

# Policy paradox: the art of political decision making



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Selena Smith Essay # 5 PA 400 Fall 2004 Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making By Selena E. Smirth In life the best way to conduct business of any type is to do it transparently. That way everyone is clear as to exactly what you are doing and it makes it easier and a lot less difficult for someone to buy into your mission or plan. Typically, policy making is complicated and often times muddled, which makes for a very hard sell when trying to get one to buy into as stated, your mission, plan or vision.

Often times, the method by which a policy gets passed is through making the language accurate to the point where it appears seamless; so as to gain support from the people. According to Deborah Stone, “ the fields of political science, public administration, law, and policy analysis have shared a common mission of rescuing public policy from the irrationalities and indignities of politics, hoping to make policy instead with rational, analytical, and scientific methods. ” In Stone’s book the Policy Paradox: The Art of Policy Decision Making there are two specific aims that the author has set out to make.

The first is, she denotes this as “ the rationality project” and brings attention to the fact that it misses the points of politics. Instead of helping policy making, these organizations are actually missing the point and are pursuing an impossible goal. Another aspect she points out is that, “ the very categories of thought underlying rational analysis are themselves a kind of paradox, defined in political struggle”. . . paradoxes do not exist without politics (573). “ The second aim is to derive kind of political analysis that makes sense of policy paradoxes such as the ones depicted above. ” The theory of rationality professes to offer a correct vantage point, from which

we can judge the goodness of the real world. Policies should be made to attain the goals in life of equity, efficiency, security, and liberty. “ Policy is the rational attempt to attain objectives... [the goals] are often invoked as justifications for a policy, for a government action, or for the government’s not taking action”(573) . Many times these goals come into conflict with each other.

For instance, if the United States provided everyone with a vehicle for the purpose of transportation, in this particular aspect everyone would be equal, but not everyone would be free to choose what type of car they would like to have; you would have to take whatever was given. This is just one example similar to Stone’s idea of equality that may not be so equal. It depends on one’s point of view. Stone says that the problems with efficiency are that people have different views about the best ways to do something.

One example that she uses is welfare. Some feel that welfare is good because it gives money to the poor; others feel that welfare only gives an incentive to stay poor. Instead, some might propose that the rich get tax cuts, in order to give incentive for the poor to become millionaires (572). According to Stone, policies include a number of things; goals, problems and solutions are to name a few. In the Policy Paradox, Stone creates a model of reasoning that demonstrates how decisions should be made in a series of well-defined steps: 1.

Identify objectives 2. Identify alternative courses of action for achieving objectives 3. Predict the possible consequences of each alternative 4. Evaluate the possible consequences of each alternative 5. Select the

alternative that maximizes the attainment of objectives Within this book Stone develops several models. The model of reasoning which is broken down above is what Stone notates as that rational decision making and this is the recommended method by which decisions should be made.

There are four other models that are mentioned directly: model of political reason, this model say Stone, " ought to account for the possibilities of changing one's objectives, of pursuing contradictory objectives simultaneously, of winning by appearing to lose and turning loss into appearance of victory, and most unusual , of attaining objectives by portraying oneself as having attained them. " Then you have the model of society, which according to Stone is the market. . . ociety is viewed as a collection of autonomous, rational decision makers who have no community life. Their infractions consist entirely of trading with one another to maximize their individual well-being. " The market model is not restricted to things we usually consider markets, that is, to systems where goods and service are bought and sold. The model of policy making in the rationality project is production is a production model, where policy is created in a fairly orderly sequence of stages, almost as if on an assembly line (574-75).

Stone does an excellent job in pointing out some of the inconsistencies with the government and then giving possible solutions to the issues of policymaking and how they can be properly addressed. Much of what is emphasized within the excerpt given is on the models, and orientating oneself to goals Stone carefully takes each model and breaks it down listing the remunerations, the shortcomings, and then makes a comparison to each other; this one might think, seems to make the models appear flawless.

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However, that is not the attempt, rather to... “ express a logic of problem solving that is widespread in the policy analysis literature.... ” It would have been great to have had her to rate the policies more and give her own views of them, instead of relying on other experts. In conclusion, this was by far the best article that I have read through the entire book of classics. The excerpt within this book has certainly encouraged me to read the book in its entirety. The author’s objectives for writing the book are clear and understandable from the very beginning.

Up until now it was not necessary to offer a view point because the readings were all somewhat convoluted and lacked substances in many areas which makes it very difficult to write a good and object summation. Overall, I thought this book was very good. I learned a lot about policy making and the problems that occur when people have different beliefs and points of view about the policy in question. It was a pretty easy read because of the examples that she gave. Most were very simple, yet had a very strong point attached to them.