



A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving

Eugene Bardach , Eric M. Patashnik

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With his original eightfold approach, Bardach encapsulates more than 35 years of teaching students effective, accurate, and persuasive policy analysis. This bestselling handbook presents dozens of concrete tips, interesting case studies, and step-by-step strategies for the budding analyst as well as the seasoned professional.

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Reader In says

This is a fantastic textbook and fabulous resource.

U Berkeley's eight-step process to problem solving is laid out in a clear, easy-to-follow manner. It's written for public policy analysis, but there are a lot of lessons here that can be used by businesses and organizations. Totally recommended.

Liam says

"You should be careful, however, to avoid using the social scientific standard of adequacy for judgments about the realism of a model, for it is quite conservative. In policy analysis the looser, but more appropriate, standard should be whether reliance on a model can lead to better results and avoid worse results than less disciplined guesswork." (49)

"Unlike most social science research, most policy research is derivative rather than original. That is, it is produced by creative play with ideas and data already developed by others. ... Instead, the researcher's role is preeminently discovering, collating, interpreting, criticizing, and synthesizing ideas and data that others have developed already." (82)

CJ says

There is a standard nightmare in teen sit-coms that a protagonist should have a nightmare about showing up to school without trousers. If there were just such a nightmare for a public policy professional, this slim text would be just the cure for such an overactive super-ego.

Put differently (and more clearly), I would choose this book to read if I knew I were starting a public policy job on Monday without any prior preparation. The book is very practically oriented towards the professional practices and behaviors that would allow a person to muddle through a job in the field. Without any experience myself, I won't speak to this book would be what you need to excel.

I am glad I started my summer reading for public policy school with this book.

Sam Norton says

Very comparable to the KKV book on social science research. Bardach presents a very straightforward description of how to conduct policy analysis, including his eightfold path. Again, similar to KKV, but certainly erring more towards using common sense than going for stringent scientific methods. However, as policy analysis and social science research aren't necessarily the same process, I think it's safe to say that the

two methods aren't conflicting.

Aqsa says

This maybe a premature review. But I think my opinion about it, is set in stone: IT IS AWESOME. Going to be a bible for the next 10000 years. Read it if you're in any way interested in policy analysis and problem-solving.

Also, it is going to be memorable because my first MOOC is based on this book. #achievementunlocked

Steven Peterson says

A brief introduction to policy analysis. Well respected author Eugene Bardach lays out what he calls "the eightfold path to more effective problem solving." This involved steps in the policy analysis process including: defining the problem, assembling evidence, constructing alternatives, selecting criteria, projecting outcomes, confronting trade-offs, deciding, and telling your story.

This is a brief book, but serves nicely as a "quick and dirty" introduction to policy analysis.

Stephanie Murray says

Not a book I'd ordinarily pick up, but I had to read it for one of my classes. Generally, the book does what it said it would do: flesh out strategies for approaching, breaking down, and comparing policy alternatives in the real world (i.e. the world in which things like political biases, time constraints, limited access to information, etc... abound). It contains some really useful insights into political problem solving. Some of the guidelines are so intuitive and obvious that it's hard to believe there is anyone in the world who could meaningfully benefit from their inclusion. Others tips are just hilarious. See Bardach's advice on making appointments with important informants: "Try to impress people with your ability to gain entree to meetings that are only quasi-public in nature, and by talking in public places to important personages. All this familiarity will backfire if you appear pesky or inept, so some judiciousness is in order. Also, you should appear to be learning quickly and critically while in these settings, rather than observing passively or dully. A notebook or laptop computer, in which you enter notes fast and furiously, is a good stage prop as well as useful in its own right" (77-78).

Lyndsey says

I was excited to read this book, but the structure and development overall is poor. I was not engaged though I am interested in policy development and analysis.

Steve says

A basic, broad overview for new policy students.

James Geluso says

When I hear eightfold I expect it to be a path with eight simultaneous aspects. This is more like an eight-step path.

Aside from quibbling about the name, the method is sound and this book is well-written with effective examples. I don't really know how often I'll refer to it in my professional life, but I'll keep it in my back pocket just in case.

Mike Bularz says

Had to read this for a class on Policy Analysis, was pleasantly surprised.

Bardach has a writing style that is easy to follow and uses relatively clear logic. The book gives the impression he is a seasoned policy analyst. This "Eightfold Path" guide to comparing and judging policy alternatives will give you an excellent base of (to be followed loosely) steps in which to approach problems in public, nonprofit sector policy as well as private organizations, although the focus is on the former two.

The author also gives you what you want to know, examples, ideas, and "semantic tricks" to thinking out any of the steps he outlines, for instance: semantic tips for deciding what criteria to judge alternatives (variations on a solution).

If, to give any negative critique of the book, the author disassembles his method too much sometimes - which leaves you confused as to which step you are referring to. To give credit though, not all types of analysis (and if you read the book you will know) are straightforward "Identify Problem, Identify Alternatives to solve it, Identify criteria to rank alternatives, and then choose" and depend on the context, as well as those funding your "analysis" and work.

Further, to credit Bardach, there are many pointers as well in other problem areas which are helpful, such as general project management, or even ways of structuring final reports and recommendations.

All in all, this is a quick read which isn't padded with useless information, and isn't lacking in terms of advice and pointers, to the effect of having things such as appendices of "work governments do" useful to not just borrow ideas, but stimulate the thinking process.

This one makes it to my top shelf, at least.

Nargiz says

“A Practical Guide” is well-written book that presents the “eightfold path” model to write a policy analysis paper. Along with the three parts, the appendices are guidebooks for writing a good paper and also getting ideas about public and non-profit stakeholders’ roles. Although the book is a good read for everyone, who would like to delve into policy analysis, it would be specifically valuable for the novices.

J says

I'm definitely going to hang onto this one! This can work both as a textbook for students to read cover-to-cover and discuss, or as a reference for practitioners. It seems like the kind of book that can serve as an inspiration when stuck or as a reassurance when about to try something new. Bardach's text is clear and concise, and the book is organized in a way that is easy to flip around.

Dede says

This book is not dry. Yes, it is an instruction book for analyzing public policy but it's so much more! With a bit of candor, and creativity one can apply these rules broader scoped problems, personal conundrums and understanding any kind of complexity of organizations, families or tribes. I love it and will refer to it indefinitely.

Rob says

A thorough, yet brief, overview of policy analysis. It started out a bit dry and slow, but as the textbook moved along, it opened up and became a bit more interesting. It's a good starter book on the subject matter.
