PART TWO

A Style of Policy Analysis for the Practical Public Policy Analyst

. . . providence never intended to make the management of public affairs a mystery, to be comprehended only by a few persons of sublime genius, of which there seldom are three born in an age.

—Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels

Introduction

The first part of this book closed by showing how conclusions from the social problem analysis and the analysis of historical and judicial context might indicate for the practitioner-analyst how particular features of a policy or program were (or should have been) shaped. The next step is to look closely at an actual operating policy or program design to identify its major features. Thus, the first section of Chapter 3 will present a way of looking closely at (of describing analytically) social policies and programs. It proceeds by first searching for the six fundamental elements in social policy and program designs. These are fundamental in the sense that they can be found explicitly or implicitly, in one form or another, in every social policy or program. Each element will be discussed, examples will be given, and concepts and classifications will be presented to sensitize the observer to their various forms. Once these elements are identified, a judgment is made to answer the most basic question: Are these program or policy features “good”? 
CHAPTER

3

An Overview of a Style of Policy Analysis

A Value-Critical Approach

This chapter is intended to lay the groundwork for understanding the basic tasks the practitioner as policy analyst will confront. To that end we will discuss the distinctions among the value-analytic, the value-committed, and the value-critical methods of policy analysis. Arguments will be presented in favor of the value-critical style for the use of social work and human service practitioners. Criteria for making professional judgments about the “goodness” of social policies and programs in using the value-critical style will be presented. We will also discuss how personal value preferences are taken into account. These evaluative criteria will be used throughout the succeeding chapters.

Martin Rein calls the “analytic-descriptive” method of policy analysis the alphabetical method of a social policy or program, which is a necessary step taken prior to a value-critical analysis. It proceeds by taking the policy or program apart, piece by piece, “where the intellectual challenge is to identify common features that are (or aren’t) congruent or logically consistent with each other.” But, for the practical policy analyst, description is never more than a means to an end because the most important step in analyzing program and policy features is to arrive at a judgment about them, that is, whether they are, in a particular sense, “good,” “right,” or appropriate. Policy analysis that remains at a descriptive level, leaving this question unanswered, cannot be a complete, much less a good, analysis. Coming to judgment is always a value-laden business and a practitioner as analyst should not apologize for that fact; a judgment that would try to be otherwise—somehow value neutral—is hollow because human judgment must always use values as a foundation. This “coming to judgment” creates a value-critical policy analysis as distinguished from the analytic-descriptive approach.

The method of analysis presented in this book advocates using both approaches serially. It is analytic-descriptive in proceeding first to instruct the reader how to do close description by disaggregating the social policy or program into parts (policy elements and the three contexts) and examining them one by one. It follows Rein in advocating the crucial second step, which consists in critically evaluating all of the parts and how they fit together as a whole using strong, value-based criteria by which to make judgments of their goodness, fitness, and appropriateness. In some ways, the analytic-descriptive approach is a way to see clearly how things should work. Because in the real world things almost never work out as planned, this second-step, value-critical approach then throws the conventional view (how a program should work) into question and
adopts a critical and skeptical view of how programs actually work—or don’t work. It seeks to uncover shortcomings, inconsistencies in logic, and ambiguities in the everyday program operations.

Michael Howlett’s policy review is a good example of an analytic-descriptive analysis that comes short of a value-critical analysis. At issue are policies addressing the need of poor people for low-cost housing. In Howlett’s review there is no room for consideration of what policies can or cannot do for poor folks; for example, the analysis never considers how cash, as opposed to in-kind housing benefits (housing project apartments), gives different advantages and disadvantages to the people for whom they are intended. When his analysis considers things such as complexity of operations and goes no further, it favors the interests of public administrators over poor people.

Value-critical analysis looks to ferret out policy problems through the use of value-based (biased) criteria, the function of which is to highlight problematic policy and program features. The analyst should expect to encounter conflict and divergence between the perspectives of two groups whose career interests are often quite different: (1) legislators who passed the enabling laws and (2) the middle managers and practitioners who implement the program derived and funded out of the law. This kind of policy analysis is similar to what Habermas calls “cross-frame discourse.” Out of this dialectic, implications for action arise and it is precisely the intention and purpose of this method of policy analysis to generate action from its results. The hope is to present a method that will result in reader discontent with the old and a strong motive to create something new and better, to develop a better (more useful-for-clients) way of doing things.

Rein points out yet another approach to analyzing social policies and programs (one this book will not emphasize) called the value-committed approach. This approach starts with a strongly held position about how things ought to be . . . and why they aren’t and then works out the implications of this commitment for action . . . Some Marxists and many social activists, but definitely not all, fall into this category . . . On several counts, value commitment is an important dimension for social work and human service practitioners. There are moments when they can be called by any one of the three approaches. A calling to activism is recognizable in the roots of the social work profession—a calling to actively pursue particular strongly held positions based on fundamental professional values about how things ought to be as against a very different real world. Note that in following that course, the policy discourse will then not be about operating details of policies and programs, but about more fundamental social and structural problems.

Under certain circumstances, a value-committed approach is irresistible. An example from Central America serves to clarify: From some particular value-committed points of view, there is an inherent injustice in a society in which 95 percent of a nation’s assets and income are received by 1 percent of its people, particularly in the face of unemployment rates of over 40 percent, a poverty rate that by local standards approaches 50 percent, and a level of armed violence that makes death and civilian casualties a daily occurrence. For the social work practitioner as value-committed analyst,
then, the argument should not be whether a policy of in-kind benefits like governmental commodity distributions (e.g., beans, cheese, flour, or meal) is the best way to keep people from starving (not that hunger isn’t an important policy issue). Rather, for the value-committed practitioner, the argument should be whether this kind of income maldistribution is just; the policy argument should be over what is the best means of radically altering it. An appropriate comparison that expresses the futility of small-scale adjustments against a catastrophic environment is that the prevailing state of affairs is “like rearranging chairs on the deck of the sinking Titanic.” Examples closer to home might be migrant workers in fields sprayed with pesticides or workers involved in the production of nuclear power. For purposes of the value-committed approach, the argument should not be whether workers’ compensation benefits should be administered by a public or a private profit-making insurance system (as it is in most states) but about whether some operations of high-injury industries should be permitted at all if they produce injuries at such a high rate or level of seriousness that any workers’ compensation system design will be deficient.

The value-committed approach will not take the world at face value but will seek to impose its vision onto the world and change conditions so that they are more in keeping with the ideal world envisioned. Social workers and other human service practitioners need Rein’s distinction among the three types of policy analysis in order to think clearly about which type they will opt for in any given situation. The decision is difficult because a number of questions must be weighed: “What is the ‘real’ state of the world with respect to the presenting social problem?” “What fundamental values are at stake?” “Is there plausible reason to believe that any audience exists to respond to the policy implications of a given activist approach to the social problem (i.e., will the approach have any chance of success)?”

The merits and difficulties of the value-committed approach will not be discussed in detail here because it seems a better fit with pure political activism, which is beyond the scope of this book—although the professional practice of social work does include that aspect. The point here is that professional practice goes beyond exercise of strongly held ideological conviction of the value-oriented approach. Certainly, social work practice includes political activism, but the social worker who wears the policy analyst’s hat cannot simultaneously wear the political activist’s hat. In this style of policy analysis, the two hats are mutually exclusive. Professional practitioners are called to commitment to a rationality that prizes alternative viewpoints and advocates taking them into account. They also are called to commitment to an objectivity that features multiple perspectives. However, multiple perspectives are not a major feature of the value-committed approach because it assumes that the “truth” is already known and value choices are already made.

Social work and other human services are currently much enamored of practice using multiple perspectives about the human condition, so the value-critical approach has a nice fit with the current professional preoccupation in its emphasis on multiple perspectives on the human condition.8 The value-critical approach also fits the current professional preoccupation in its assumption that no facts are independent of theories and value biases. Whereas certain kinds of facts are very unlikely to change, the value-critical approach takes the view that the selection of facts taken under consideration does vary with the theory used; the approach further posits that it is the very purpose of
theory to highlight some facts and ignore (or suppress) others. Note that for the purpose of analysis, the value-critical approach is, like all professions as a matter of fact, both conservative (in its view that the status quo might be worth saving) and radical (in calling the status quo into question).

The value-critical approach also has appeal because it can (and should be) grounded in practice experience. The questions practitioners raise are not just theoretical or just value-driven. In conducting the analysis of a social policy or program, social work and human service practitioners must bring to bear their own practice experience and, not least, their clients.

One element of the value-critical approach is that it requires teasing out the value biases and frames of reference that lie behind social problem analyses and their associated policy and program designs (ideology, causation, etc.). It develops a useful skill in elucidating competing values and frames of reference, a skill practitioners might use when confronted with conflict at any level—personal, familial, organizational, communal, or political. Practitioners need to develop this skill to be able to sort out their own organizational world. After all, each practitioner conducts her or his practice surrounded by competing values and frames of reference. For example, as indicated earlier in this chapter, organizational administrators have a frame of reference about implementing legislation or court mandates that may differ completely from that of the practitioner (the frontline practitioner) whose frame of reference about the social program design and the social problem comes from an entirely different world: street corners, interacting families, or the corridors of public schools and hospitals. Part of the business of practice is to find some rationalization for practice behaviors or program designs to bridge these competing interests and frames of reference. Social work and human service practitioners at either administrative or direct service levels don’t anymore directly implement legislation than do physicians directly implement medical care out of textbook solutions or Medicare, hospital, legal, even ecclesiastical regulations. Thus, one of the important and persuasive attributes of value-critical policy analysis is that it forces practitioners to analyze for multiple and competing values and frames of reference, to make hard choices among them, and to take even their own frames and values into question as they confront the reality of both the social world in general, the world their clients/consumers live in, and the daily operating world of organizations, laws, and public expectations.

Still, there is a utility to all this ambiguity in public policy. Social workers and human service professionals need to realize that it is precisely the lack of specificity of legislation, court decisions, historical tradition, and organizational regulation that is, in some important sense, the source of their freedom to practice while remaining faithful to their own personal values and professional frames of reference. Where legislation and regulation are precise and specific, practitioners have little discretion and their tasks are like automated decision making. Although practitioners’ freedom will be seriously restricted whenever it conflicts with or bursts the bounds of plausible relation to legislation or regulation, nonetheless, it is commonly the judgment of experienced practitioners that there is almost always more freedom to practice at the limits of organizational rules and regulations than is ever used by most social work and human service practitioners. The point is, practitioners can protect themselves as well as maximize their freedom to practice simply by having a keen awareness of the relationship between their own values and frame of reference.
about a social problem and the programmatic features designed to cope with it. A key part of the practitioner’s task is to bridge the two, and it is both an offensive and defensive practice strategy to be prepared to do so. The general principle is that a practitioner who can give a rational account of the relationships between what she or he is doing and the various frameworks that administrative or political superiors are using is less likely to experience a serious attack on his or her competence and autonomy. Martin Rein is very clear on this point:

We more typically start with practice (action) and then design policies to justify what we do. The sequence is then from practice (action) to design to purpose. Thus, policy rationalizes and legitimizes actions that arise from quite different processes.9 (emphasis added)

The advice here is not to suggest that a seat-of-the-pants behavioral style is really the way social work or human service is best practiced but only to underscore that practitioners and organizations (and street-level bureaucrats) muddle through, work things out, and try to do everything they can to be successful—then repeat what experience shows to be successful. Most likely they did begin with a guiding idea for practice, but that idea was shaped by the lived realities of both clients/consumers and helpers. The notion is that policy formed out of practice experience serves a useful function in helping to shape the resulting program and practice design. It creates a freer stance from which to conduct a professional practice; here practitioners create programs and are not simply the routinizing, bureaucratic implementers, the tools of higher organizational powers.

The major problem for this approach lies in locating and working with a set of criteria by which to make the value-critical judgment. Particular sets of criteria for each policy element will now be advocated, criteria that seem to be absolutely necessary (though probably not sufficient, of course). Other criteria could be proposed certainly, but those proposed here will force the analyst to give attention to certain features of social policies and programs that are absolutely essential if the analyst is to understand the whole. It is left to the reader to ferret out the peculiar set of underlying, fundamental value biases in the criteria presented here. One such bias is the assumption of the authors of this text about rationality, that is, the best social program being one that is internally rational and logically consistent among its parts: for example, logically consistent with the judicial decisions, which by law it is obligated to follow, logically consistent with the social problem analysis used by the legislature when the enabling legislation was enacted, and logically consistent with the social problem analysis of the agency administering the program or policy.

So, our list of evaluation criteria will begin with whether the basic elements of the program and policy are consistent with its social problem analysis. It can be said that the solution to inconsistency with the social problem analysis is not always to change program features, but one can change the social problem analysis! This is in line with two ideas: (1) Policy as well as social problem analysis can emerge from practice, not always the other way around, and (2) theories are not ultimate truth and should be shaped by practice and empirical experience as well as abstractions.

Other evaluation criteria used here will include traditional ones: equity, adequacy, and efficiency (originally developed for use in economics). Also included are
criteria that may be less familiar: trade-offs and access/coverage effects (as we have la-
beled them). Note that whereas these criteria are intended to be used for critical eval-
uation of more than one policy element, there are other criteria that are unique to a single policy element.

The next section will give a brief overview of how to do an analytic description of policy and program using the six policy elements. We will then discuss how to do the value-critical aspect of the analysis, using suggested evaluation criteria to judge the ultimate merit of the operating characteristics.

The Policy and Program Analysis Process: An Overview of the Six Fundamental Policy Elements

Six policy elements form the cornerstone of every policy and program presented daily to citizens and clients/consumers. It is these policy elements on which the practical social policy analyst ultimately will base judgments about a policy or program. Ordinary sources for information about them cannot always be relied on; and, given the size and complexity of modern social welfare programs, agency staff members, administrators, and policy manuals are not always accurate or completely informed. The six policy elements to be discussed are as follows:

1. Mission, goals, and objectives
2. Forms of benefits or services delivered
3. Entitlement (eligibility) rules
4. Administrative or organizational structure for service delivery
5. Financing method
6. Interactions among the foregoing elements

Why study these six rather than others? Because these are the six without which a social policy or program cannot be operated; that is, they are necessary to implement a program or policy system. It is simple enough to do a mental experiment to test out this idea: Suppose you have something very valuable to convey and you neither wish to bury it nor give it to kin or friends. How will you dispose of it? If you want to do it rationally, you will have to ask six questions so as to reach a decision.

1. What purpose or goal do you wish to achieve in giving this gift?
2. Given those goals, who is entitled to the gift?
3. In what form would the gift be given, assuming you could easily transform it into cash or some other gift?
4. Whom will you select to deliver it?
5. Do you want to give the whole gift at once or just the interest earned from principal, or do you wish others to help with financing by putting up some of their own money?
6. If the gift is given in cash, will recipient(s) spend it for the purpose intended (i.e., interactions in this case between goals and form of benefit)?
These same choices have to be made whenever policies or programs for the general good are to be put into effect. In an ideal world, of course, no such choices are necessary because there is an unlimited supply of what everybody needs. Unfortunately, however, in our faulty paradise, a world in which it is not the case that everybody has enough, social welfare policy and programs are necessary.

Social policy is concerned with the six elements enumerated because, in the final analysis, they are the basis on which social policies and programs ration and distribute benefits, select beneficiaries, and attempt to ensure that money, goods, and services are used efficiently, effectively, and without waste. Some public commentators remark sarcastically that social welfare policy and programs are futile because they attempt to bring paradise to an inherently imperfect world; the reality is quite the opposite—the benefits of paradise are self-selected, self-rationed, and occasioned by justice. Social welfare policy is about selection and rationing in an attempt to correct injustice. Social welfare policy is about a concrete empirical world and the attempt to moderate its sometimes cruel and inhumane effects. We will talk more later about how the challenge to social policies and programs is to be successful in moderating one cruel effect without creating another, more cruel effect.

Table 3.1 lists two additional types of information for each operating characteristic: subtypes and evaluation criteria. When the practical policy analyst studies the policy elements of particular social welfare program or benefit systems, it becomes clear that there are only a limited number of ways in which those criteria are expressed; for example, only about a half-dozen (more or less) subtypes of entitlement or eligibility rules are apparent. That is not to say that an inventive mind couldn’t think of others or that certain programs (domestic or foreign) might not have others. Column 2 of Table 3.1 summarizes the main subtypes of policy elements—for example, the main subtypes of forms of benefits are cash, commodities, personal social services, and so on. This summary provides a quick and handy reference for describing the main features of any social welfare service or benefit program. The subtypes listed in Table 3.1 are intended for use by the practical policy analyst who daily encounters a world full of new and old social programs and policies that he or she must evaluate in order to know whether they are useful to clients/consumers.

These subtypes are not mutually exclusive; that is, a particular social welfare program or policy may use more than one kind of entitlement rule or financing method. For example, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program that pays monthly benefits to people who are age 65 or older or blind or have a disability who pass a means test for income and resources. A means test covers only one part of eligibility. Note that age status is an eligibility criterion for some individuals to qualify. The exercise of professional judgment is factored in for persons to qualify as blind or disabled. Diagnostic criteria are applied to others who may be eligible for disability benefit entitlements. Qualified professionals determine whether a physical or mental problem keeps an individual from working, or when deciding if a child is disabled; SSI looks at how his or her disability affects everyday life. In addition to federally financed SSI benefits, many states also add money to the basic benefits. Furthermore, SSI-eligible individuals may also be able to get assistance from the Food Stamp program, Medicaid benefits, and additional social and rehabilitation services.

How each operating characteristic is evaluated is discussed in the following section.
### TABLE 3.1 Policy Element Subtypes and Evaluation Criteria for a Value-Critical Appraisal of Social Policies and Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Policy Element</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Evaluation Criteria</th>
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| Mission, Goals, and Objectives | 1. principles or purpose  
2. long term/short term  
3. manifest/latent | 1. criteria specific to goals and objectives  
(a) not just service delivery but end product  
(b) clarity, measurability, manipulability  
(c) inclusion of performance standards and target specifications |
| | | 2. implications of goals and objectives for adequacy, equity, and efficiency |
| | | 3. fit of goals and objectives with the social problem analysis: problem definition and variables (consequences) in causal analysis |
| Forms of Benefits and Services | 1. personal social services  
(a) “expert services”  
2. “hard benefits”: cash, goods, commodities  
3. positive discrimination  
4. credits/vouchers  
5. subsidies  
6. government loan guarantees  
7. protective regulations  
8. supervision of deviance  
9. power over decisions | 1. criteria specific to benefits and services  
(a) stigmatization  
(b) target efficiency  
(c) cost-effectiveness  
(d) substitutability  
(e) consumer sovereignty  
(f) trade-offs  
(g) coerciveness/intrusiveness  
(h) complexity and cost of administration  
(i) adaptability across users  
(j) political risk |
| | | 2. implications of benefit/service for adequacy, equity, and efficiency |
| | | 3. fit of benefit/service form with the social problem analysis |
| Eligibility Rules | 1. means/asset tests  
2. administrative rule  
3. private contract provision  
4. prior contributions  
5. professional discretion  
6. judicial decision  
7. attachment to workforce | 1. criteria specific to eligibility rules  
(a) over-/underutilization  
(b) overwhelming costs  
(c) stigma/alienation  
(d) disincentive for work  
(e) incentives for procreational and marital breakup and/or generational dependence |
| | | 2. fit with social problem analysis: problem definition/target group specifications |
| | | 3. implications of eligibility rules for adequacy, equity, and efficiency |
Criteria for a Value-Critical Appraisal of Social Policy and Programs

Column 3 of Table 3.1 lists evaluation criteria by which the policy analyst can judge why and how a particular program has implemented each policy element and, ultimately, the worth of the program and policy system. For example, a mission statement (if available) gives the policy analyst descriptive information on the purpose of a policy or program. A mission statement tends to be very general and ambitious—a call for action, so to speak. Goals are also general (abstract) statements that may elaborate on the direction of policy or program initiatives to fulfill a mission and, at a minimum, can be evaluated on the basis of clarity. Objectives are concrete, stated more specifically as intended outcomes to achieve goals. The policy analyst will want to evaluate whether objectives are
measurable and manipulable, identify a target population, give reference to time parameters, and use other such criteria. Forms of benefits and services may be examined from a number of perspectives, particularly regarding the extent to which they are appropriate for addressing the presenting social problem. A means test (eligibility rule) should be evaluated on the basis of whether it creates stigmatization, alienation, or off-target benefits. Administration and service delivery evaluation criteria guide the analyst in determining whether benefits and services effectively reach the client/consumer. Finally, financing evaluation criteria address the adequacy of resources committed to resolve the social problem and who commits resources and in what manner.

The method of policy analysis contained in this book actually suggests three general but very different types of criteria for evaluating the features of social program and policy systems. The first type uses the social problem analysis as a referent, the evaluation issue being whether the policy or program has any potential for making an impact on the social problem it was intended to solve. In this mode, the practitioner asks certain questions:

- Do the entitlement rules direct benefits at the entire population defined to have the social problem, or do they only reach a subgroup?
- Do the goals and objectives of the program or policy system fit a social problem as defined?
- Can this form of benefit produce a significant impact on the causal factors believed to produce the social problem?
- Does the policy or program recognize or build on the strengths or assets of those affected by the social problem?

The second type is made up of those traditional value perspectives—adequacy, equity, and efficiency. For example, one might ask: “Is delivery of commodities rather than cash as a form of benefit a more efficient (cost-effective) way to solve the problem of nutrition?” An example of the adequacy criterion lies in the question: “Is the counseling adequate to the task of creating change of sufficient magnitude?” Similarly, a practical policy analyst might be evaluating a particular service delivery type against both an equity criterion and an adequacy criterion when she or he asks: “To what extent does the case-management style of service delivery increase the ability of the policy and program system to relate to the ethnic and racial diversity of its target population?” It is more than a little useful for the practitioner to be aware of what root questions are being asked (whether adequacy, equity, or efficiency questions) when a program and policy system are being judged for merit.

The reader should be alert to the possibility that many of the questions about adequacy are answered in the context of evaluating the fit of a policy element with the social problem analysis. In fact, one of the most important functions of a social problem analysis is to provide an internally consistent basis for judging whether the policy/program design/policy system is a “good” one. For example, a good social problem analysis will describe who is affected and (obviously) the policy or program solution must address those very people in order to be judged adequate. And recall that a good social problem analysis will describe the consequences at the heart of why the problem is considered to be a social problem—
obviously, in order for the policy or program design to be judged adequate, it has to (plausibly) make an impact on just that problematic condition. The basic question is whether it is believable (or whether there is any evidence) that the program design can do that.

The adequacy/equity/efficiency criteria were developed by economists. When they use them, it is out of a concern for large-scale economic matters: changes in the characteristics of the national workforce, profitability of big industrial employers, gross domestic product, the national wage scales, and the like. Those are surely important matters but not very useful to social program implementers and designers since they are not factors within their reach. No one likely to read this book would design or implement a program intended to raise the national worker wage scale—though that might, indeed, go a long way toward the solution of some social problems. Economists, bless their souls, do have a good deal to say about how that might be accomplished, though they aren’t often right on target. The economists’ perspective is to judge the adequacy of public policy by how it contributes to an economy that rewards and encourages capital investment and the creation of national wealth. It is nearly inescapable that economists believe that what benefits wealth holders almost always and necessarily benefits workers and the general population. Although that might be true over some long time spans, it is often not the case for the near term of a few years, the time scale social practitioners and their needful clients/consumers work with. They are concerned with immediately presenting problems. Sadly, and as anyone knows from having read reliable accounts of large-scale unemployment resulting from large corporations profiting from shifting production overseas, corporate downsizing, and mergers, much of the profits in the U.S. economy goes into the pockets of those already wealthy, whereas the national income share of the middle and working class remains stable or decreases. 

Thus, judgments of policy/program adequacy for the practical policy analyst/practitioner uses the social problem analysis perspective, and its ideological/causal perspective focuses on the consequences for persons and citizens, not on the effects on the economy.

The reader can find the economists’ focus on equity useful, that is, on whether a policy or program design does treat similarly situated program participants in the same way. Inequities are sometimes (legitimately) designed into policies and programs, of course, but the point here is that inequities need to be searched out, identified, and examined for their consequences, intended or not. And the same can be said of efficiencies. Even though there are prominent exceptions, for the most part, the program or policy that is most efficient or cost-effective is the best choice—if for no other reason, the least cost alternative allows the always scarce social welfare dollar to go to more people in need.

The third type of criteria with which to evaluate policy elements for their worthiness are those used only for a particular policy element. Good examples are “includes target specifications” or “performance standards,” which can be used only for evaluating goals and objectives. Notice that it would make no sense to ask whether some benefit form like a “voucher” has “target specifications.” “Target specifications” are peculiar to goals and objectives.

In summary, then, the evaluation criteria the practical policy analyst should use for deciding the merit of the policy elements in a program, service, or policy system will always include
1. the fit of the policy element to the social problem of concern
2. the consequences of the policy element with regard to adequacy, equity, and efficiency for clients/consumers and program participants
3. criteria that are uniquely useful for a single policy element but not others

We will save a more detailed look at evaluation criteria for the specific chapters on each policy element that follow this overview.

Summary

Chapter 3 contrasted three styles of policy analysis: the analytic-descriptive, the value-committed, and the value-critical methods. While recognizing that political occasions will arise during which it is essential, the value-committed approach is rejected because it is not open to new data or conclusions. This fact argues for the value-critical style, which forces into the open whatever ideology is inherent in the analytic method used and the fundamental value commitments of the analyst in whose hands the method rests. Taken into the open, the effects of ideology can be observed and accounted for. Although useful, the sole use of the analytic-descriptive method fails in policy analysis because it commits the analyst to untenable assumptions: for example, that judgments about the goodness or merit of a social policy or program can be made in a value-free way. Such assumptions are unrealistic because any judgment of social program merit requires judgment of social worthiness—which simply cannot be made absent a strong value commitment. The virtue of the value-critical method is that it forces value commitments into the open and, therefore, gives both the analyst and his or her audience great freedom in using (or not using) the data produced from the analysis. This approach also enables practitioners to decide whether they are in agreement with the conclusions, to sort them selectively, or to freely substitute their own value biases and draw different conclusions. That sort of freedom can be used at different levels—either with regard to particular social program or policy operating characteristics or with regard to summary judgments.

Value commitments inherent in this preferred method of policy analysis are rationality, logical consistency, and reaching conclusions by a contrast between various value perspectives and between program means used to realize them. Other basic value commitments inherent in the analytic method are adequacy, equity, and efficiency.

Exercise

1. Complete the following mental experiment: Your physician has just told you that you have a fatal and incurable illness. You have just eight weeks to live. On returning home from the physician’s office, you decide not to go berserk today (perhaps tomorrow), at least not until you open your mail. There is an envelope with a strange return address on it, foreign stamps in fact. Opening it first, you learn that you have inherited several million dollars, being the last living heir to a European fortune. A quick calculation shows that
you cannot possibly spend it all in eight weeks. Then you decide you do not want to give it either to friends or relatives—your closest friend recently offended you and your closest relative died three years ago. Use the six basic policy elements to decide how you want to dispose of the money.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. x.
4. Ibid., pp. 6–9.

7. Rein, From Policy to Practice, p. x.
10. Elements 2, 3, 4, and 6 were used by Evelyn Burns in a book titled The American Social Security System (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1949) and we assume that (collectively) they are original with her. Her ultimate sources may lie somewhere in the British tradition of social policy studies, of course. Many contemporary authors use N. Gilbert and H. Specht, Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974). We have added new operating characteristics in the belief that they are important to a thorough analysis: Goals and Objectives and Interactions among Elements.
The Sixth Edition of A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis presents dozens of concrete tips, new case studies, and step-by-step strategies for the budding analyst as well as the seasoned professional. Bundle with select CQ Press textbooks for only $5! See the bundles section on the right of this screen or contact your textbook representative for additional information. Policy analysis is a technique used in public administration to enable civil servants, activists, and others to examine and evaluate the available options to implement the goals of laws and elected officials. The process is also used in the administration of large organizations with complex policies. It has been defined as the process of "determining which of various policies will achieve a given set of goals in light of the relations between the policies and the goals."