

Two Top-Down Approaches of the Public Policy: Similarities, Differences and Ethics of the Bardach's and Kingdon's Perspectives of Policy Process

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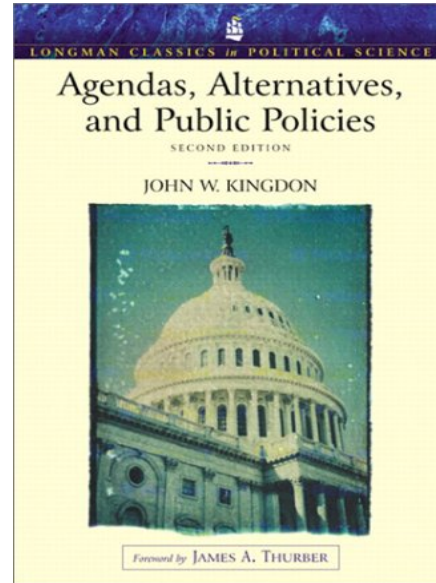
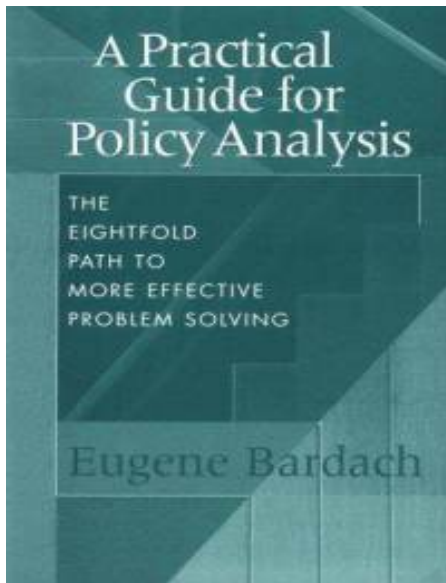
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Book Review

Bardach, Eugene, (2000), *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, New York: Seven Bridges Press.

Kingdon, John W. (2003), *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, New York: Longman.



Abstract This comparative review analyzes two top-down approaches of public policy, the approach of Eugene Bardach, representative of the classical side, and the approach of John Kingdon, representative the modern side. By this review, readers are going to identify and evaluate the similarities, differences and the ethics of the perspectives. This analysis shows the identical differences about "how ideas become policy." This comparative review also shows the different aspects of the two top-down approaches, so it can be also seen as a comparison of two top-down approaches of the public policy

Keywords: Public policy, Eugene Bardach, John Kingdon

1. Introduction

Both Eugene Bardach (2000), in *A practical Guide for Policy Analysis*, and John Kingdon (2003), in *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, discuss how policy solutions are derived. Bardach (2002) gives information for more effective problem solving through his "eightfold path." In Bardach's model the analyst defines the

problem, lays out alternatives and then attaches a set of projected outcomes. Next, he determines the nature and magnitude of the tradeoffs implicit in different policy choices. Lastly, he recommends which alternatives should be chosen.

Kingdon (2003), on the other hand, explains the processes of public policy as consisting of the following steps: setting of the agenda, specifying alternatives, making an authoritative choice among the alternatives, and finally implementing the decision. He argues that policy windows open at the convergence of three independent streams. This article identifies and analyzes the similarities and the differences of two perspectives. Then, it assesses the ethics of both perspectives. Finally, it gives a brief summary.

2. Similarities of the Perspectives

Both Kingdon and Bardach are university professors. Both authors use "top-down" approach (Birkland, 2001) for their policy implementations. Bardach's reading has a clearly defined goal: problem solving; it contains a clearly defined policy tool: "the eight-step path;" and it does not have any implementation chain. Also, Bardach does not mention anything about receiving feedbacks from bureaucrats. Likewise, Kingdon agrees that hidden participants such as career bureaucrats do not impact agenda setting.

Both Bardach's and Kingdon's client audiences are professionals. The presumed user for Bardach's reading is public policy students, practicing policy officials in government, and professionals in executive-level training programs. Kingdon's book is clearly not intended for the lay reader, but for political scientists and policy specialists interested in theorizing about policy formation.

Bardach stresses that policy analysis draws on intuition as much as method, so it is more art than science. However, his eight step mechanistic path is in contradiction with this. In fact, he promotes scientific research methods; he says that gathering quantitative data for policy research is important. Radin (1997), in *The Evolution of the Policy Analysis Field*, talks about earlier and contemporary policy analysts. Similar to Radin's earlier policy analyst, Bardach believes that information is available and appropriate to give good advice directly to decision makers (Radin, 1997). Kingdon also uses scientific research methods to discuss how ideas become policy. He mentions "careful empirical observation" (p.18) as a scientific method.

According to Bardach an analyst should first describe some problem that needs to be mitigated or solved. Second, he should lay out a few alternative courses of action. Even though Kingdon looks at the issue from a wider perspective, he does not refute Bardach's assertion that using a problem is the starting point of analysis. He says that when government recognizes that there is a problem that needs to be dealt with, they must set about narrowing the list of possible policy choices.

According to Bardach, all of the time doing a policy analysis is spent in two activities: thinking and collecting data. He mentions that gathering data takes more time than thinking, but thinking is more important than gathering data. Kingdon also mentions the importance of ideas. He argues that ideas are often more important than the push and pull of interest groups in affecting the substance of public policy.

3. Differences Between the Perspectives

Bardach's book is for policy analysts. The main idea of the book is to describe how policy analysis can be done. However, Kingdon's book is for policy makers, actors, and policy analysts. Starting with the policy process, his work includes agendas and alternatives as well as policies. It addresses why and when an issue gets on a government's agenda. His approach is why and when rather than how. According to Radin (1997), Bardach's approach of policy analysis is in a vertical scale because he sees policy as a province of analysts. Kingdon's approach, on the other hand, is seen as being on a horizontal scale (Radin, 1997). Kingdon mentions that policy is neither the sole province of analysts nor is politics the sole province of politicians.

Bardach offers a mechanistic model, "the eight-step path" of policy analysis. According to him, it is not necessarily taken in precisely that order; however, an effort to define the problem is almost always the right

starting place, and telling the story is almost inevitably the ending point. Kingdon, on the other hand, says that his model does not depend only on randomness, but follows some degree of patterns. Kingdon points out that the government looks at the policy in terms of technical feasibility, value to community, anticipation of future constraints and of course monetary issues.

Like Birkland (2001), Kingdon distinguishes between participants and processes. Using the "garbage can model" as the basis and starting point, Kingdon develops his "policy window" concept of policy making. It has three fundamental processes: problem recognition, policy generation, and politics. According to Radin (1997) policy analysis in the past was based on technique driven economic model, but today its aim is to assist decision makers. Kingdon's garbage can model certainly assists decision makers. Its approach appears to be a more modern concept of policy analysis than Bardach's. On the other hand, a mechanistic technique like Bardach's lends support to the rational and traditional approach to policy analysis. Still, rational policy making is portrayed as impractical for the most part, according to Kingdon. Shulock (1999) criticizes the traditional view of policy analysis because it reflects the rationalist foundation of traditional policy analysis which limits understanding of policy analysis and its role in the policymaking process.

Kingdon, unlike Bardach, also supports the agenda setting process. He defines agenda setting in a way similar to Birkland (2001) and Ripley (1991). According to Kingdon, it is a process that involves problem identification, acceptance of a public problem, stating alternative solutions and defining how to implement those solutions (Birkland, 2001 & Ripley 1991). Birkland (2001) defines two ways in which groups take advantage of agenda shifts by utilizing what Kingdon terms the "window of opportunity." They are as follows: (1) changes in policy perception; (2) changes in the policy stream. He also identifies focusing events as sudden events that can generate attention to public problems or issues. According to Kingdon, focusing events can cause a shift in agenda. Birkland (2001) uses the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska to illustrate this point.

Kingdon uses problem solving as one of the objectives, but not as the final one. However, problem solving is the final goal for Bardach. Elements of his Eight Step Path can be applied generally to problem solving and so policy development is dependent on the problem being defined first. According to Kingdon, each process (problems, policies, and politics) are independent from each other up until the time that they form a coupling stream and an opportunity for action occurs. Policy windows are aided by focusing events which may cause the above processes to merge into a stream and then work in conjunction with the windows of opportunity. Shulock (1999) argues that policy analysis may be a more effective instrument of the democratic process than the problem solving process. She says that if policy analysis were used as a problem-solving tool, there might actually be less use of analysis.

Bardach states that the definition of a problem is the first step in gathering evidence, and is essential in preparing the end step. He includes missed opportunities and conditions as problems. Yet, Kingdon defines problems as starting out as conditions that evolve into an issue about which something needs to be done. According to him, conditions are also defined as problems when they violate important values or are negatively compared with a condition in other countries. For an issue to make it to a government agenda, it must first be recognized as a problem. Problems can gain visibility because of an event. It becomes an agenda item only if there is additional attention brought to the governmental officials through other indicators such as a focusing event, and/or feedback.

Radin (1997) argues that there are more actors/participants in policy process today than in the past. Bardach do not mention importance of actors in policy process. Kingdon talks about participants, but his classification of participants is different than Birkland's classification (2001) of official and unofficial actors. According to Bardach, policy analysis goes beyond personal decision-making. It is a social and political activity that appears as a confusing welter of details, personalities, rhetorical demands, budget figures, rules and routines, interpretations, attitudes, and interest groups. Kingdon, on the other hand quantifies how influential certain groups are to policy formulation and implementation. He looks at the influence of groups inside and outside of government. According to him, there are visible participants, such as elected officials,

political appointees, the media, political parties and interest groups, and hidden participants, such as academic specialists, career bureaucrats and congressional staffers. He notes that the visible participants are far more important in agenda setting than the hidden participants.

4. Ethics of the Perspectives

Bardach mentions that a policy has the effect of insulating people from the consequences of actions. He writes that there may be adverse side-effects of policies. According to him, an ethical policy analyst always asks "if people actually were to follow my advice, what might be the costs of my having been wrong? (p.35)" For him, analyst should take personal moral and intellectual responsibility for the quality of their policy analysis.

According to Weimer and Vining (1992), analytical integrity, responsibility to client, and adherence to personal conception of the good society are appropriate roles of the analyst. Based on these roles, they assume that there are three kinds of policy analysts: objective technician, client's advocate, and issue advocate. Among them, Bardach's analyst fits into objective technician because he provides objective advice about the consequences of proposed policies (Weimer & Vining, 1992). According to Weimer and Vining (1992), objective technicians view clients as "necessary evils", so they tend to select institutional clients as Bardach does. In order to contribute to the good society by providing unbiased advice, they prefer to draw their tools from different disciplines and believe that values relevant to the choice of politics should be identified (Weimer & Vining, 1992).

According to Bardach, a researcher needs to be prepared to protect his work from political and intellectual attack that is intended to undermine its credibility. Also, he gives little attention to partisan and societal value conflicts. He accepts the policy analyst as an advisor, not involved in partisan politics (Radin, 1997). Bardach's idea about politics reminds the reader political environment for policy analysis in the past (Radin, 1997).

Kingdon's analyst is not an objective technician because he gives importance to the politics. Also, he is neither client advocate nor issue advocate. He juggles all three roles. Weimer and Vining (1992) argue that the analysts do not need to adopt any of the three roles, mentioned above. They suggest that the analysts should try to keep all three roles under consideration, rather than selecting one value and sacrificing the other two. The ethical problem, then, involves how much value can be sacrificed when conflicts arise.

In order to solve that problem, a code of ethics may be needed. However, unlike many professions, policy analysts are not governed by code of ethics to guide the behavior of their members. Then, the issue is if they need a course of ethical standards adapted from another discipline. Weimer and Vining (1992) suggest that policy analysts should work toward an ethos for the new profession of policy analysis rather than writing for a code of ethics. The market model takes policy analysts where they are.

Weimer and Vining (1992) propose that analysts have clients who are players in the game of politics. According to them, policy analyst should take into consideration both the interests of the client and interests of the other players in order for his recommendations to be adopted and implemented. According to Kingdon, public mood, public opinion, and broad social movements are important determiners of the political agenda. He argues that the public mood play a role in promoting the problem to an agenda. If the national mood is not right, the policy will never become operational.

Contemporary policy analysts are faced with political pressures, information overload and ever changing clients (Radin, 1997). Based on Stone (2002), Radin (1997) assumes that modern policy analysis is political argument. This assumption also supports Kingdon's ideas. In setting the agendas, Kingdon talks about problem recognition, formation and refining of policies, politics and the visible participants. Like Weimer and Vining (1992), Kingdon does not separate policy analysis from politics, which has practical and ethical implications. His political stream uses "political" in the narrow sense of partisan politics which refers to electoral, partisan, or pressure group politics.

Meltsner (1992) recognizes a set of existing and recurring problems facing those who analyze policy. He terms these problems as "deadly sins" and believes that such sins are inevitable for anyone in the position of giving political advice. It seems his approach is traditional (objective technician). Therefore, he might criticize Kingdon as being too channeled, distant, late, superficial, topical, and capricious. Also, he might criticize Bardach as being apolitical.

5. Conclusion

The similarities and differences of two perspectives have been identified and analyzed, and the ethics of them have been assessed. Both perspectives use top-down approaches. They both use scientific research method. They start with describing the problem. Thinking and ideas are often important for both perspectives. Their audiences are professionals. While Bardach's book is for policy analysts, Kingdon's book is for policy makers and actors, in addition to policy analysts.

Bardach uses an earlier approach for policy analysis; whereas, Kingdon's approach is more contemporary. Although traditional approach is based on a final goal of problem solving, modern approach is based on decision-making. Bardach's approach of policy analysis is in a vertical scale, but Kingdon's approach is in a horizontal scale. Bardach does not mention actors of policy process. Conversely, participants are important for Kingdon. Bardach offers a mechanistic model of policy analysis. Kingdon uses garbage can model. He says that there are times, "policy windows", when the separate streams of problems, policies, politics are joined. He also distinguishes between participants and processes.

Bardach takes responsibility for the quality of his policy work. He fits into objective technician model which is away from politics. However, Kingdon gives importance to the politics. He keeps all three roles of policy analyst but sacrifices value which is an ethical problem. He also argues that public mood, opinions, and movements are important as players in the game of politics to determine the political agenda.

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