policy research. When conducted for specific clients to answer questions such as, should this particular

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

Policy Analysis

Aidan R. Vining and David L. Weimer

program be expanded, shrunk or terminated, modified, or replicated, it is a form of policy analysis. However, for it to be good policy analysis, it must consider the full range of impacts rather than limiting attention to either those related to putative goals or those that can be quantitatively inferred. If the evaluation does not have a specific client, but rather is directed to a broad community, such as a network of researchers or actors in a policy subsystem, then we define it as policy research. Policy research may be a valuable input into more comprehensive policy analysis by providing methodologically sound estimates of particular impacts.

Sometimes evaluation looks back at what happened simply to contribute to our general knowledge about the likely effects of some generic policy intervention. For example, it may try to answer a question like: Did this type of charter school contribute to higher student achievement? It becomes policy analysis when the look back is linked to a specific look forward. For example, should the state department of education encourage replication of this type of charter school?

Thus far, the public decisions of interest in the policy analysis definitions discussed above are those concerning substantive policy choice. However, many policy scholars are more concerned with how, why, and when policies get adopted—the policy process (Sabatier 2007). Accordingly, the lower half of Table 1 summarizes the policy process dimension of policy analysis. As an understanding of the policy process can help public decision makers improve the potential for the adoption of their desired policies, there are often political and administrative clients for specific policy process analyses (Meltsner 1972; May 1986; Stokes

1986; Weimer and Vining 2011). Additionally, once policies are adopted, they have to be implemented. Successful implementation requires intra- and inter-organizational co-operation or compliance from both individuals and groups (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; May 2003; Winter 2003; Weimer and Vining 2011). In Table 1, we summarize this client-focused advice, whether at the adoption or implementation stage, as **Political/Organizational Analysis**, or as it is sometimes known “Pol/Org” Analysis (SW cell). More specifically, this form of analysis focuses on the relevant stakeholders (Meltsner 1972; Weible 2007). **Stakeholder Analysis** includes, but is not limited to, the following attributes of relevant actors: their beliefs and motivations, their resources, their strategic orientation and sophistication, their willingness to compromise, and their ability to influence others, including other stakeholders and the public at large (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997). This can be summarized in a “position map” or “stakeholder map.” Stakeholder analysis is now highly institutionalized (e.g., Reich 1994; Schmeer 1999; Varvasovszky and Brugha 2000; Bryson, Cunningham and Lokkesmoe 2002). Although the focus of much of this form of analysis is instrumental—how can we get a policy adopted and implemented, a number of scholars have adopted a more explicitly normative perspective, whether in terms of citizen participation in policy decisions or in terms of the participation of interested, but disenfranchised, constituencies (e.g., Checkoway and Van Til 1978; Langston, 1978; Kathlene and Martin 1991; Walters, Aydelotte and Miller 2000).

Table 1: Taxonomy of “Policy Analysis”

		CLIENT VERSUS SOCIETAL FOCUS	
		Client Focus	Academic/Societal Focus
SUBSTANTIVE VERSUS PROCESS FOCUS	Substantive Policy/ Policy Analytic Focus	<p>Policy Analysis (narrowly defined)</p> <p>Problem-solving focus</p> <p>Economics pre-eminent</p> <p>Comprehensive: problem analysis (market & government failure, synthesis, solution analysis (alternatives, goals, assessment)</p> <p>Goals clear, or at least emergently clear; efficiency (cost-benefit) or efficiency, equity, government revenue-expenditure (multi-goal)</p>	<p>Policy Research/Policy Sciences</p> <p>Social science research on policy problems</p> <p>Policy problem discovery/exploration</p> <p>Solution (policy) discovery/exploration</p> <p>Broad range of social sciences, but economics, political science dominate</p> <p>Partial or fragmentary (in terms of policy problem)</p> <p>Goals contestable</p>
	Policy Process Focus	<p>Political/Organizational Analysis (or Stakeholder Analysis)</p> <p>Political, organizational, and inter-organizational analysis (including networks)</p> <p>Relevant for both adoption and implementation</p> <p>Strategic client focus</p> <p>Often informal and unwritten</p> <p>Primarily descriptive and predictive, rather than normative: goal is adoption and implementation</p>	<p>Policy Process Research</p> <p>All social science research, but dominated by political science research</p> <p>Distributional and re-distributional focus (iron triangles, etc)</p> <p>Theory somewhat contestable: interest group theory, advocacy coalition, path dependency, etc, but converging on contingent and comprehensive theory</p>

Source: Authors.

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

Policy Analysis

Aidan R. Vining and David L. Weimer

There are a number of distinct features of Political/Organizational Analysis. Especially in its stakeholder manifestation, political/organizational analysis often has a strategic focus. That is, in game theoretic terms, it is an attempt to anticipate the outcomes that will result when others involved in the issue react to one's actions. Because of its sensitive political nature, it is often delivered in an informal, unwritten form. In contrast to the strong normative focus of substantive policy analysis, it is primarily descriptive and predictive, seeking to promote the instrumental goals of adoption or successful implementation.

Despite the importance of political/political organizational analysis for clients' efforts to achieve their goals, we believe it is fair to say that most Policy Process Research (SE cell) is not client-oriented. Weimer and Vining (2011) identify seven somewhat distinct approaches to understanding the policy process at a fundamental theoretical level: interest group theory (Lowi 1972; Wilson 1980), institutional rational choice theory (Ostrom 1990), path dependence theory (Arthur 1994; Pierson 2004; Page 2006), the advocacy coalition framework (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993), the social construction framework (Stone 1988; Schneider and Ingram 1993), the multiple streams framework (Kingdon 1984), and punctuated equilibrium theory (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005).

In contrast to the dominance of economics in terms of substantive policy analysis, political science has provided the dominant intellectual contribution to understanding the policy process: "the primary contribution of political science to the field of public

policy analysis has been to enhance our understanding of the causes of public policies, or how the public policy-making process actually works" (Gormley 2007, 301).

Policy Analysis (Narrowly Defined but Broadly Synthetic)

Aaron Wildavsky (1973, 127) noted the paradoxes inherent in comprehensive planning, asserting, "if planning is everything, maybe it's nothing." For policy analysis to have a meaningful definition, we believe that it should be reserved for the professional activity in which an analyst gives advice to a client about how to achieve substantive goals. Sometimes, the analyst and client are one and the same, as when public managers do their own analyses about how to promote some socially desirable values better. The client may be an elected official or an appointed or professional public manager. The client may even be an institution, such as Congress. Although policy analysis generally seeks to promote social values, society is not the immediate client for professional policy analysis.

Nonetheless, good policy analysis within this narrow definition cannot function well in isolation. Clearly, good policy analysis must almost always incorporate an understanding of the prospects for adoption of policy alternatives; it must always pay attention to implementation if realistic predictions are to be made. Therefore, policy analysts must understand political and organizational analysis. That is, effective functioning in the NW cell of Table 1 requires an understanding of the SW cell and the ready importation of its theories, methods, and empirical findings into

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

Policy Analysis

Aidan R. Vining and David L. Weimer

substantive policy analysis. The centrality of political and organizational analysis to public administration thus links it closely to policy analysis.

Good policy analysis also requires well-grounded predictions of the consequences of policies, whether the ones currently in place or alternatives to them. These predictions require policy analysts to draw on policy research. That is, effective functioning in the NW cell also requires an understanding of the NE cell and the ready importation of its theories, methods, and empirical findings. The retrospective policy and program evaluations commonly performed by policy researchers often provide the basis for the necessarily predictive work done by policy analysts.

What about policy process research shown in the SE cell? Understanding it may help the policy analyst by providing broader frameworks for interpreting the complexity of the political world. Additionally, it helps inform political and organizational analysis. That is, the SE cell influences the NW cell directly to some extent but also indirectly through the SW cell.

Substantive Policy Analysis Frameworks

A number of policy scholars have addressed how analysts should formulate advice for, and communicate it to, clients (Bardach 1996; Leman and Nelson 1981; Lidman and Sommers 2005; Verdier 1984; Musso, Biller and Myrtle 2000; Weimer and Vining 2011). Almost all policy analysis textbooks lay out more or less detailed frameworks for conducting policy analysis. Michael Munger (2000, 7), for example, lays out five steps, including ones relating to policy adoption and

implementation (that is, the policy process as summarized in Table 1): (1) problem formulation; (2) selection of criteria; (3) comparison of alternatives and selection of the policy; (4) consideration of political and organizational constraints, and (5) implementation and evaluation of the program. Eugene Bardach (2008) sets out eight steps: (1) define the problem; (2) assemble some evidence; (3) construct the alternatives; (4) select the criteria; (5) project the outcomes; (6) confront the trade-offs; (7) decide, and (8) tell the story. Michael Kraft and Scott Furlong (2010) have five steps: (1) define and analyze the problem; (2) construct policy alternatives; (3) Develop evaluative criteria; (4) assess the alternatives; (5) draw conclusions. Karl Patton and David Sawicki (1993) offer six steps: (1) verify, define, and detail the problem; (2) establish evaluation criteria; (3) identify alternative policies; (4) evaluate alternative policies; (5) display and distinguish among alternative policies; (6) monitor and implement policy. Duncan MacRae and Dale Whittington (1997) organize policy analysis around the criteria/alternatives matrix, which provides a scorecard for systematically assessing policy alternatives against selected criteria.

Weimer and Vining (2011, Chapter 15) lay out eight steps, subdivided into two major components, problem analysis and solution analysis (Weimer and Vining 2011, Figure 15.1). They describe this process as “rationalist,” rather than as rational, because *only* following these steps in order is unlikely to be fully rational because it ignores the corollary value of nonlinear, creative thinking especially in terms of iterative learning. For example, a novel policy alternative may require that goals be modified to take account of initially unanticipated impacts, which in turn

may suggest yet different alternatives. In the Weimer and Vining formulation, all the steps in their policy analysis framework concern substantive policy analysis; adoption and implementation analysis are subsumed within the prediction of impacts. Here, we briefly

summarize the Weimer and Vining policy analysis framework steps for illustrative purposes. The framework is summarized in Table 2 (adapted from Weimer and Vining, 2011).

Table 2: Rationalist Approach to Policy Analysis

Problem Analysis	
Understanding the Problem	Assess the symptoms using relevant empirical evidence. Frame the problem as a market or government failure. Model the problem to identify leverage points
Choosing and Explaining Relevant Goals and Constraints	Select substantive and instrumental goals. Justify their selection.
Selecting a Solution Method	Generally multi-goal analysis. In special cases cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness, or other related analytical approach
Solution Analysis	
Choosing Impact Categories for Goals	Identify impacts for assessing progress toward goals. Some goals may require multiple impacts.
Concretely Specifying Policy Alternatives	Alternatives must be sufficiently detailed to facilitate prediction. Include status quo to avoid action bias.
Predicting Impacts of Alternatives	Predict impacts of each alternative. Make a prediction in terms of all impact categories. All impacts should be identified.
Valuing Impacts of Alternatives	Apply normative criteria to impacts.
Assessing and Recommending	Compare alternatives in terms of impacts. Recommend alternative based on explicit consideration of tradeoffs.

Source: Adapted from Weimer and Vining (2011, Figure 15.1).

Problem Analysis

Following the rationalist mode, problem analysis consists of three major steps: (1) understanding the problem; (2) choosing and explaining relevant policy goals and constraints, and (3) choosing a solution method. The first step—understanding a policy problem—involves assessing the conditions that concern the client, analyzing them in terms of market or government failures, and modeling the relationship between the conditions of concern and variables that can be manipulated through public policy. Weimer and Vining (2006) argue that the dual concepts of market and government failures provide the basis for framing policy problems in terms of efficiency. Specifically, they argue that a critical step in problem analysis is an assessment of the role of market failure vis-à-vis government failure. Weimer and Vining (2011) further suggest that the most difficult and judgmental step in any policy analysis often is deciding on appropriate goals (Nienaber and Wildavsky 1973, 10). This is because there can be fundamental disagreement about the relevant goals and their weighting, but also because individuals and organizations preparing to make complex policy decisions frequently do not have predetermined and clearly stated policy goals (Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Theoret 1976; March 1976).

Some economists argue that, in general, aggregate efficiency should be the primary concern of policy analysis and that equity and other goals are rarely appropriate in evaluating alternative policies. They argue that seeking efficiency leads to the largest supply of goods and therefore provides the greatest

opportunity for redistribution. Most other social scientists and some economists adopt a broader multi-goal perspective (e.g., Radin 2000).

One approach to multiple goals is to recognize that they can be broken down into two broad categories: substantive and instrumental. Substantive goals represent values, such as equity and efficiency that society wishes to secure for their own sake. In contrast, instrumental goals are conditions that increase the prospects for achieving substantive goals. Commonly relevant instrumental goals include political feasibility, increasing government revenues, and decreasing government expenditures (sometimes, more specifically, balancing budgets).

Weimer and Vining include goal selection as a component of problem analysis because they argue that the nature and number of goals largely determine the appropriate solution method. Choosing *how* the solution analysis will be conducted is therefore also a component of problem analysis. Vining and Anthony Boardman (2006) label this selection process as “metachoice.” Weimer and Vining (2011, Figure 15.3) argue there are five basic approaches to solution analysis: first, formal cost-benefit analysis; second, qualitative cost-benefit analysis; third, modified cost-benefit analysis; fourth, cost-effectiveness analysis; and fifth, multi-goal policy analysis (for a different, but related, framework, see Vining and Boardman 2006). In practice, the usual relevance of multiple goals, often including ones that cannot be reasonably quantified, often make multi-goal analysis the most appropriate approach in policy analysis. However, sometimes efficiency is the only relevant goal and all efficiency

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

Policy Analysis

Aidan R. Vining and David L. Weimer

impacts can be monetized to make cost-benefit analysis an appropriate solution method (Boardman et al. 2006). Even when cost-benefit analysis is not appropriate, its protocols may be useful for assessing the relative efficiency of alternatives.

Solution Analysis

In the Weimer/Vining framework, solution analysis consists of five steps: (1) selecting impact categories for the relevant goals; (2) generating a mutually exclusive set of policy alternatives; (3) predicting the impact that each alternative would have in terms of achieving each goal; (4) valuing the predicted impacts, either using qualitative, quantitative, or monetized measures; and (5) assessing the alternatives in terms of the goals and making a recommendation.

Whereas good analysis usually begins with broad goals so as not to narrow prematurely the range of alternatives considered, the actual comparison of alternatives generally requires more specific categories to assess the various effects relevant to the goals. The analyst needs a scorecard to help compare alternatives in terms of their impacts. Indeed, it is often useful to literally construct a scorecard in the form of a goals/alternatives matrix.

Possible solutions take the form of alternatives to the status quo policy. The alternatives may come from a variety of sources (Weimer 1993). For example, they may be developed from generic responses to identified market or government failures (Weimer and Vining 2011); based on policies borrowed from other jurisdictions or policy areas (May 1981; Schneider and

Ingram 1988); constructed from “backward mapping” that assembles policies from changes in individual behaviors and the chain of actions needed to affect them (Elmore 1979–1980); formed from modifications of preliminary alternatives in response to anticipated implementation problems (Bardach 1977); created de novo (Weimer 1992a, 1992b); or simply adapted from policies proposed by stakeholders, policy researchers, or others. No matter what the source of the policy alternatives, the analyst must specify them concretely in sufficient detail to permit predictions of their impacts.

The next steps involve predicting and valuing the impacts of the alternatives. They often can be accomplished in a single step because the specified impact categories typically have clear normative interpretations. When they do not, then an explicit normative assessment of the impacts is required to support comparison of the alternatives in terms of the goals. Using a goals/alternatives matrix as a scorecard helps avoid the danger of failing to assess each alternative in terms of each of the impact categories by drawing attention to empty cells.

Finally, the analyst must assess the alternatives in terms of the goals, identifying the almost inevitable tradeoffs faced in choosing one alternative over the others. The recommendation to adopt a policy alternative should follow directly from this assessment. The analyst should convey the important uncertainties encountered in reaching the recommendation. A competent analysis that carefully considers tradeoffs and uncertainties will often be useful to the client even if the client rejects the recommendation.

Reprise

Although policy analysis draws broadly from the academic disciplines to help understand, value, and predict, it is fundamentally a craft for giving good advice to public decision makers about how to make society better. Like any craft, it can be done more or less skillfully. Explicit frameworks, such as the rationalist approach, help analysts deal with the complexity and ambiguity commonly inherent in public policy problems. However, the development of craft skill almost always requires practice. Effective preparation of new public administrators in policy analysis therefore requires creating opportunities within their curricula for practice through projects, workshops, and other experiences in actually doing policy analysis.

Conclusion: Too Much Analysis? Not!

In a much-cited article Nancy Shulock (1999) asks of policy analysis: “if it is not used, why do we produce so much of it?” In addressing this question, we would first point out that although Shulock provides evidence that there are many policy analysts, many journals with a policy interest, many agency units with “policy” in the title, and many schools of public policy, she does not actually produce evidence that there *is* much policy analysis, at least policy analysis that fits our narrow definition. We concur that there is a great deal of policy analysis available that fits in the NE, SW and SE cells, but, in contradiction to Shulock, we believe that there is actually a relatively limited amount of (available) policy analysis that could be placed in the NW cell.

We are particularly aware of this lacuna because over the last twenty years we have continuously sought reproducible comprehensive policy analyses for our policy analysis textbook and found that there are relatively few that are publically available. Of course, “publically available” is part of the problem. For strategic reasons, government bureaus and other organizations, such as consultancies, that produce comprehensive policy analysis may not want to publish it. Still, if this is the case, it is surprising that more of these confidential analyses have not “leaked out” from agencies. Gary Banks (2009, 14), the Chair of the Productivity Commission in Australia (the independent agency charged with analysis), has forcefully made the case *against* the use of confidential analysis (to the extent it is out there) by government agencies: “Much policy analysis...actually occurs behind closed doors. A political need for speed, or defence against opportunistic adversaries, is often behind that. But no evidence is immutable. If it hasn’t been tested, or contested, we can’t really call it ‘evidence’. And it misses the opportunity to educate the community about what is at stake in a policy issue, and thereby for it to become more accepting of the policy initiative itself.”

Transparency ideally means “opening the books” in terms of data, assumptions and methods, such that the analysis could be replicated. The wider the impacts of a policy proposal, the wider the consultation should be. Not just with experts, but also with the people who are likely to be *affected* by the policy, whose reactions and feedback provide insights into the likely impacts and

help avoid unintended consequences. Such feedback in itself constitutes a useful form of evidence.

We have found some examples of available NW cell policy analysis. In most countries, including the United States, these analyses have usually been produced by somewhat independent oversight agencies, rather than by line agencies. In Australia, for example, the Productivity Commission, an independent agency fully funded by the government of Australia, has produced high quality analysis (e.g., Productivity Commission, 1999; Productivity Commission 2005, Productivity Commission 2006). In Canada, for example, the C.D. Howe Institute, a non-profit think tank, tries to produce actual (relatively short) policy analyses (see, for example, Renzetti 2009; Sampson and Stamler 2009). In the United States, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) produces a considerable number of analyses that are comprehensive except for the absence of a recommendation and exclusion of political feasibility as a goal. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy produces policy analyses at the request of its state legislature that are similarly comprehensive. Indeed, it produces a large number of cost-benefit analyses that make evidence-based comparisons across large numbers of policy alternatives.

The Shulock argument is essentially that the policy analysis is out there, but that it is not used (see, Shulock 1999, Table 1, 229). We argue that there is probably not that much. Furthermore, we argue that it is not surprising that much of even this limited stock of analyses does not get used in the straightforward sense of immediately adopted recommendations. The narrow definition of policy analysis is primarily

normative. As far as we are aware, none of the leading authors in this normative policy analysis tradition (Shulock describes it as the “traditional policy analysis” approach) would claim that they are making an empirical claim about how most actual policies get adopted and implemented. Indeed, in their writings most of these scholars are careful to distinguish between the normative orientation—how to perform comprehensive policy analysis—and the descriptive orientation—how the policy process actually operates. Furthermore, the attention to government failure as well as market failure demonstrates that scholars are well aware that the presence of good analysis does not necessarily (or even usually) translate into good policy. Banks (2009, 1) has summarized this reality as: “cringing in the recognition at how a carefully crafted policy proposal can be so easily subverted, or a dubious policy can triumph with little real evidence or analysis to commend it.” In sum, a normative theory of good policy analysis is not directly comparable to a positive theory of how policies actually get made. In this sense, Shulock’s comparison of the “traditional” (normative) approach to the “interpretive” (descriptive) approach is flawed.

PAR

Foundations of Public Administration

Policy Analysis

Aidan R. Vining and David L. Weimer

If there is not that much policy analysis and if it is often ignored, then what is its value? Again, Banks (2009, 4) summarizes the value of policy analysis well:

While the systematic evaluation and review of policy have not been pervasive—and arguably have been less evident in the social and environmental domains than the economic—Australia’s experience illustrates its potential contribution. It also reveals the sterility of academic debates about whether evidence can or should play a ‘deterministic’ role in policy outcomes. It will be clear to all...that policy decisions will typically be influenced by much more than objective evidence, or rational analysis. Values, interests, personalities, timing, circumstance and happenstance—in short, democracy—determine what actually happens.

Policy analysis helps us choose alternatives to make society better. Good policy analysis explicates the value-tradeoffs decision makers confront in choosing among policy alternatives. It often has informative value even when its recommendations are not immediately adopted. At least in the abstract, as evidenced by legislative mandates for the use of cost-benefit analysis and the acceptance Congressional Budget Office analyses in extremely polarized political debates, our political leaders have some appreciation the value of policy analysis. We all should want more of it produced and used. Those of us involved in the preparation of public administrators for their important roles in society should make sure that they can do it well.

Bibliography

- Arthur, Brian, *Increasing Returns and Path Dependence in the Economy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
- Banks, Gary, *Evidence-based Policy Making: What Is It? How Do We Get It?* ANU Public Lecture Series, presented by ANZSOG, 4 February 2009, Productivity Commission (Government of Australia), Canberra.
- Bardach, Eugene, *The Eight-Step Path of Policy Analysis* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Academic Press, 1996).
- Bardach, Eugene, *The Implementation Game: What Happens After a Bill Becomes Law?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977).
- Baumgartner, Frank R. and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Beckman, Arnold, "Policy Analysis in Government: Alternatives to 'Muddling Through,'" *Public Administration Review* 37(3) 1977, 221–22.
- Boardman, Anthony E., David Greenberg, Aidan R. Vining and David Weimer, *Cost-Benefit Analysis: Concepts and Practice* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice-Hall, third edition, 2006).
- Brewer, Gary D. and Peter deLeon, *The Foundations of Policy Analysis* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1983).
- Bryson, John M., Gary L. Cunningham, and Karen J. Lokkesmoe, "What to Do When Stakeholders Matter: The Case of Problem Formulation for the African American Men Project of Hennepin County, Minnesota," *Public Administration Review* 62(5) 2002, 568–84.
- Checkoway, Barry and John Van Til, "What Do We Know About Citizen Participation? A Selective Review of Research," in Langton, Stuart, ed., *Citizen Participation in America* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1978).
- Coleman, James S., *Policy Research in the Social Sciences* (New York: General Learning Press, 1972).
- Dunn, William, N., *Public Policy Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1981).
- Elmore, Richard F., "Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Design," *Political Science Quarterly* 94(4) 1979–1980, 601–616.
- Friedman, Lee, "Peanuts Envy," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 18(2) 1999, 211–225.
- Geva-May, Iris, Ed., *Thinking Like a Policy Analyst: Policy Analysis as a Clinical Profession* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- Gormley, William T., "Public Policy Analysis: Ideas and Impacts," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, 2007, 297–313.
- Hall, Peter A. "Policy Paradigms, Experts, and the States: The Case of Macroeconomic Policy-Making in Britain," in Stephen Brooks and Alain-C. Gagnon, eds., *Social Scientists, Policy, and the State* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 53–78.

- Jenkins-Smith, Hank and Paul A. Sabatier, "The Dynamics of Policy-Oriented Learning," in Paul A. Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith, eds., *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach* (San Francisco, CA: Westview Press, 1993), 41–56.
- Jones, Bryan D. and Frank R. Baumgartner, *The Politics of Attention: How Government Prioritizes Problems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- Langton, Stuart, ed., *Citizen Participation in America* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books).
- Lasswell, Harold D., "The Emerging Conception of the Policy Sciences," *Policy Sciences* 1(1) 1970, 3–30.
- Leman, Christopher and Robert Nelson, "Ten Commandments for Policy Economists," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 1(1) 1981, 97–117.
- Lidman, Russell and Paul Sommers, "The 'Compleat' Policy Analyst: A Top 10 List," *Public Administration Review* 63(5) 2005, 628–634.
- Lowi, Theodore J., "Four Systems of Policy, Politics, and Choice," *Public Administration Review* 32(4) 1972, 298–310.
- Kathlene, Lyn and John A. Martin, "Enhancing Citizen Participation: Panel Designs, Perspectives and Policy Formulation," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 10(1) 1991, 46–63.
- Kingdon, John W., *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1984).
- Kraft, Michael E. and Scott R. Furlong, *Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives* 3rd Ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).
- MacRae, Duncan Jr. and Dale Whittington, *Expert Advice for Policy Choice* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1997).
- March, James, "The Technology of Foolishness," in James C. March and J. P. Olsen, eds., *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (Bergen, Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), 69–81.
- May, Peter, J., "Policy Design and Implementation," 223–233 in B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre, eds., *Handbook of Public Administration* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage, 2003).
- May, Peter, J., "Politics and Policy Analysis," *Political Science Quarterly* 101(1) 1986, 109–125.
- May, Peter, "Hints for Crafting Alternative Policies," *Policy Analysis* 7(2) 1981, 227–44.
- Maynard, Rebecca, "Evidence-Based Decision-Making: What Will It Take for the Decision Makers to Care?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 25(2) 2006, 249–265.
- Meltsner, Arnold J., *Policy Analysts in the Bureaucracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
- Meltsner, Arnold J., "Political Feasibility and Policy Analysis," *Public Administration Review* 32(6) 1972, 859–67.
- Mintzberg, Henry, Gurev Raisinghani, and Andre Theoret, "The Structure of Unstructured Decision Processes," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21(2) 1976, 246–75.

- Mitchell, Ronald, Bradley R. Agle, and Donna J. Wood. "Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Counts," *Academy of Management Review* 22(4) 1997, 853–888.
- Munger, Michael, C., *Analyzing Policy: Choices, Conflicts, and Practices* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).
- Musso, Janet, Robert Biller, and Robert Myrtle, "Tradecraft: Professional Writing as Problem Solving," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 19(4) 2000, 635–646.
- Nienaber, Jeanne and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Budgeting and Evaluation of Federal Recreation Programs* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
- Ostrom, Elinor, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Page, Scott E., "Path Dependence," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1(1) 2006, 87–115.
- Patton, Karl V. and David S. Sawicki, *Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning* 2nd Ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993).
- Pierson, Paul, "Dependence, Increasing Returns, and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review* 94(2) 2004, 251–267.
- Pressman, Jeffrey L. and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).
- Productivity Commission, *Public Support for Science and Innovation*, Research Report, Canberra, 2007.
- Productivity Commission, *Road and Rail Freight Infrastructure Pricing*, Report No. 41, Canberra, 2006.
- Productivity Commission, *Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia*, Research Report, Canberra, 2005.
- Productivity Commission, *Australia's Gambling Industries*, Report No. 10, Canberra, 1999.
- Radin, Beryl, *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Comes of Age* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000).
- Reich, M. *Political Mapping of Health Policy: A Guide for managing the Political Dimension of Health Policy* (Boston, MA: Harvard School of Public Health, 1994).
- Renzetti, Steven, *Wave of the Future: The Case for Smarter Water Policy* C.D. Howe Institute Commentary No. 281, February 2009.
- Sabatier, Paul, A. (ed.), *Theories of the Policy Process* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007).
- Sampson, Roger A. and Stephanie Baily Stamler, *Going Green for Less: Cost-Effective Alternative Energy Sources* C.D. Howe Institute Commentary No. 282, February 2009.
- Schmeer, Kammi, *Guidelines for Conducting a Stakeholder Analysis* (Bethesda, MD: Partnerships for Health Reform and Abt Associates Inc. 1999).
- Schneider, Anne and Helen Ingram, "The Social Construction of Target Populations," *American Political Science Review* 87(2) 1993, 334–346.

- Schneider, Anne and Helen Ingram, "Systematically Pinching Ideas: A Comparative Approach to Policy Design," *Journal of Public Policy* 8(1) 1988, 61–80.
- Shulock, Nancy, "The Paradox of Policy Analysis: If It Is Not Used, Why Do We Produce So Much of It?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 18(2) 1999, 226-244.
- Stokes, Donald E., "Political and Organizational Analysis in the Policy Curriculum," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 6(1) 1986, 45–55.
- Stone, Debra, *Policy Paradox and Political Reason* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1988).
- Varvasovszky, Zsuzsa and Ruairi Brugha, "How To Do (or Not Do) a Stakeholder Analysis," *Health Policy and Planning* 15(3) 2000, 338–345.
- Verdier, James, M., "Advising Congressional Decision-Makers: Guidelines for Economists," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 3(3) 1984, 421–38.
- Vining, Aidan R. and Anthony E. Boardman, "Metachoice in Policy Analysis," *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 8(1) 2006, 77–87.
- Weible, Christopher, M. "An Advocacy Coalition Framework Approach to Stakeholder Analysis: Understanding the Policy Context of California Marine Protected Area Policy," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 17, 2007, 95–117.
- Walters, Lawrence C., James Aydelotte and Jessica Miller, "Putting More Public in Policy Analysis," *Public Administration Review* 60(4) 2000, 349–359.
- Weimer, David L., "The Current State of Design Craft: Borrowing, Tinkering, and Problem Solving," *Public Administration Review* 53(2) 1993, 110–20.
- Weimer, David L., "The Craft of Policy Design: Can It Be More Than Art?" *Policy Studies Review* 11(3/4) 1992a, 370–388.
- Weimer, David L., "Claiming Races, Broiler Contracts, Heresthetics, and Habits: Ten Concepts for Policy Design," *Policy Sciences* 25(2) 1992b, 135–59.
- Weimer, David and Aidan R. Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice* 5th Ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011.)
- Weimer, David and Aidan R. Vining "Policy Analysis in Representative Government," in A. Gerber and Patashnik (Eds.), *Promoting the General Welfare: American Democracy and the Political Economy of Government Performance* (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 19–39.
- Williams, Walter, *Social Policy Research and Analysis* (New York: American Elsevier, 1971).
- Wildavsky, Aaron, "If Planning Is Everything, Maybe It's Nothing," *Policy Sciences* 4(2) 1973, 127–153.
- Wilson, James Q., *The Politics of Regulation* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).
- Winter, Sidney, "Implementation Perspectives: Status and Reconsideration," 212–222, in B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre, eds., *Handbook of Public Administration* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage, 2003).