Policy analysis for practice: applying social policy.

SPICKER, P.

2006

Policy analysis: developing a checklist

[published as pp 181-183 of P Spicker, *Policy Analysis for Practice,* 2006]

Most of the chapters in this book are concerned with stages in a process, outlined in chapter 3:
- identifying aims, values and goals
- assessing the environment
- identification of methods
- selection of methods
- implementation, and
- evaluation.

Although the stages are not really distinct, and they can be difficult to separate in practice. They point, however, to a series of issues which almost any policy analysis will have to consider. They can be used as the basis of a checklist.

There are other checklists that people may know. The rational model is one; the Treasury's ROAMEF model (in chapter 3) is another. Michael Scriven offers a 'key evaluation checklist', with fifteen main points:
- context
- descriptions and definitions
- consumers
- resources
- values
- process
- outcomes
- costs
- comparisons
- generalizability (i.e. whether there are lessons for others)
- overall significance
- recommendations and explanations
- responsibility and justification
- report and support (i.e. follow-up work with agencies), and
- meta-evaluation (that is, evaluation of the evaluation).[1]

These are all useful, but the list is difficult to use. The sequence is not very clear, and with a long list of points, it is difficult to know what weight to attach to each element, or how the issues relate to each other. Some of the issues (like generalizability) are less important to policy analysis than they are to other fields. Others which matter for policy analysis, like considering what can go wrong, are hardly considered.

The approach taken in this book is complementary, but different. The sorts of questions that a policy analyst needs to ask are summarised in table 11.1. The questions are not the only questions that can be asked, or that should be, and it may be possible, in some contexts, to leave out some which are inappropriate. This can be used as a checklist, but it does something more important than that - it is also a way of structuring information. The questions reflect a pattern of thought - the kinds of problem that policy analysts need, in practice, to address, and the kinds of issue that they need to consider.

Table 11.1: Policy analysis in practice

Key stage	Indicative questions to consider ...	... while reviewing the issues in the light of:
Aims and values	What is the policy supposed to do? What should be done? What should not be done? How will we be able to tell if a policy has achieved its aims?	The policy process Strategic objectives
Assessing the situation	What is happening? What is the evidence? What do stakeholders and key actors have to say? What is likely to happen in the future?	Aims and values
Methods	What are the options? What are the constraints? What resources are there? Are the methods consistent with the aims? What happens if nothing is done? What might go wrong?	Aims and values The assessment of the situation
Effectiveness, efficiency and equity	What are the costs? What are the benefits? Are the methods cost -effective? How can costs be reduced, and benefits increased? Who gains, and who loses?	Aims and values Methods
Implementation	Is the way things are done appropriate to the task? Does the process meet the criteria and standards applicable in this field? How does the process of implementation relate to other work? What is going wrong? What else might go wrong?	Aims and values The assessment of the situation Methods Effectiveness, efficiency and equity
Evaluation	What effects does the policy have? What do those affected think? Has the policy achieved its aims?	Aims and values The assessment of the situation Methods Effectiveness, efficiency and equity The process of implementation

1. M Scriven, 2000, Key evaluation checklist, at
http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/kec.htm