

## 1 Introduction: Searching for an Identity

For much of its life, the field of policy analysis has lived with a wide range of definitions of its goals, work, and significance in the society. Conversations between people who self-identify as policy analysts sometimes seem to be straight from the Tower of Babel, where individuals speak different languages and have difficulty communicating with one another. This Element seeks to sort out these differences by describing the issues, players, and developments that have played a role across the life of this field. It is my hope that readers will find a picture of themselves in this discussion.

I signed my agreement with Cambridge University Press for a manuscript as part of their Academic Elements offerings just as the Coronavirus began to creep into my consciousness. As a result, the process of writing this manuscript was entwined with one of the most unsettling experiences of my life. Not only was my life disrupted by a day-to-day, hour-by-hour schedule that seemed to parallel experiences of wartime, it was also a direct challenge and attack on my personal values and beliefs.

Given my age, I had envisioned this Element as the last volume that I would write. I was motivated to write it because, right before my eyes, I was watching the metamorphosis of one of my major areas of professional interest move into very different forms. Even before COVID-19 emerged, I saw the field of policy analysis change dramatically. While I hadn't connected the two developments before I sat down in front of my computer, writing this manuscript has inevitably linked the two.

This is not surprising. My personal, professional, and value concerns have always moved in the same direction and, as a result, have affected one another. I tend to see how decisions made about one set of concerns interplays with another set of concerns and, hence, have personalized what for some move along separate tracks. I have made decisions about where to live, where to enroll in educational programs, what jobs to take, what to study, and where to spend time on volunteer activities in a way that links what others may see as separate moves.

Much of my previous published work has focused on the historical developments in the policy analysis field – the developments that I have seen from both inside and outside perspectives. Citizenship and public policy issues have been a part of my entire life. Originally trained as an historian, I have always been sensitive to the shifts in the intellectual history that surrounds the policy analysis field. I've usually emphasized the changes that emerged from incrementalism, but in recent years I have tended to become more skeptical about the extent of change that is possible in the twenty-first century and the ways that seemingly diverse issues affect one another.

Over the years, I have noted the changes that have occurred in the field from several perches. One emerged from nearly fifty years of teaching graduate students in policy analysis. The second came from my own involvement in the policy world, either as an analyst, an advocate, or an interested citizen. I've been quite aware of the generational changes that have occurred, especially in the current generation of students, who seem to anticipate a conflict between the jobs available to them and their personal values.

Increasingly, I have become more concerned about the directions taken in the journey that something titled "policy analysis" was taking. As the years progressed, I found myself attending familiar conferences but, despite my presence, failing to find many sessions on the program that seemed to be important or even interesting to me. These were often conferences sponsored by groups in which I had played a leadership role. One could link this perception to my advanced age and the changes that are easily ascribed to it, but I had an underlying hunch that it reflected something more substantive.

This Element is my attempt to give readers a sense of my exploration of this issue. I begin by acknowledging that there are few fields in the social sciences that have ignored the multiple effects of economic, social, and political change. Thus, one should not be surprised by shifts in the way the field is defined and organized. Most of the disciplines have managed to balance these demands with classic issues and create variations on familiar themes. These changes were often built into standard operating procedures and were not always immediately visible. While modifying the past assumptions and approaches associated with the relevant social science discipline, these fields still contain issues, methodologies, and processes that resonate with those of the past.

While changes in the original assumptions seemed obvious and appropriate, there has been a pattern of variations on the original assumptions that often seemed familiar. Over the years, issues have appeared on agendas that never seem to have been resolved or even formally acknowledged. This is especially true for policy analysis.

As a result of the relationships that have developed over the years, an environment has emerged where both academics and practitioners who self-identify as "policy analysts" are not always recognized as such by others who use that same label. Some who have been regular attendees at organizations such as APPAM (the United States-based Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management) find that they are uncomfortable participating in the recent discussions that have taken place in those settings. Others have the opposite reaction and do not acknowledge the potential import of the past patterns. Neither group recognizes the other group's players, issues, and approaches, and they certainly don't agree about their relative importance. While this may

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be most visible in the US organizations, there are traces of similar reactions in other parts of the globe.

This Element attempts to explore the reasons why this conflictual situation has developed and whether the current status is a major departure from the past. While these developments may not be new or found only in policy analysis, they do have an impact on the status of the academics as well as the practitioners in the field. Both the form and the impact of these activities appear to have diminished the ability of policy analysts to improve the societies in which they live. This is ironic since that was the basic goal of those who saw themselves as the original policy analysts. This exploration of the policy analyst's role draws on a range of sources to illustrate my argument; these include activities and writings of a number of individuals identified with changes in the field, and draw on both writings and activities over time.

My approach is historical in nature, but I am trying to define the nature of the current state of the field by placing it in the context of past developments. I believe that the topic that most interests policy analysts today seems to begin with concern about whether data is available. Is that concern inevitable, and does its ascendant role lead one to address a policy problem and lead to change?

Collectively, we seem to have forgotten that this field started in the world of practice and then moved to the academy. Both sites care about data, but their definition of data differs. For some, the data becomes an end in itself and not a means to other ends. Yet today it seems that we as a collectivity are largely uninterested in developments in the world of practice.

I have focused this discussion on a number of different topics that seem to me to tell the story of how these changes have led to these developments. Each of the topics will be discussed separately but will highlight the changes that have taken place, the players in these modifications, their contributions, and the impact of these changes on the field. The concluding section will attempt to provide readers with a way to assess their personal pattern and craft future directions for themselves.

This perspective is not completely *sui generis*. There are some people in the field who seem to share my views. I have discovered some people with similar perceptions. Interestingly enough, almost all of them had some link to the public policy efforts found at the University of California at Berkeley in the period from the late 1960s to the 1980s. The activities that were led by Aaron Wildavsky during this period were significant in the creation of the policy analysis field. This occurred through the development of both the MPP (Masters of Public Policy) and the PhD in public policy at Berkeley, as well as the development of journals and the field in general

Wildavsky's role in defining and developing a unique academic program has rarely been acknowledged by later generations of policy analysts, either in the US or in other countries as the field expanded across the globe. Yet, if one imposed a family tree framework on the several generations of policy analysts who emerged throughout the last third of the twentieth century, something that touched the Berkeley school appeared in the background of many of the significant players. They are not always labeled as policy analysts, but emerge in different places and at different times.<sup>1</sup>

This short volume is not a traditional work. It does not fit the model of any earlier publication I know of. In some respects it is a memoir, since I was a witness to a number of the developments that I describe. But I was on the periphery of many of the changes that took place in Washington, in Berkeley, and in the United States more generally. More recently, I have been involved in efforts in a number of countries (largely in Asia) and have observed comparative developments there. I am not arguing that the field is moving in clear directions. In fact, as time has progressed the field has become more complex and often conflictual.

But this Element does have several goals. First, it is meant to be a tribute to Wildavsky, whose creativity and ability to predict issues that would play a role in the future development of the field is currently underappreciated and frequently ignored. In some ways, one feels that Wildavsky left us in the middle of a conversation. Second, it seeks to provide readers with an understanding of the dynamics and issues that seemed to be the basis for the situation I describe. Like many policy areas themselves, the issues have taken on the complexity of the twenty-first century. As I have noted, many of those who call themselves "policy analysts" define themselves in totally different ways than those who emerged from the early years. Not only have these definitions led to different emphases and approaches, but they often generate conflict between proponents who do not accept the definitions of others who explain the origins, meanings, and requirements of the field very differently. And third (and perhaps most importantly), it is a picture of what some call "the best laid plans," as it tells the story of the development of the field as it has responded to uncertainty and change. Readers are likely to find that they cannot find their favorite author or example from all three areas in the volume. Hopefully, however, this Element will be interesting to its readers, particularly those entering the policy analysis field. '

<sup>1</sup> Among the individuals who were at Berkeley during the early period of the School, either as faculty or as students in the School (or in related programs), were Eugene Bardach, Arnold Meltzner, David Weimer, Aidan Vining, Helen Ingram, Jeanne Nienaber Clark, Howell Baum, Iris Geva May, Eric Patashnik, David Dery and Frank Thompson.

## 1.1 Are the Developments in Policy Analysis Different from Those in Other Social Sciences?

One should not be surprised that a field such as policy analysis has changed since the 1960s. There are few fields in the social sciences that have ignored the multiple effects of economic, social, and political change. Most of the disciplines (e.g. political science, sociology, planning, economics, and others) have managed to turn these demands into classic issues and create variations on familiar themes.

But this is not the case for the policy analysis field. While the roles and functions of policy advising are ancient, policy analysis as a modern academic and practice field is really quite new (see Goldhamer, 1978). Despite the attention given to it, policy analysis as an identifiable academic and practitioner area is less than sixty years old. It started as a self-conscious field of practice in the United States in the 1960s, moved into an academic setting in the form of degree programs largely in the United States, and by the twenty-first century responded to international and global interest.

While changes in the original assumptions often seemed obvious, there has been a pattern of variations on those original assumptions that are more puzzling. At times it seems to operate as an octopus with tentacles reaching into many other subject areas. The boundaries between these elements are confusing and sometimes exhibit intellectual variations of imperialism or attention to limited issues that have emerged as a result of somewhat idiosyncratic developments. It is not always clear whether policy analysis is overtaken by other agendas and approaches or whether it plays the ascent role.

These changes have produced a contemporary field and a definition of “policy” that is a strange combination of wide breadth and narrow depth of issues. Members of the International Political Science Association recognized these relationships by spinning off a number of its substantive sections to a freestanding organization and created the International Public Policy Association. Yet it is not always clear what should be included under that banner, and the emphasis on the inheritance from the political science field does not always clarify the boundaries of the policy analysis term.

As a result of these complex relationships, an environment has emerged where both academics and practitioners who self-identify as “policy analysts” are not recognized as such by others who use that same label. Some who have been regular attendees at organizations such as APPAM find that they are uncomfortable participating in the recent discussions that have taken place in those conferences and settings. Others have the opposite reaction and do not acknowledge the potential import of the past patterns. Neither group recognizes

the issues and approaches emphasized by other groups – and they certainly don't agree about their relative importance.

## 2 Section One: The Origins of the Policy Analyst Concept and its Early History

This Element attempts to explore the reasons why this complex situation has developed. Why is there so little agreement on what a policy analyst is and should do? While these developments may not be new or found only in policy analysis, they do have an impact on the status of the academics as well as the practitioners in the field. And it is not surprising that many of these efforts have had limited ability to improve the societies in which we live – the basic goal of those who saw themselves as the original policy analysts. Despite its expectations and promises, the search for a definition of the policy field has become a quest that seems to be present throughout the life of the policy analysis field. I will draw on a range of sources to illustrate my arguments. These include the activities and writings of a number of individuals identified with changes in the field, and their writings and activities are analyzed over time.

### 2.1 The Origins of the Policy Analysis Concept

The term “policy analyst” did not really appear in the literature until early in the 1960s. It emerged from the post–World War II experience that produced the RAND Corporation and the use of intellectual approaches that drew on the systems analysis field.<sup>2</sup>

This story begins with a discussion of the efforts in the US Department of Defense and related activities in other parts of the US Federal Government during the 1960s. This draws on the work of RAND staff member Herbert Goldhamer who, by the late 1970s, found enough in the literature and practice to publish a book that opened with the following introduction:

The advisers to political leaders do not lack for attention in contemporary political journalism, in political biography, and in memoirs. In addition, a substantial literature now exists on the role of the expert and adviser in government service in the United States and Great Britain during and after World War II. Oddly enough, however, there is, to my knowledge, no work on the adviser that covers a sufficient range of periods and cultures to throw into relief the continuities and diversities of this political figure over the centuries in which he has played his important role in politics. (Goldhamer, 1978, p. ix)

<sup>2</sup> RAND is a non-profit organization created in 1948, just after World War II, to do analytic work for the US government, especially the Department of Defense. It was designed to further and promote scientific, educational, and charitable purposes for the public welfare of the United States.