

## Public Policy 101

### What is policy?

Policy is everywhere. It controls what we buy, where, what we eat, how much we pay, transportation, the environment, sports...everything. Its application and effect demonstrate what makes policy so important.

Policy is about the people. Policy outlines our socially accepted norms and practices to assure some form of predictability in the allocation of scarce resources so we can all contribute towards a social outcome.

Examples demonstrate how wide-ranging policy can be:

- A lacrosse league sets out rules and regulations regarding return to play procedures for athletes following a concussion.
- A school sets a dress code
- A government increases the tax on sugary drinks
- A parent establishes what is acceptable behavior at the dinner table

Note that only one of these involves a formal government structure. Policy can be defined in many ways depending on its application. An overarching definition can be defined as follows:

**Policy:** a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual.

#### **Origin:**

Late Middle English: from Old French *policie* 'civil administration,' via Latin from Greek *politeia* 'citizenship,' from *politēs* 'citizen,' from *polis* 'city.'

From there we can rely on Dean Kilpatrick, from his work *Definitions of Public Policy and the Law* to define Public Policy as:

Public policy can be generally defined as a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning a given topic promulgated by a governmental entity or its representatives.

### **A Classification of Classifications of Policy**

Many-a-day have been spent assigning labels or classifications to policy. Generally policies can be broken down into personal, organizational and public – each reflecting the realms of jurisdiction to which they apply. This paper will focus on Public Policy.

Each policy is unique and deserves interpretation of implications rather than strict classification. A good example of this is with cigarettes.

The evolution of cigarette/tobacco policy is a great example of the dynamic roles that policy can take. Beyond the health impact of cigarettes, cigarette taxes – as the argument goes – cost society money. Increase in taxes on cigarettes, decreases use and leads to more individuals reaching older age that has higher healthcare costs. These additional costs are greater than the generated revenue, not to mention the time lapse between income and expenditure that is well beyond a political lifespan. Obviously, cost is not the only consideration with cigarette taxes, the social implications outweigh the financial considerations. The point is that policy is not always straight forward and classification is often misleading. Cigarette policy has many elements than span classifications (reactive and proactive, substantive and administrative, regulatory, redistributive, current and future, etc.).

Reactive and Proactive	Refers to the timeline that the policy is being applied. Cigarette taxes in response to health concerns is reactive. A child fitness tax credit to prevent obesity rates is proactive.
Substantive and Administrative	Substantive refers to legislation or programs that affect the significant or substantive aspects of community work while administrative is the procedural or administrative aspect (such as monitoring and reporting).
Vertical and Horizontal	Vertical refers to the traditional, formal model of policy making where by the traditional body (government) initiates, passes and imposes policy. Horizontal introduces more organizations into the development of policy (for example Public Private Partnerships P3's).
Current and Future	As society changes future policy is becoming increasingly important as aspects of our society require government intervention (example of file-sharing or technology over time that was not a traditional government priority). Current aspects of policy are areas that governing bodies already have jurisdiction over.
Lowi Classification <sup>1</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory</li> <li>• Distributive</li> <li>• Redistributive</li> </ul>	<b>Regulatory:</b> Regulation is obviously only one of several ways governments seek to control society and individual conduct. There are rather specific purposes that are

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<sup>1</sup> Lowi, Theodore J., *Public Administrative Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1972, pp. 298-310

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constituent</li> </ul>	<p>best pursued through regulatory techniques, and the reading of any account of regulatory administration suggests that there is a distinct set of moral and political-process consequences associated with this kind of governmental commitment.</p> <p><b>Distributive</b> – policies with many beneficiaries beyond those who “pay” for the program (such as farm subsidies).</p> <p><b>Redistributive</b> – Policies that reassign resources from one area to another (such as federal equalization payments).</p> <p><b>Constituent</b> – While there is some debate over Lowi’s interpretation of constituent definition it may refer to the top-down process of elected officials and administrative agencies<sup>2</sup>.</p>
<p>Public Policy v. Social Policy</p>	<p><b>Social policy:</b> will help the community much more improvement in different aspects for example some come in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of life</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Citizenship</li> <li>• Culture</li> </ul> <p><i>Social policy is part of public policy but public policy is more than that, it is economic policy, industrial policy, and also social policy, etc. Definitive answers to the supply, poverty and inequality are likely to remain elusive, and as such, it is important to sustain the opportunities for discussion, experimentation, innovation and learning in social development approaches considered<sup>3</sup></i></p>

While classification of a policy may be of note; its importance is not dependent on its classification.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.envplan.com/abstract.cgi?id=c10w>

<sup>3</sup> <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/81/77/98/PDF/32.pdf>

### *The Policy Cycle:*

Every policy, regardless of political system, party in power, electorate, issue or idea has the same basic guidelines that outline its cycle from definition to evaluation.

Lasswell outlines the policy cycle as:

1. (Problem definition) Agenda setting
2. Policy formulation
3. Decision-making
4. Implementation
5. Evaluation

Distracted Driving example:

1. Studies released support the assertion that texting and driving is wildly dangerous. Public concern is raised around the issue and public policy is identified as a possible solution.
2. Politicians and bureaucrats determine what policy options are available, most successful and most cost effective.
3. The legislative body votes and passes distracted driving legislation.
4. The enforcement agency (cops) enforce the policy
5. The public reflects on the policy, enforcement and implementation. If there is an attitude for continued change (too harsh, not strong enough, etc.) this forms the basis for Agenda Setting and the cycle starts again.

Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making  
By Deborah Stone

Chapter 1: The Market and the Polis

Market is the individual    Polis is the community

	Market	Polis
1. Unit of Analysis: individual	The Edison Schools	Public Districts
2. Motivation: Self-interest	Owners want own money; Stockholders and parents	Community education of the entire district. City interest = real estate values, Scores Children have opportunity for good education
3. Conflict	Self interest with these three. We really need to offer a good education, but we need to make money.	My child vs. the rest of the children Resource allocation: AP vs. after school help programs
4. Source of Ideas and Preferences (Civic Capacity)	Parents what child to go to the best schools, self set standards and freedom of choice	Federal and State Guidelines and Mandates, NCLB, Private sector demands
5. Nature of Collective Activity	Public School VS. Edison	Community Works with the board for the budget. Competition between schools in the same district, tenure, jobs
6. Criteria for individual decision-making	Making more money than we are spending, profit /cost driven	PTA promotes the interest of the school, the BOE and who makes it up
7. Building blocks of social action	Politicians direct this election of the school system. Edison owners influencing them	PTA, Fiscal Equity group, Teachers Associations, Community business owners
8. Nature of Information	Stockholder reports, Students success reports, Websites	Ambiguous: Highly Qualified teachers, School report card once a year, NYS Standards of reporting is set forth by legislators, How BOE present data in terms of improvement rather than raw numbers.
9. How things work Laws of Passion – the more they have a group the more interdependence there is	No enrollment no tuition CEO – Chris Whittle Only competition drives society.	PTA, more cooperation creates more social well being.
10. Sources of change PARADOX: both are perusing their own welfare, not really for the cause rather my child's education	Money	School budget persuasion by the BOE. Increase scores

## Policy Evaluation

No two policies are created equal. Seemingly small differences between policies may have monumental impacts on everyday life. For example the difference between tax deductions versus a tax credit may seem trivial but the implications are large. A tax deduction decreases the amount of taxable income you can claim such charitable donations in Canada. A tax credit reduces the amount of tax you pay, for example the child's fitness tax credit.

Policy evaluation attempts to identify all the costs and benefits whether they are direct/indirect, economic, social, political, or any other measurement. Policy without compromise or objection is like freehand drawing a perfect circle – it is impossible. Comprehensive evaluation is critical to limit the exposure of risk in implementing policy and should not be rushed.

A popular policy analysis is the SWOT analysis – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

## **Politics & Policy**

All too often people associate policy with the debauchery that is our question period. Policy is so much more than that. Obviously politics has a huge implication on policy development and is often the quickest way to get formal policy in Canada. Question period in Canada is simply to draw attention to the shiny object of the day that may or may not lead to policy change. Policy and politics is much more than partisan negotiations. Government policy has three main sources the political side, the bureaucratic side and the judiciary.

Political parties run elections on their respective political platforms that outline their general beliefs and policy options for their respective jurisdictions. When elected, parties enact their legislation choices thus forming the political side of policy.

Changes to regulation or even the introduction of new legislation can be promoted through civil servants. While this tends to be more time consuming, this also assures that legislation is constantly being monitored, evaluated and amended regardless of political interest. That said, at the end of the day, new pieces of legislation require political acceptance.

The judiciary in Canada is responsible for determining the legality of legislation or laws (depending on their status) subject to the constitution of Canada. A great example of the effect of the judiciary on policy in Canada is the ongoing case of prostitution that places the legality of prostitutes/prostitution against the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

The three areas of policy development also interact and respond to each other. A judicial decision may affect the bureaucratic and political agendas. The judiciary reacts to legislation regardless of its introduction through the political or bureaucratic areas and you can always count on the political realm responding to anything.

This is also a great time to point out that policy is not strictly for the purpose of limiting freedom but rather to promote or enforce a behavior or action. In a recent call regarding potential legislation for a safety device in cars that has proven to save lives – that is required in all but one province – I was confronted with the assertion that that “we (province in question) are not behind on legislation, but ahead on freedom”, this is certainly one way to look at policy and is an important belief to keep in mind when implementing policy.

Politics and Policy have a fickle relationship as determining the agenda for policy change in Canada is often skewed by a multitude of factors including; Canada’s

“friendly dictatorship”, opinion polling, media coverage, special interest groups and general public knowledge. Most recently the issue of medical marijuana policy has been at the forefront of political discourse. While the medical implications, funding models, distribution channels, security, taxation and general structure moving forward the long-term implications are still relatively uncertain. Each level of government will navigate this complicated policy area to determine the best outcome for their respective jurisdiction. In the marijuana field (pun intended), while medical benefits, revenue and regulation pose an emerging market and opportunity for governments long-term health drawbacks (ex. potential lung-cancer), substance abuse and social issues will continue to drive policy change over time. As Tip O’Neil will remind us, all politics is local, and Medical Marijuana will be no different. Election and re-election will always be at the forefront of any political policy decision.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this document is to provide a general overview of policy. This overview will hopefully provide the background knowledge to approach, examine or implement a policy. Every policy has unintentional repercussions and accordingly balancing expected outcomes and externalities is always advised.