

The Policy Process

Chapter Summary

Policy development in the public sector involves an examination of the decision-making systems in government. The policy process involves establishing the goals, means, and how to achieve them in a set of inter-related stages. There has been much debate and comparative study on understanding the complexity of the public policy process. Following the works of Hall (1989, 1993) and Lasswell (1956, 1971), a proposed model is offered by the author, identifying five stages of the policy cycle and their relationship to applied problem solving and decision-making.

All five stages of this model can explain how the many actors are involved in making decisions toward a policy outcome. In the first stage of agenda-setting, or the policy universe, a wide variety of different actors can identify and contribute to the development of the political agenda. The second stage, policy formulation, involves many different actors who possess some specialized knowledge or understanding of the problem or issue and can offer different options for response to the issue. This sub-system of the policy universe then becomes smaller when, in the third stage, the governmental decision-makers who have the authority will choose a policy option. In the fourth stage of policy implementation, the number of actors can increase again, as these people are the ones who are responsible for implementing the chosen policy option. The fifth stage of evaluation once again includes the entire policy universe to effectively evaluate and assess the policy to see if it achieved its intended objectives.

An overview of some of the major theories and approaches to understanding the public policy process offers some historical context and further perspective as well as identifying their many criticisms. In particular, several theories such as the rational model by Lindblom (1959), the writings of Simon (1955) and March and Olsen (1979) offered some unique but, as noted by the author, limited versions of explaining and understanding the complex processes of the policy cycle. Other studies by Cobb, Ross, and Ross (1976) also expand on the aspect of agenda setting by identifying additional styles, such as outside initiation, mobilization, inside initiation, and consolidation. However, further discussion on policy styles is also examined in respect to policy

communities, policy networks, decision-making styles, policy implementation, and policy evaluation stages.

The key to an examination of the different policy styles in each of these stages is the acknowledgement of the administrative capacity to interpret, implement, and apply a particular policy style to a problem or issue. As is acknowledged throughout the chapter, it helps to understand the different approaches of the policy process to appreciate how a policy is determined and eventually implemented at the political level.

Annotated Weblinks

- 1) <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/public-policy/>

The Canadian Encyclopedia provides a comprehensive overview and detailed examples of the public policy process in Canada, along with further details of the intricacies of the policy system.

- 2) <http://www.pco.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=information&sub=publications&doc=legislation/chap2.2-eng.htm>

The Privy Council Office created a site focused on development and Cabinet approval of policy outlining the legal and policy considerations for the government through the approval and enactment stages.

- 3) <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/policy/Pages/policy-management-framework.aspx>

This site provides an outline and framework for policy development by Library and Archives Canada.