Policy content, types, cycles and analysis

Contents

1. Policy content

Policies are typically promulgated through official written documents. Policy documents often come with the endorsement or signature of the executive powers within an organization to legitimize the policy and demonstrate that it is considered in force. Such documents often have standard formats that are particular to the organization issuing the policy. While such formats differ in form, policy documents usually contain certain standard components including:

- A purpose statement, outlining why the organization is issuing the policy, and what its desired effect or outcome of the policy should be.
- An applicability and scope statement, describing who the policy affects and which actions are impacted by the policy. The applicability and scope may expressly exclude certain people, organizations, or actions from the policy requirements. Applicability and scope is used to focus the policy on only the desired targets, and avoid unintended consequences where possible.
- An effective date which indicates when the policy comes into force. Retroactive policies are rare, but can be found.
- A responsibilities section, indicating which parties and organizations are responsible for carrying out individual policy statements. Many policies may require the establishment of some ongoing function or action. For example, a purchasing policy might specify that a purchasing office be created to process purchase requests, and that this office would be responsible for ongoing actions.

Responsibilities often include identification of any relevant oversight and/or governance structures.

- Policy statements indicating the specific regulations, requirements, or modifications to organizational behavior that the policy is creating. Policy statements are extremely diverse depending on the organization and intent, and may take almost any form.

Some policies may contain additional sections, including:

- Background, indicating any reasons, history, and intent that led to the creation of the policy, which may be listed as motivating factors. This information is often quite valuable when policies must be evaluated or used in ambiguous situations, just as the intent of a law can be useful to a court when deciding a case that involves that law.
- Definitions, providing clear and unambiguous definitions for terms and concepts found in the policy document.

2. Types of policies

The following is a sample of several different types of policies broken down by their effect on members of the organization.

➢ Distributive policies

Distributive policies extend goods and services to members of an organization, as well as distributing the costs of the goods/services amongst the members of the organization. Examples include government policies that impact spending for welfare, public education, highways, and public safety, or a professional organization's benefits plan.

➢ Regulatory policies

Regulatory policies, or mandates, limit the discretion of individuals and agencies, or otherwise compel certain types of behavior. These policies are generally thought to be best

applied when good behavior can be easily defined and bad behavior can be easily regulated and punished through fines or sanctions. An example of a fairly successful public regulatory policy is that of a speed limit.

➢ Constituent policies

Constituent policies create executive power entities, or deal with laws. Constituent policies also deal with Fiscal Policy in some circumstances.

➢ Miscellaneous policies

Policies are dynamic; they are not just static lists of goals or laws. Policy blueprints have to be implemented, often with unexpected results. Social policies are what happens 'on the ground' when they are implemented, as well as what happens at the decision making or legislative stage.

When the term policy is used, it may also refer to:

- Official government policy (legislation or guidelines that govern how laws should be put into operation)
- Broad ideas and goals in political manifestos and pamphlets
- A company or organization's policy on a particular topic. For example, the equal opportunity policy of a company shows that the company aims to treat all its staff equally.

The actions the organization actually takes may often vary significantly from stated policy. This difference is sometimes caused by political compromise over policy, while in other situations it is caused by lack of policy implementation and enforcement. Implementing policy may have unexpected results, stemming from a policy whose reach extends further than the problem it was originally crafted to address. Additionally, unpredictable results may arise from selective or idiosyncratic enforcement of policy.

3. Policy cycle

The Policy Cycle framework suggests that the policy process develops along sequential logical stages of problem solving, in which policy decisions are made by decision makers, with one stage informing the next. "Decision-making is not a self contained stage, nor is it synonymous with the entire public policymaking process. Rather it is a specific stage rooted firmly in the previous stages of the policy cycle.

The policy cycle usually includes the following stages: Agenda setting, problem definition and analysis, policy tools selection, implementation, enforcement and evaluation. It is widely agreed that policy cycle, as a framework, is an ideal type from which every reality curves away. In actuality, different stages are sometimes shaped simultaneously and there may be a succession of feedback loops.

The rational for observing each stage separately –is that each stage differs from the others in the sort of activities it involves, the expertise it requires, and the procedures that govern it. Another important insight contributed by the stages model is the understanding that different stages provide different sets of outcome, which affect other stages, even if they occur simultaneously. Differentiating between the stages activities, procedures, outcomes, and other characteristics reveals that the interests in shaping each stage outcomes vary between actors and affect the actors' participation.
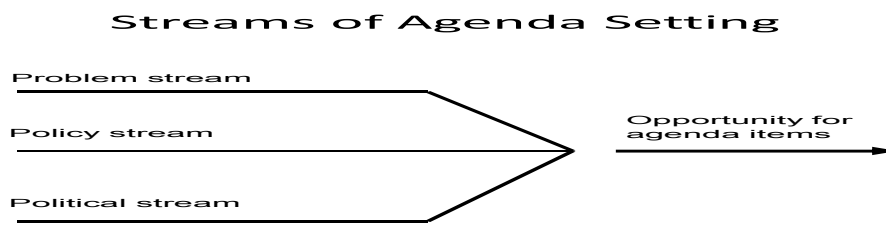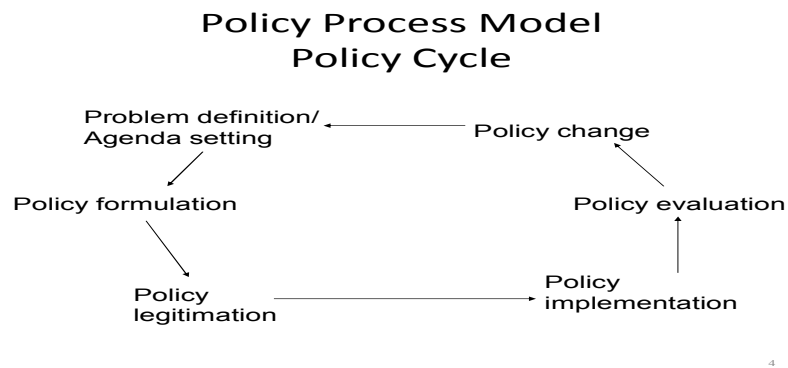
The policy cycle is a tool used for the analyzing of the development of a policy item. It can also be referred to as a "stagist approach". One standardized version includes the following stages:

1. Agenda setting (Problem identification)
2. Policy Formulation
3. Adoption
4. Implementation

5. Evaluation

An eight step policy cycle is developed in detail in The Australian Policy Handbook by Peter Bridgman and Glyn Davis:

1. Issue identification
2. Policy analysis
3. Policy instrument development
4. Consultation (which permeates the entire process)
5. Coordination
6. Decision
7. Implementation
8. Evaluation

Policy Process Model
Policy Cycle

Problem definition/ Agenda setting ← Policy change

Policy formulation → Policy legitimation → Policy implementation → Policy evaluation → Policy change

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Streams of Agenda Setting

Problem stream
Policy stream
Political stream
→ Opportunity for agenda items →

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4. Policy Analysis Models

Institutional model

Public policy is determined by political institutions, which give policy legitimacy. Government universally applies policy to all citizens of society and monopolizes the use of force in applying policy. The legislature, executive and branches of government are examples of institutions that give policy legitimacy.

Process model

Policy creation is a process following these steps:

- Identification of a problem and demand for government action.
- Formulation of policy proposals by various parties (e.g., congressional committees, think tanks, interest groups).
- Selection and enactment of policy; this is known as Policy Legitimation.
- Implementation of the chosen policy.
- Evaluation of policy.

This model, however, has been criticized for being overly linear and simplistic.[5] In reality, stages of the policy process may overlap or never happen. Also, this model fails to take the multiple actors attempting the process itself as well as each other, and the complexity this entails.

Rational model

The rational model of decision-making is a process for making logically sound decisions in policy making in the public sector, although the model is also widely used in private corporations. Herber Simon, the father of rational models, describes rationality as "a style of behavior that is appropriate to the achievement of given goals, within the limits imposed by given conditions and constraints".

Furthermore, as we have seen, in the context of policy rational models are intended to achieve maximum social gain. For this purpose, Simon identifies an outline of a step by step mode of analysis to achieve rational decisions using the following steps:

1. Intelligence gathering— data and potential problems and opportunities are identified, collected and analyzed.
2. Identifying problems
3. Assessing the consequences of all options
4. Relating consequences to values— with all decisions and policies there will be a set of values which will be more relevant (for example, economic feasibility and environmental protection) and which can be expressed as a set of criteria, against which performance (or consequences) of each option can be judged.
5. Choosing the preferred option— given the full understanding of all the problems and opportunities, all the consequences and the criteria for judging options.

The decision criteria used in the analysis of environmental policy is often a mix of —

- Ecological impacts — such as biodiversity, water quality, air quality, habitat quality, species population, etc.

- Economic efficiency — commonly expressed as benefits and costs.

- Distributional equity — how policy impacts are distributed amongst different demographics. Factors that can affect the distribution of impacts include location, ethinicity, income, and occupation.

- Social/Cultural acceptability — the extent to which the policy action may be opposed by current social norms or cultural values.

- Operational practicality — the capacity required to actually operationalize the policy. For example,

- Legality — the potential for the policy to be implemented under current legislation versus the need to pass new legislation that accommodates the policy.

- Uncertainty — the degree to which the level of policy impacts can be known.

Some criteria, such as economic benefit, will be more easily measurable or definable, while others such as environmental quality will be harder to measure or express quantitatively. Ultimately though, the set of decision criteria needs to embody all of the policy goals, and overemphasising the more easily definable or measurable criteria, will have the undesirable impact of biasing the analysis towards a subset of the policy goals.