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Public Policy Analysis Models

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Abstract:

Due to the amount of uncertainty in public policy – making, the idea has taken shape that public policy should be studied to better comprehend its various facets, that is, the input to and output of policy, and also the participants and factors involved in policy – making. The consequence has been the development of various analytical models which could be used to explain the policy results. The first category is concerned with the way in which the participants in policy – making tackle the problem and to what extent they take cognizance of the factors involved in policy – making. It is a descriptive approach. The second category is concerned with how the participants in policy making should act. This is prescriptive approach. This constitutes the subject of their article.

Keywords: *public policy analysis, models, descriptive approach, prescriptive approach, and policy – making.*

1. Introduction

We are all model builders in the sense that we need to see some sort of pattern in the world around us and tend to interpret events in terms of perceived pattern (Hogwood and Gunn, 1994:42). The subject of discussion is public policy analysis models.

2. Purpose of the Article

The purpose is to:

- a) Define the terms ‘model’, ‘theory’ and ‘conceptual framework, and
- b) Identify and explain the two types of models, namely, descriptive and prescriptive approaches to public policy analysis.

3. Public Policy Analysis Models

3.1. Few Basic Questions

Few basic questions require clarifications. For example,

What is a model?

What is meant by a theory or a conceptual framework?

What is meant by public policy analysis?

3.2. Possible Answers, Examples and Illustrations

1. A model: is a mental image or a theory which represents a conceptual framework that is a set of interdependent concepts.

→ Synonymous terms:

Model

Theory

Conceptual framework



Interdependent and used synonymously

We may therefore sum up by saying that model or theory in the sense of a conceptual framework is both the result of conceptualization and a guide to further conceptualization.

2. What is meant by public policy analysis

According to Professor Robert A. Goldwin [1980], an eminent American public policy scientist, public policy analysis is described as a systematic and deliberate endeavour to measure the costs and benefits of various policy alternatives; and to evaluate actual practical results, or proposed governmental activities in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness [Jenkins – Smith:]

3. Theories involved in public policy analysis

Owing to the amount of uncertainty involved in public policy – making, the idea took shape that public policy should be studied in order to better understand its various facets, that is, the input to and output of policy, and also the participants and factors involved in policy – making. The result was the development of various analytical models which could be used to explain the policy – making process and or to explain the results of policies.

1. The first category is based on behavioural theory and is concerned with the way in which the participants in policy – making tackle the problem and to what extent they take cognizance of the factors involved in policy – making. In other words, it is a descriptive approach.
2. The second category is concerned with normative theory and a prescriptive approach, that is, how the participants in policy – making ought to act.

3.3. Public Policy Analysis Models

Public policy analysis models may be called theories involved in public policy analysis.

Two categories of public policy analysis models, namely, the descriptive and prescriptive approaches lead to specific groups of analysis models, that is, the descriptive and the prescriptive models.

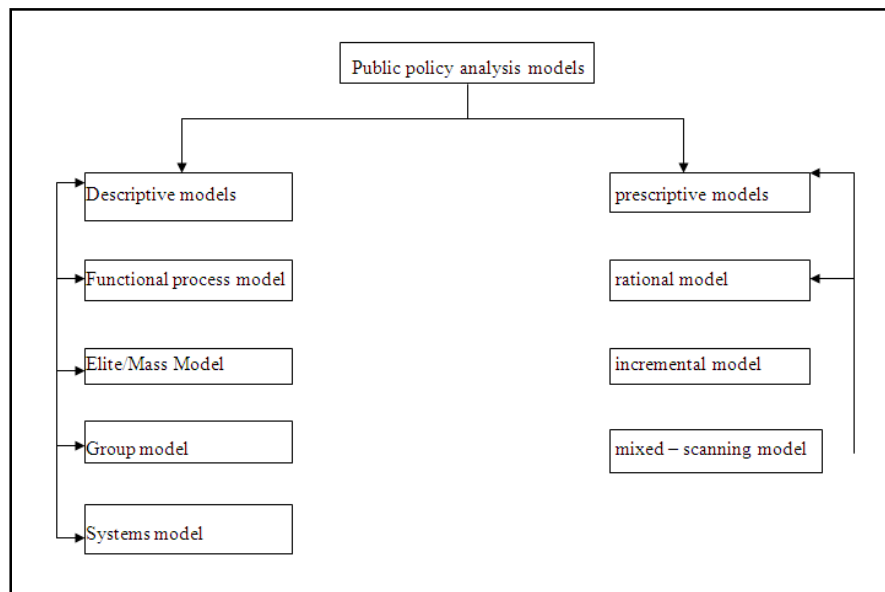


Figure 1: Institutional model

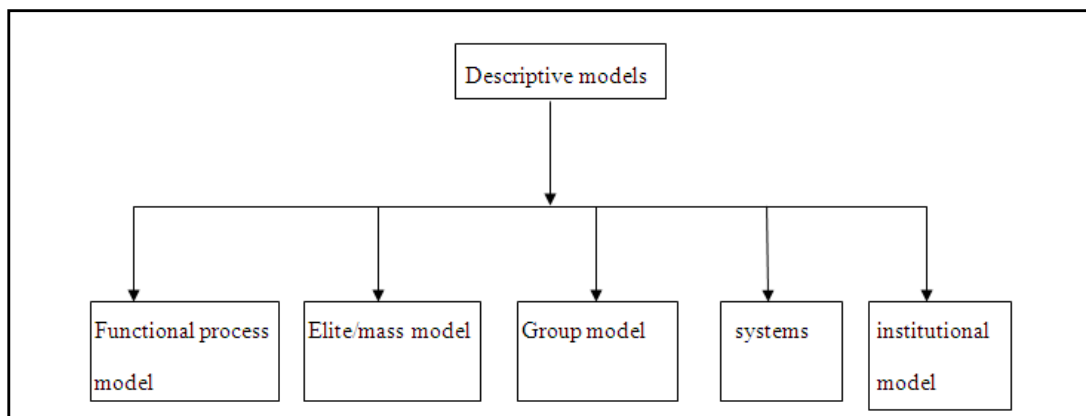


Figure 2: Descriptive Models

4. Explanations of Descriptive Models

The descriptive models deal with the actual process of public policy – making, the individuals and or groups involved and also the institutions concerned with public policy – making.

4.1. Functional Process Model

According to J. E. Anderson [1979:20 -21], an analysis of the functional activities involved in policy – making involves considerations of;

- Alternative solutions
- Participants in policy – making and execution;
- Adjudication measures to ensure adherence to the law,
- Judgment pertaining to the success or failure of a specific policy, and
- adaption of legislator measures.

The functional process model is particularly suitable for a comparative study of policy – making. It is not without defects, however: consideration of the aspects referred to above could create the idea that policy – formulation is nothing but intellectual process, which in turn could lead to the disregard of certain variable.

Notwithstanding the inherent inadequacies of this model, consideration of the aspects on which the model is based can contribute towards rationality can be obtained regarding specific functional activities involved in the formulation of policy.

4.2. Elite/Mass Model/ Kings and Kingmakers

According to T. R. Dye [1978:25 – 8] the elite/mass model; Nicholas Henry [1975:231] postulates that is small elite group is responsible for the formulation policy and that the small elite group governs a large, passive ill – informed public. Public policy thus flows downwards from the elite to the masses and is applied by a select group of appointed public officials.

The idea created by the elite/mass model of that the elite have consensus of opinion on policy and that the interests of the masses are secondary to the interest of the elite. The kingmakers occupy the top level of the public policy hierarchy. This idea could well prove to be a major area conflict of interest.

- Does the elite always have consensus?
- Will they continue to have consensus?
- Are the needs of the masses secondary to the needs of the elite?
- Do public officials merely execute policies or do the contribute towards policy formulation?

An advantage of this model for analyzing public policy lies in its identification of contribution of specific groups involved in policy formulation and policy execution. If thus becomes possible to determine who is responsible for what is made applicable to whom.

4.3. Group Model

According to T. R. Dye [1978:23 – 25 and N. Henry 1975:231 – 233], the interaction between pressure groups or interest groups may pay an important part in the formulation of policy. A pressure group usually acts as a link between the individual and the policy – maker, and the importance of the group determines its contribution to policy, the legislator, however, always the final arbitrator and uses legislative measures to ratify the result of group influence and demands. Changes in the group’s influence on the public marker may have a direct bearing on policy, as a movement to towards or away from the group’s demands. It should be noted that the struggle between the two [Dye 1978:24] could have a descriptive effect on the formulation of policy, especially if the policy – maker is ultra – sensitive to the influence of groups, of it the policy – maker is inclined to favour the demands of a specific group to the disadvantage of other groups.

The value of the group model for public policy analysis lies in the identification of pressure groups and the acceptance that they do have the power to influence policy, and as a result cannot be disregarded when an analysis is made of a specific policy.

4.4. Systems Model

According to both T. R. Dye [1978:37 – 9] and Nicholas Henry [1975:233], in the systems model inputs from the external environment such as community needs and problems serve as the basis for action by the policy – maker. Through intensive debate, compromise and consensus, decisions are taken on what is to be done to alleviate problems or to satisfy needs, that is, a policy (output) pertaining to the debate aspect is made, the results of the adopted policy again serve as a feedback to the system.

The value of the systems model of public policy analysis is to be found in the continuous feedback implied by utilizing the policy results as additional inputs to the system. In this way it is possible to determine whether a specific policy indeed has the effect intended by the policy – maker.

The conversation of inputs into outputs is, however, not clear:

- Were the feedbacks taken into account?
- If so, to what extent?
- Was consensus achieved on what is to benefit to the community of the community or was it a question of compromise for the sake of saving face?

4.5. Institutional Model

The institutional model of public analysis [Henry 1975:233 – 5; Dyke 1978:20 – 3] is supposed to describe the roles of public institutions involved in public policy – making and to analyze the public policies as products of institutions, either as policies formulated by or implemented by public institution, or both.

The importance of the institutional model is to be found in the possibility of formulating uniform policy which is given legitimacy by the legislator, thus ensuring legislative monopoly in deciding what the policy – maker wants to do with the society or a community group.

It should be pointed out that although policies can be formulated in public institutions such as departments of state, these policies have no significance unless legitimized by the legislator and unless the execution of the policies by public institution – is within the parameters laid down by the legislator.

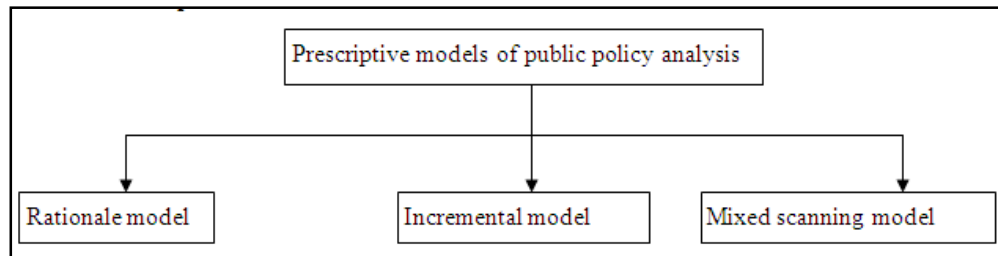


Figure 3: Prescriptive models

5. Explanations of Prescriptive Models

The prescriptive approach to public policy making is concerned with normative theory that is how policy makers should act, must act and ought to act under certain given circumstances, three main public making models can be linked to the prescriptive approach: namely, the rational, the incremental and the mixed – scanning models of public analysis.

5.1. Rational Model

According to both T. R. Dye [1978:28 – 32 and Nicholas Henry 1975:236 – 43], the rational policy – making model requires: -

- Intimate knowledge of all the value preferences of the community, as well as
- Knowledge of all the possible alternative approaches which can be followed to satisfy community needs.

Furthermore, the results of each alternative must be known.

If these are known, the results should be a rational policy decision.

→ Shortcoming

Unfortunately, this is also where the major limitation of this model lies: there is no consensus on community values, with the result that it becomes impossible to formulate an extensive range of alternatives to satisfy needs or to calculate the results of each alternative.

5.2. Incremental Model

According to both T. R. Dye [1978:32 – 4 and Nicholas Henry 1975:235 – 6] has as point of departure that existing policies are legitimate and satisfactory and probably only marginally ineffective, and should thus be adapted incrementally to eliminate those aspects which are no longer effective.

The advantage of incremental policy – making can be found in its low conflict potential, relatively expeditions adaptations to changing circumstances, and in its flexibility: it is quite possible to make adaptations and then at a later stage return to the initial policy. For analysis purposes it can then entail looking only into the adaptations.

The disadvantages of this model is its acceptance that an existing policy is indeed satisfactory without analysis the policy and all its ramifications in totality.

5.3. Mixed – Scanning Model

Etzioni in Kramer [1973:142 – 55] says that owing to the inherent inadequacies of both the rational and incremental policy – making models, it was suggested that the best qualities of both models be integrated into a new model, the so – called mixed – scanning model. The basis of the mixed – scanning model is that all overall (comprehensive) review is made of a situation and then deviations concentrated upon.

The advantage of this model is that in all circumstances an overall picture is obtains before concentrating on any deviation with a view to adaptation. This means that for the purposes of analysis a broad overviews made of a specific policy, and then an analysis of the adaptations made to counteract deviations.

A disadvantage of the mixed – scanning model could be that too sketchy an overview of the total policy is made, the result that the in-depth analysis of the adaptation could well be out of proportion to their particular importance to the total policy.

5.4. Models As Aids/Tools

The public policy analysis models discussed above should be involved only as aids/tools to improve the quality and appropriateness of the policies made. The models should not become goals in themselves.

A final word of warning:

Public word of warning:

- Public policy analysis is not a panacea to all policy inadequacies;
- It is merely an attempt to promote a greater degree of rationality in policies and thus quantitatively better public policies.

5.5. Summary

Public policies are necessary in order to obtain a clear picture of what the policy – maker intends doing with society. Clarity in public policy depends to a large degree on the nature of public policy, that is, demands, decisions, statements, outputs, limitations, evaluation and rationally pertaining to policies and policy consequences.

In practice, public policies are made by the legislator who usually acts on the advice of leading public officials and sometimes because of the influence exerted by the pressure groups. Specific factors which can influence policy - making in the public sector include aspects such as technological development, international relations, natural disasters and political ideologies pursued by political parties. Unfortunately, no universally acceptable public policy – making exists, but if a model is utilized it should at least include phases such as goal identification, authorization, execution, and evaluation.

Rationality in policy – making can be promoted by analysis the policies themselves or by analysis the results of policies, by means of models specifically developed for this purpose. The models themselves should be viewed as aids in improving the appropriateness of the policies and not as goals in themselves.

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