



Encyclopedic Dictionary of Public Administration

The reference for understanding government action

POLICY (PROGRAM) ANALYSIS AND POLICY ANALYSIS FRAMEWORKS

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An analysis, to paraphrase the *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, is an operation that consists in breaking down a complex problem into its fundamental elements in order to understand how these elements work together. It follows that policy analysis consists in identifying the elements of public policies and proposing theories that shed new light on the relationships these elements have with one another. Such analyses, of course, may vary depending on the definition of public policy adopted by the researcher.¹ When the definition is restricted to government programs, the analyzed elements generally correspond to the programs' characteristics (for example, objectives and means) and their impacts. These analyses are commonly said to be normative, that is to say, intended to improve programs by providing advice for policy-makers.² When viewed from a broader perspective, however, analyses often appear to be explanatory in nature, seeking less to improve programs than to demystify the way policies are developed and implemented.³

Public policy analysis became a rapidly developing field in the U.S.A. after the World War II, particularly under the influence of Harold Lasswell and his propose "policy orientation." Having direct, in-depth understanding of the role played by social sciences in the Allied victory, Lasswell proposed that specialists in this field should direct their efforts towards a search for solutions to eliminate obstacles to human, social and democratic emancipation. Lasswell envisaged the emergence of the policy sciences, which would bring together experts from various disciplinary backgrounds who could grasp the complexity of the contexts engendering modern problems and thus arrive at effective solutions.⁴ The idea of a more pragmatic, public policy-oriented approach to the social sciences became hugely popular, and numerous U.S. universities established policy schools in the 1960s. Well-known examples include the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke. These schools were as interdisciplinary as Lasswell's policy sciences were, but they soon shifted away from his humanistic project, abandoning it for a technical utilitarianism

¹ Vincent Lemieux (2002) presents an excellent overview of possible definitions for the notion of public policy.

² There are naturally exceptions to this rule. See Rose and Davies (1994).

³ This does not mean that such policy analyses are more objective than program analyses. In *Policy Design for Democracy*, for example, Schneider and Ingram (1997) propose a policy analysis based on a bias (and therefore on a normative approach) in favour of a more inclusive political system.

⁴ The policy orientation is presented in Lasswell (1951). Torgerson (2007) offers an excellent synthesis of Lasswell's project.

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that, according to critics, did not take into account the political considerations that are integral to public policy development.⁵ A division of labour has thus sprung up university policy schools and political science departments. While the schools have favoured normative analyses intended to guide governments in decision making, the departments have devoted their attention to explanatory policy analyses, treating policies as the object of research that can lead to a better understanding of how democracies function. In other words, policy schools train experts who take part in developing policies, while political science departments produce analyses that frequently underline the possibilities, limits and asymmetries of power resulting from the use of expertise by government authorities.⁶

It is only in the past few years that interest in policy analysis has spread beyond the borders of the U.S.A. and other English-speaking countries.⁷ The discipline has nevertheless developed much more extensively in the U.S.A. than it has in any other country.

Most normative policy analyses are carried out within the framework of cost-benefit analysis.⁸ This framework is used particularly for policy evaluation. However, normative analyses accord increasingly more importance to participation and deliberation.⁹ Rather than prescribing public policy choices, analysts promote means of policy development and evaluation that are more inclusive of citizens and that rest on argumentative processes to a greater degree.¹⁰

The public policy cycle is perhaps the oldest framework for explanatory analysis. First proposed by Lasswell,¹¹ this framework has been refined over time and is now divided into stages representing agenda setting, policy formulation, decision making, policy implementation and policy evaluation.¹² Nevertheless, this framework does not satisfy a good number of analysts, who consider it to be more descriptive than explanatory. Alternative approaches have therefore been proposed, including the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework and Punctuated Equilibrium.¹³

⁵ On this subject, see DeLeon (1997).

⁶ On different ways of conceiving the role of expertise in policy development, see Torgerson (1986).

⁷ In France, policy analysis has become popular as a result of publications by Bruno Jobert and Pierre Muller (1987), as well as those by Yves Mény and Jean-Claude Thoenig (1989).

⁸ Munger (2000) presents an excellent synthesis of this work.

⁹ For an example, see Forester (2002).

¹⁰ See Cousins and Earl (1992).

¹¹ See Lasswell (1956).

¹² The stages in the cycle can vary from one author to another. The works of Charles Jones (1984) and James Anderson (1975) have contributed significant improvements to this framework.

¹³ The Advocacy Coalition Framework was developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith (1993), the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework by Elinor Ostrom et al. (1994) and Punctuated Equilibrium by Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones (1993). Excellent résumés of these frameworks, as well as other analytical frameworks, are presented in Sabatier (2007).

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HOW TO CITE	Montpetit, E. (2012). "Policy (Program) Analysis and Policy Analysis Frameworks," in L. Côté and J.-F. Savard (eds.), <i>Encyclopedic Dictionary of Public Administration</i> , [online], www.dictionnaire.enap.ca
INFORMATION	For further information, please visit www.dictionnaire.enap.ca
LEGAL DEPOSIT	Library and Archives Canada, 2012 ISBN 978-2-923008-70-7 (Online)