

Defining Policy Analysis: A Journey That Never Ends

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My comment on Beryl A. Radin, *Policy Analysis in the Twenty-First Century* (2019):

“Radin draws on her extensive scholarship and experience to produce a book that will be very valuable for those entering, or considering entering, the increasingly diverse field of policy analysis. By conveying the many contexts in which policy analysts practice, the book’s cases will help aspiring analysts better match their personal values to the varieties of roles available in the policy making process.”

Narrow definition of policy analysis from professional perspective:

“Policy Analysis is client-oriented advice relevant to public decisions and informed by social values.” Weimer and Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice* (1989).

TAXONOMY OF "POLICY ANALYSIS"		CLIENT VERSUS SOCIETAL FOCUS	
		Client Focus	Academic/Societal Focus
SUBSTANTIVE VERSUS PROCESS FOCUS	Substantive Policy/ Policy Analytic Focus	<p><i>Policy Analysis (narrowly defined)</i></p> <p>Problem-solving focus</p> <p>Economics preeminent</p> <p>Comprehensive: problem analysis (market and government failure, synthesis, solution analysis (alternatives, goals, assessment)</p> <p>Goals typically clear, or at least emergently clear; efficiency (cost-benefit) or efficiency, equity, government revenue-expenditure (multi-goal)</p>	<p><i>Policy Research/Policy Sciences</i></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 especially economics and political science</p> <p>Partial or fragmentary (in terms of policy problem)</p> <p>Goals contestable</p>
	Policy Process Focus	<p><i>Political/Organizational Analysis (or Stakeholder Analysis)</i></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 predictive, rather than normative: goal is adoption and implementation</p>	<p><i>Policy Process Research</i></p> <p>All social science, but especially 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: Aidan R. Vining and David L. Weimer, "Policy Analysis," *Foundations of Public Administration Series* (2010).

TABLE 7.1
Comparison of Policy Research with Policy Analysis

Approach Characteristics	Policy Research (common practice)	Policy Analysis (canonical)
Values	Selective; Implicit	Comprehensive; Explicit
Alternatives	Single; Generic	Multiple; Concrete
Primary Client	Research community	Decision maker
Time Frame	Driven by methodology	Driven by decision
Intellectual Resources	Disciplinary	Eclectic
Recommendation	Single impact; General	Tradeoffs; Very specific
Dissemination	Broad	Narrow

Source: David L. Weimer, "Making Education Research More Policy Analytic," in Gary Sykes, Barbara Schneider, and David N. Plank, eds. *Handbook of Education Policy Research*. New York: Routledge (2009), 93–100.