

**Presidential Address:  
The Evolution of the  
Policy Analysis Field:  
From Conversation  
to Conversations**

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Several years ago, the Israeli author A. B. Yehoshua [1993] wrote a very unusual novel about a family. The volume, called *Mr. Mani*, is constructed as five conversations, set in five different time periods, that take place between a family member and some other individual. Although written as a conversation between two people, Yehoshua presents only one side of the dialogue. It is up to the reader to read between the lines and to create the reality of the other participant in the conversation.

On its face, this novel has very little to do with the world of public policy analysis and management. Yet I was intrigued by its potential applicability. At the most basic level, the idea of the conversation does have relevance and appeal to our field. Our identity emerged from the desire to provide policy advice to decisionmakers. Our predecessors—whether the more ancient traditions of Machiavelli or Kautilia [Goldhammer, 1978] or the more contemporary work of Dror [1967], Meltsner [1990], and Wildavsky [1979]—envisioned a two-person advising process that is much like a conversation. It requires an exchange between the advisor and the decisionmaker, built on personal trust, understanding, and reciprocity. It certainly requires the two participants in the dialogue to speak the same language if they expect to communicate with one another.

One side of a conversation seemed to me to be a powerful metaphor that was worth exploring within the context of the policy analysis field. Yehoshua could present one side of a conversation with the assurance that the reader would accurately deduce the dialogue from that exposition. Would we be able to infer the dimensions of the policy analyst–decisionmaker exchange by looking only at the analyst’s contribution? Have we, in fact, moved from participation in a two-way exchange to a one-sided conversation? Have we moved into multiple conversations involving many players in complex settings, making it difficult to make such an inference?

Others have commented on the limitations of the policy analysis process in ways that suggest that we have engaged in one-sided dialogues. More than a decade ago, Alice Rivlin noted that “policy analysts often seem paralyzed, recognizing the futility of chasing easy solutions, but confounded by their own sense of the complexity of issues. They lose the floor—indeed often hand

over the microphone willingly—to the intellectual patent medicine salesmen” [Rivlin, 1984, p. 18]. We are all aware of recent frustrations experienced by policy analysts who have not been able to convince contemporary decisionmakers of the wisdom of their recommendations.

These frustrations provoke a series of questions. What *does* happen on the other side of the conversation? Have we created a mirror in which the known speaker projects his or her own image to the other side? Has the one-sided conversation actually turned into a monologue? Have we focused only on the production side of the conversation and not on the consumption side? Have the participants in the conversation failed to speak the same language and have instead engaged in what the child psychologists call parallel play? Do the participants on the other side of the conversation move in and out of the conversation? Does their conversation change over time?

Today I want to examine the nature of the conversation between the policy analyst and the decisionmaker-client. I want specifically to focus on the developments within the policy field that may help us understand the problems and frustrations of the contemporary policy analyst.<sup>1</sup> It is useful to repeat Larry Lynn’s warning of 1989: there is a danger that “policy analysts can become just another parochial interest: priests with their rituals, rather than searchers for a just and comprehensive view, who pay no attention to anything but realities and who counteth the cost” [Lynn, 1989, p. 376].

Although it may be appropriate at some point to engage in a bit of self-criticism, I have sought instead to examine the assumptions that were in place when our field developed and to contrast them with what I see as the reality today. I believe that these changes have made it difficult for the policy analyst to behave in the ways that were envisioned when the field first began and, to some degree, this disjuncture has produced some unsatisfying experiences. I will discuss five areas and contrast the assumptions in the early 1960s with those today: (1) the scale and location of policy analysis functions; (2) the political environment surrounding the activity; (3) the analytic methodologies used; (4) the availability and use of information and data; and (5) dimensions of policy decisions. I will conclude with some suggestions that respond to the current realities.

Each of these five attributes is set in the context of a larger framework: the drastic changes that have occurred in the broader context of our work—shifts in the political, social, and economic environment of the mid-1970s that continued through the 1980s and 1990s. Abundance, growth, and faith in possibilities for change were replaced by scarcity, decline, and skepticism about the future. This skepticism is especially dramatic in the ways that it affects views of the public sector. Clients and analysts alike worry about the limits of their authority, are fearful of exercising discretion, and have doubts that promises of change could be kept.

## THE SCALE AND LOCATION OF POLICY ANALYSIS FUNCTIONS

First, let us examine the scale and location of policy analysis functions.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1960s, beginning with the Program Planning and Budgeting Systems

<sup>1</sup> I have attempted to build on the work done by Laurence E. Lynn Jr. and other participants in a 1989 *JPAM* symposium on these issues.

<sup>2</sup> I am discussing two types of developments in this area: those related to the vertical scale and spread of the function within agencies and those related to the horizontal spread of the function outside of government.

(PPBS) activity in the Department of Defense, it was assumed that the policy analysis units would be established at the top of the organizations, looking to the top executives and senior line staffers as the clients for analysis. These clients would define the perspective, values, and agenda for the analytic activity. Once completed, policy analysis would become an additional resource to decisionmakers and, thus, contribute to the improvement of policymaking [Dror, 1967]. The focus of the activity was upward and the separate nature of the policy analysis unit minimized concern about the organizational setting in which the analysis took place. Whether or not these individuals were as influential as they hoped to be, this conceptualization of the role became the point of departure for the field.

By the mid-1970s policy analysis functions had dramatically increased throughout the structure of federal government agencies. Most of the units began in the top reaches of departments or agencies. But as time went on, policy analysis offices appeared throughout federal agency structures, attached to specific program units as well as middle-level structures. As a result, staffers appeared to become increasingly socialized to the policy cultures and political structures with which they were dealing. Those staffers who stayed in the office for significant periods of their careers became attached to and identified with specific program areas and took on the characteristics of specialists, sometimes serving as the institutional memory within the department [Rein and White, 1977].

As policy analysis activities were instituted and proliferated through federal departments (not simply at the top of the structure), the centralized policy analysis officials became highly interactive in their dealings with analysts and officials in other parts of the departments. In addition, policy analysis staff found they shared an interest in activities performed by other offices; in many ways, staffers behaved more like career bureaucrats than the in-and-out analysts envisioned in the early writings on the field.

As a result of the spread of the function, staff implicitly redefined the concept of "client." In part this was understandable as analysts developed predictable relationships with programs and program officials over time [Meltsner, 1986]. Not only were clients the individuals (or groups) who occupied top-level positions within the organization, but clients for analysis often became those involved in the institutional processes within the agency as well as the maintenance of the organization itself. Institutional processes included the standard operating decision procedures in federal agencies (such as planning, budgeting, regulation drafting, and legislative drafting) which are predictable and defined by law, internal decision rules, and externally imposed calendars [Nelson, 1989]. Organizational maintenance as the "client" for analysis developed in the 1980s as the imperative for some analysts became the survival of the agency and maintenance of its programs.

I have spent some time watching changes in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), established in 1965, and the oldest of the federal domestic policy departmental level policy analysis units.<sup>3</sup> Its development illustrates some of these shifts [Radin, 1992]. As ASPE became institutionalized,

<sup>3</sup> The Office of Research, Plans, Programs, and Evaluation in the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) was the first office in a domestic policy agency. However, the OEO did not have the status of a full-fledged cabinet department.

it underwent a transformation. Some of these changes are attributable to changes within the office itself. Sudden growth changed the office from a small, almost intimate work group to a compartmentalized and specialized bureaucracy. And as the years passed, some individuals became career ASPE officials and created the norms that socialized shorter term employees to a particular mode of operation. Longevity and specialization combined to create organizational units made up of staff members with strong commitments to specific specialized policy areas (often to particular approaches to those policies) and to the organization itself.

At the same time that this was occurring, changes were also taking place within the Department and in the external environment that modified ASPE functions. As policy analysis units proliferated around the Department, ASPE analysts could no longer view themselves as holding a monopoly on the production of policy advice. Increasingly, policy development took on the quality of an adversarial situation where policy analysts from one unit engaged in debate with policy analysts from another part of the Department. Analysts, not their clients, became the first line conduit for policy bargaining. The relationships between policy analysts became even more important by the late 1970s when the reality of limited resources meant that policy debate was frequently focused on the modification of existing programs not on the creation of new policies. The analysts at ASPE were likely to be working on issues where they already had a track record, either in terms of substantive policy approaches or involving relationships with others within the Department.

Despite these developments, the role definitions of the policy analyst continue to be expressed in the language and rhetoric of earlier years. One new policy deputy assistant secretary recently said that his staff members told him that their role was to advise the Secretary—yet when queried further, no member of the staff had ever had direct contact with the Secretary and what was perceived to be secretarial advising took place through multiple layers of the bureaucracy. Indeed, some have suggested that policy analysts operate with a set of myths about decisionmakers. Among these are the myth that decisionmakers operate like monarchs and that all decisions made by “big people” are always important [House, 1982, p. 36].

As the policy analysis function proliferated within the federal government, it also spread outside the government to include the variety of actors engaged in the policy process. Wildavsky characterized the growth in his characteristically straight forward way: “It takes one to beat one, if only to counter those who are everywhere else—in the interest groups, the congressional committees, the departments, the universities, the think tanks—ensconced in institutions mandated by law to evaluate everything and accept responsibility for nothing” [Wildavsky, 1979, p. 402].

Weimer and Vining’s account of policy analysis as an emerging profession describes the variety of organizational settings where policy analysts work—multiple settings in the executive branch of the federal government, the legislative branch, state governments (both executive and legislative organizations), local level executive agencies, think tanks and policy research organizations, and profit-seeking firms in industries affected by government action [Weimer and Vining, 1989, pp. 9–12].

One writer has suggested that more than 1000 private not-for-profit think tanks are now found in the United States, approximately 100 of them operating in and around Washington, DC [Smith, 1991, p. xiv]. This includes the tradi-

tional think tanks such as Brookings, but also the newer think tanks that have proliferated around the country [Weiss, 1992; McGann, 1995]. Many of these institutions have research (read policy) agendas and are not situations where staffers follow their own intellectual agendas [Polsby, 1983].

In some instances, there has been a blurring of the lines between advocates and analysts. Groups such as the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities have taken their place, focusing on the production of rigorous, high-quality work but organized around a commitment to low-income citizens. Some think tanks have actually become extensions of government agencies. In an era of government staff reductions, there has been an increasing use of outside groups as surrogate federal officials, using mechanisms such as standing task order agreements to carry out these relationships.

The spread of the policy analyst role across government and nongovernmental locations has created new opportunities. Students of the policy schools found jobs in the field and learned that they were, indeed, a part of a new profession. With the policy shifts that have taken place in the last few years that devolve new authorities and responsibilities to players at the state and local level, we can expect that there will be a new demand for analytic activity outside of Washington. At the least, the profession today looks much different than that envisioned by Dror. Indeed, as we look at the APPAM membership rolls, it is clear that the policy analysis function has found expression in many different organizations and venues.

## THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Second, let us compare the earlier political environment for policy analysis with that today. As I reviewed the early writings about the field, I found little discussion about politics. Although Dror noted that systems analysis (particularly the economic approach to systems analysis) neglected problems of political feasibility and the characteristics of political resources [Dror, 1971, pp. 227–228], he did not really address these deficiencies in his work on policy analysts.

Meltsner's useful typology in *Policy Analysts in the Bureaucracy* reminded us that policy analysts did have to be attuned to development of micro-level political skills [Meltsner, 1982, 1986]. However, there was very little attention to partisan and societal value conflicts or, indeed, to appropriate political strategies attached to recommendations. Those who grappled with the PPBS process in the 1960s did recognize that it was difficult to make trade-offs between programs for different client groups. Yet these difficulties were posed as analytical—not political or interest group pressure—challenges. One commentator noted that Americans “have felt an elemental urge to bring social science and technical skills to bear on policy making, and our politics has been changed and reshaped by a yearning to govern ourselves more intelligently—even if doing so means escaping the political process” [Smith, 1991, p. 3]. Carol Weiss has noted that some critics have charged that “the spread of analysis and analysis organizations has pernicious effects on the democratic process” and the policy experts “hostile to politics and scornful of moral and ideological commitment . . . seek to reduce all issues to matters of practical technical inquiry” [Weiss, 1992, p. 15].

In addition, there was a tendency to assume that the goals articulated by the decisionmakers were appropriate and provided sufficient guidance for the analyst. Soon, however, analysts confronted problems with this assumption and recognized that goals and objectives in public policy are usually multiple, ambiguous, and conflicting.

In the years that have lapsed since the field began, we have experienced incredible vacillations in politics. Some of these represent a dramatic move from a society characterized by abundance to one that has to deal with scarcity and limitations. Today it is difficult to imagine analytic activity that is insulated from the conflicts that make up political debate. Deborah Stone has argued that policy analysis is political argument and that policy conflicts are produced by political conflicts [Stone, 1988].

I remember an APPAM spring meeting panel during the Reagan administration that sought to review the developments in the policy analysis field. The panel included Dick Darman who, at the time, had left the administration and was teaching at Harvard in the Kennedy School of Government. Darman recited the various analytic methods that had been used over the years, beginning with PPBS, moving to MBO and ZBB.<sup>4</sup> Now, he said, “we have a new form—IDEOLOGY.” This pronouncement left the APPAM crowd stunned (me among them). Beginning in the Reagan years, we became more aware of the driving power of politics when policy became predicated on political values and calculations.

Politics and political feasibility have been uncomfortable subjects for many of us [Holden, 1996, p. 7]; the conflict between the culture of analysis and the culture of politics is played out on a daily basis and is expressed in differences related to values, time, uncertainty, evidence, and meanings. The gulf between the two cultures is similar to what C. P. Snow wrote about the conflict between literary intellectuals and physical scientists: “Between the two a gulf of mutual comprehension—sometimes (particularly among the young) hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding. They have a curious distorted image of each other. Their attitudes are so different that, even on the level of emotion, they can’t find much common ground” [Snow, 1963, p. 4].

Sometimes it is not easy to assign players to their appropriate camps. Certainly the current President eludes easy classification. Although he reads the footnotes in technical reports and can engage in debate as the infamous policy wonk, he does not move without turning to public opinion polls and focus groups.

It has become harder and harder for analysts to deal with this reality. Some analysts are not able to acknowledge that their own values and beliefs might shape their approach to issues. Although not thinking of themselves as apolitical, other analysts inside government agencies tried to protect themselves from external overt political pressure or agendas, often moving away from high-profile assignments to less visible activities [Sarat and Silbey, 1988, p. 98]. Sometimes these projects are technical in nature, but more often they involve the satisfaction of working on interesting topics with good colleagues inside an organization and with others outside the agency who are interested in the work.

Another response has been for analysts to become identified with particular political or value commitments. Although they may not have begun their careers with that intent, this move has occurred as analysts who specialize in

<sup>4</sup> MBO is the acronym for Management by Objectives and ZBB is Zero-Based Budgeting.

particular policy areas become convinced of the truth of their recommendations and, as a result, move into an advocacy posture. They may continue to work inside the government but their policy preferences are well known and others may view them as the close colleagues of analysts attached to advocacy groups that highlight particular client groups, policy issues, or political stances.

Others have responded to the changes in the political environment by deciding to stay within the system and to attach themselves directly to the political actors. The shelf life of such a strategy may be short, particularly in an era characterized by frequent shifts in political leadership. It requires an analyst to focus on short-term goals and elevate assessments of relevancy over those of policy effectiveness. This has not been an easy strategy to employ and sometimes involves interaction with Rivlin's "intellectual medicine men." Weimer and Vining have reminded us that analysts deal with value conflicts in many different ways and use the powerful Hirschman framework to think about voice, exit, and loyalty responses [Weimer and Vining, 1989, pp. 20–29].

#### **ANALYTIC METHODOLOGIES AND APPROACHES**

Third, let us review the assumptions about analytic methodologies and approaches of the past and compare them with those used today. Even in its earliest phase with the introduction of the Program Planning and Budgeting Systems (PPBS), those who sought to improve policymaking through the creation of a policy analysis capability believed that this function would be able to accomplish at least three different goals: control by top agency officials over fragmented and diffuse organizational and program units; improved efficiency in the way that resources were allocated and implemented; and increased use of knowledge and information in the actual making of decisions.

The three goals of control, efficiency, and use of knowledge seemed to be mutually reinforcing and consistent during the PPBS phase of the movement's development. During the early phase of the introduction of policy analysis, there was tremendous confidence in the potential for using an applied social science that could be both scientifically rigorous and practical at the same time. Dror described it as "a profession-craft clustering on providing systematic, rational, and science-based help with decisionmaking." [Dror, 1984, p. 79]. Some saw policy analysis as integral to the reform of the American political system, doing away with politics and power relationships, and substituting social science and expertise for politics [Banfield, 1980, pp. 1–19]. Policy analysts were seen as short-term staff who came from (and would return to) universities or research centers, drawn largely from economics and operations research, who could operate as analytic generalists able to use literatures and concepts from other fields when deemed appropriate.

The core of the work of the original conceptualization of the policy analyst was technique driven. Techniques were drawn from both positivist social science and normative economic models with the economic models providing the clearest and most powerful basis for an improvement and change orientation [Aaron, 1989]. These techniques were nested in the American pragmatic tradition, particularly that variety defined by John Dewey who, while he did not believe in complete objectivity, articulated strong faith in the scientific study of social problems. Wildavsky noted, "Policy analysis has its foundations for

learning in pragmatism and empiricism. We value what works and we learn what works from experience, particularly experience that magnifies error and failure" [Wildavsky, 1979, p. 393].

Despite these initial goals, even the early work on policy analysts in the federal bureaucracy indicated that the concept, once put into place, yielded a more diverse set of roles, functions, and techniques. Arnold Meltsner's study of policy analysts in the bureaucracy, based on interviews completed in 1970–1971, indicated that the policy analysis function took multiple shapes as it interacted with the realities of client idiosyncrasies, organizational cultures and histories, and special attributes of particular policy issues. Meltsner found that analysts differed in their use of political and technical skills and that they did not have uniform educational backgrounds, policy areas of interest, incentives, or views about the role and impact of the function in the policymaking process. Recruitment patterns over the years broadened the methodological approaches used by the analysts; an early reliance on models and paradigms associated with economics training was complemented by other approaches. Many analysts found that their specific program knowledge was the most valuable skill. Others emphasized implementation analysis, organizational analysis, and methods associated with policy evaluation tasks [Radin, 1992, p. 153].

As the field of policy analysis and policy studies developed, students and practitioners of the profession became more sophisticated in the way that they described and understood the dimensions of the policymaking process. Whether optimistic or pessimistic about the long-term impact of policy analysis in the federal bureaucracy, there was a growing consensus that a model, based on an assumption that decisionmaking actually followed the formal hierarchical structure of the organization chart, had limited applicability (indeed, to some, was naive). For many, the process needed to be understood in the complex context of multiple actors, levels of meaning, and external pressures that created policy systems [Edelman, 1964; Kingdon, 1984].

Although some analysts continue to define their success in terms of the impact of their analytic work on specific societal problems, others clearly developed suboptimal goals for their work. Analysts valued their ability to influence decisionmakers and to sustain that influence over time [Pugliaresi and Berliner, 1989]. Goals, thus, became more modest in scope and, at the same time, reflected an awareness of the multiplicity of subgoals contained in programs. Analysts often recognized the complexities involved in the implementation of their recommendations and moved to rethink the way they structured problems and thought about policy design [Ingraham, 1978]. Some analysts defined their view of success in response to political realities while others focused on the elements of the work situation in which they operated or bureaucratic support for their efforts.<sup>5</sup> Overall, few analysts held the optimistic view of the achievement of an applied social science that was both scientifically rigorous and practical. Others, such as Majone, searched for alternative ways of conceptualizing the intellectual frame, substituting the idea of argument and evidence for the earlier applied social science approach [Majone, 1989].

The policy recommendations that emerged from the analytic work began to be modest and incremental, rather than broad and comprehensive. In some

<sup>5</sup> This problem is not unique to the United States. A recent volume from Australia suggests that the relationship between the minister and the policy adviser or advising unit cannot be understood without attention to the battles that go on within government [Uhr and Mackay, 1996].



instances, analysts found that their work accentuated rather than solved problems [Benveniste, 1977]. Unanticipated consequences bred fear; it was difficult to overcome the skepticism and cynicism that overwhelmed faith in change and action. And in some cases, analysts found that their most useful role did not actually involve all of the elements of a classic policy analysis (problem definition, client specification, background, criteria, analysis, recommendation) but rather involved assisting decisionmakers in understanding the dimensions of the policy problem and helping them “map” the relevant actors involved in a decision [Meltsner, 1982, pp. 64–66].

As Wildavsky noted in a retrospective look at policy analysis, the “macro-macho” view of the endeavor, highlighting microeconomics and operations research, did not deliver on its promises. For analysts, he commented, “the real loss was innocence” [Wildavsky, 1985, p. 28]. Another commentator noted that the metaphors of science and disinterested research have given way to “the metaphor of the market and its corollaries of promotion, advocacy and intellectual combat” [Smith, 1991, p. 195].

#### AVAILABILITY AND USE OF INFORMATION

Closely related to the issue of methodologies is the fourth area of contrast: changes in views about the availability and use of information. During the early stages of the profession, faith in the methodologies of the analyst rested on confidence that information was available and appropriate. As Lindblom and Cohen [1979] have indicated, the assumptions were embedded in the approaches of professional social inquiry. Those who drew their framework from the empirical social sciences assumed that fact-value differentiations could be made. And those who approached the field with the lens of normative economic models were confident their perspective and market models generated accurate information. Both groups did not question their ability to differentiate the true from the false and to provide advice to decisionmakers based on that confidence.

Soon, however, it became apparent that the task was much more complex and involved both the problem of framing the conception of relevant data as well as the issue of utilization of information and research findings. As Majone noted, we learned that in policy analysis “data are often ‘found’ rather than ‘manufactured’” [Majone, 1989, p. 46]. In addition, these data have to be molded and refined into quite different forms before they can be used in the decisionmaking process. Majone has sought to define that usefulness as “evidence”; he says that it is “information selected from the available stock and introduced at a specific point in an argument ‘to persuade the mind that a given factual proposition is true or false’” (p. 48).

Carol Weiss has characterized the information problem as the three “I’s”—information, ideology, and interests—and has argued that fact-value dichotomies are rarely if ever possible in the policy field [Weiss, 1983]. Lindblom and Cohen’s discussion of “ordinary knowledge” suggests that the information that is more often useful to the decisionmaker derives from sources that are very different than those of the social scientist. Eugene Bardach provided a different framework for the collection of data for policy research by looking to the methodologies of the investigative reporter—rather than the classic researcher—as a model [Bardach, 1996].

At the same time that some have questioned the utility of traditional approaches—particularly as they are measured in terms of utilization—others continue to produce an incredible amount of analytic work. Carol Weiss, while acknowledging the limitations of direct utilization of policy research in decisionmaking, has argued that information often plays an “enlightenment” function and does, indeed, have an impact on the policymaking process. Alice Rivlin has suggested that “the information overload is frustrating and intimidating and it affects people in different ways, making some extremely cautious, others impatient. In the face of this overload, there is an attraction to simple organizing principles or ideologies that will sort everything into convenient categories” [Rivlin, 1984, p. 19]. I recently heard information overload called the information fatigue syndrome.

Wildavsky offered an explanation for the disparity between the assumptions of the field’s founders and the experience of practicing policy analysts: “The relative objectivity of analysis depends on people living together in reasonable trust with a common culture. The cultural conditions within which analysis takes place—the sort of social structure thought desirable, the values to be obtained—guide and shape what is done. If trust declines, the framework of facts that can be taken for granted declines with it. Without agreement on a starting place, there is no end to debate. Theories harden into dogma, and assertion replaces evidence. Policies then are judged not by their merits but by the motives of their proposers” [Wildavsky, 1979, p. 7].

## DIMENSIONS AND FORMS OF POLICY DECISIONS

Finally, let us contrast the dimensions and forms of policy decisions today with those of the early days of the profession. It is hard to remember a time when the challenge for policy analysts was to come up with new programs and policies, drawing on resources and a sense of optimism about government action. In that long-ago environment, the task of the analyst was to give policymakers options for new action, choosing among various approaches to achieve what was seen to be agreed upon goals.

No one here needs to be reminded that much has changed since those days. Divisions in the society make agreement on policy goals much more difficult. Policy analysts find themselves dealing with marginal changes in existing programs, rather than crafting new approaches to problems. The policy analyst operates within an environment of budget cuts, deficits, and scarcity; this has created a new path for decisionmaking. We have become aware of the prominence of budget decisionmaking at the legislative level but may have underestimated its impact on the decision process in government agencies. In those settings, policy analysts sometimes find that their influence has waned as budget analysts and decisionmakers play a more prominent role. More and more decisions are made in budget rather than programmatic terms.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, rather than being close to the top decisionmakers, policy analysis and planning offices sometimes find themselves at the fringes in terms of influence.

Other changes are worth noting. There are now many more players involved in the process and, to the extent that policy analyses are available to all parties,

<sup>6</sup> The role and power of OMB is also found in nonbudget processes such as requirements for clearance of data collection. In this sense, OMB not only plays a role in determining whether an agency has the resources to undertake analysis but also affects how that analysis is carried out.

that access has the effect of leveling the playing field. Increasingly (although still not common) information is viewed as a public good where the multiple players involved have access to it. In these cases, the policy dispute involves debate between analysts.

Several sessions during this conference deal with the limitations of resources for policy analysis and research. It is increasingly difficult to justify large-scale data collection approaches as budgets for data collection decrease. Resistance to information collection demands compounds the problem. Despite the rhetoric focusing on performance measures and the Government Performance and Results Act, it has become more and more of a problem to convince recipients of governments funds that they should provide data on their accomplishments. In addition, it is not always easy to gather the information that policy analysts believe is needed for the crafting of policy advice. In part, this occurs because of the ambivalence in American society to expertise. One commentator described this as a situation in which “populist scorn for intellectuals and experts simmered, ready to boil, in American society” [Smith, 1991, p. 8]. At the least, questions of privacy and federalism compound the problem. In addition, analysts who have been trained to focus solely on public action also find themselves accentuating marginal issues in an era where the boundaries between the public and private sectors have blurred.

## SPEAKING TRUTHS TO MULTIPLE POWERS

### Where Does this Leave Us?

Let me contrast the two eras with a broad brush.<sup>7</sup> I would characterize the early era of our profession as one of policy advising where analysts were reputed to be advisers to the top decisionmakers, could insulate themselves from partisan political debates, had confidence in their methodologies and information sources, and believed they were in a growth mode. Today, policy advisers are strewn around the policy landscape, find it difficult to escape the pressures and demands of partisan and ideologically driven debates, question their methodologies and acknowledge the limits of their information, and find themselves marginal to many decisionmaking processes. Instead of being characterized as speaking truth to power, it would be more accurate to describe our activity as speaking truths to multiple powers. Instead of being described as a field that focuses on a single conversation between the adviser and the ruler, it is a field with multiple conversations taking place at once.

Does this suggest that we are approaching a period of decline? I do not think so. Some, I am sure, find this world of political pressures, ambiguity, and messiness untenable and believe that it is time for intellectuals to retreat to their ivory towers [Benda, 1955]. I do not believe that most of us would accept that pathway. However, I do believe that these changes require us to reflect on the developments and become more self-conscious about the way we operate within a changing world. Historians have developed a subfield called historiography to reflect on the development of the history field. We need something of that sort—*an analysis of our analyses*. We should expand our scholarship to include an examination of our own work.

<sup>7</sup> This comparison is meant to exaggerate the tendencies in each of the two eras.

I would suggest three ways of doing that. First, it would be useful to look at a body of work on a particular policy issue over time—look at the way that the policy problem has been defined, how its arguments are made, the type of information sources used, the participants in the process, and—of course—its impact on decisionmaking. The long-term investment in work on welfare and health policy seems to me to give appropriate examples for such an analysis of analyses. Although there has been a relatively stable set of analysts working on these issues for several decades, the “clients” for this work have changed dramatically. It is not clear to me how the analytic work responded to those changes.

Second, I would like to encourage policy analysts to write about their work. Several other fields have encouraged this type of reflection, particularly sociology. Intellectual autobiographies by policy analysts (particularly those who are in a position to reflect back on their lives without negative consequences to their careers) would be incredibly useful to the field [Hammond, 1967]. And third, we could make sure that attention is given to these issues during the Research Conference. Although they are included from time to time, there is no focused attention to such questions.

There are other things that we could do as well. We could reexamine the curriculum of our policy schools and see whether we are preparing our students for the realities of this changing environment. There are techniques such as organizing and running focus groups that our students ought to be familiar with. We have yet to figure out ways to help our students gauge the intensity level around certain issues, assessing not only classic political feasibility questions but also the level of venom around some policy areas. Given the focus on decisionmaking at state and local levels, we also should examine the appropriateness of the classic policy analysis techniques to these levels of activity.

At last year’s Research Conference, David Lyon of the California Policy Institute noted that the growth in our field was for people who could write pithy, ideologically based briefs to sell a partisan position. Although we have always acknowledged that students have to learn how to write memos, I do not believe that we have spent much time teaching them how to package their work. The experience of groups like the Heritage Foundation is instructive in this matter. And packaging can take many different forms. Several projects sponsored by the World Bank have “published” the results of evaluation studies by posting them on the walls of village clinics and centers. Simple charts on the walls are understandable by village residents and create a set of accountability expectations for service delivery.

We are challenged to think about ways of developing standards for our work. Although I think that the literature on the ethics of policy analysis is interesting, it does not really deal with the variety of roles and expectations about individuals in the policy analysis field. What are the standards against which we measure our work? Is it drawn from a peer review model? Should our accountability revolve around questions of utilization?

The proliferation of participants in the policy analysis field also demands new ways to think about the availability of data. I recently learned that HUD’s Office of Policy Development and Research has established a policy that requires all of its contractors and grantees to deliver their data as well as analytical reports to the funding agency. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will put that data on the Internet, allowing access to it by research-

ers, advocacy groups, and decisionmakers across the country. That approach has been called the “democratization of data” and seems to me to respond to the expansion and diversity of the field. Michael Stegman, The Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research at HUD, has described this effort to “democratize data” as one which “enables the entire research and policy community to participate in the analysis of federal programs by first creating costly data bases . . . and then by making them available to the community” [Stegman, 1996, Foreward].

I conclude by returning to the metaphor of the one-sided conversation. As I have attempted to indicate, I believe that the original view of the policy analysis activity as a process of advising the prince or ruler—harkening back to Machiavelli—does not capture the complexity of the field today. Indeed, it is difficult to characterize the field as a two-person advising process that is like a simple conversation. We are now a field with multiple languages, values, forms, and with multiple individuals and groups as clients. Our conversations take place across the policy landscape. Although our diversity is frustrating and dissonant to some, I believe that we can take pride in the developments of our field. As individual analysts, we win some . . . and we lose some. But we have taken our place in the contemporary world of decisionmaking.

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