

Three Eras in Policy Analysis: Review of Radin’s “Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife”

Donovan A. McFarlane

College of Business, Westcliff University

4199 Campus Dr., Irvine, CA 92612

Email: donovanmcfarlane@westcliff.edu

H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship, Nova Southeastern University

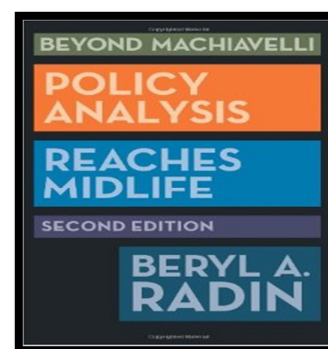
3301 College Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

Email: donovan@nova.edu

Department of Business Administration, Broward College

1000 Coconut Creek Blvd, Coconut Creek, FL 33066

Email: dmcfarla@broward.edu



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1. Introduction

Policy Analysis as a systematized body of knowledge or field of study has been defined in several ways. For example, Mayer, Els van Daalen, and Bots (n.d.) define Policy Analysis as a multi-faceted field in which a variety of different activities and ambitions have found a place; as a broad and versatile field of applied policy research and advice, where a multitude of perspectives and methods have developed. Vaitsman, Lobato, and Ribeiro (2013), state that policy analysis refers to either an interdisciplinary or applied field within the social sciences dealing with all of the activities within a planning system and which provides information for policy decision-makers in administrative and political systems. Policy analysis simply defines the problem and the goals, examines the arguments, and analyzes implementation of the policy regarding issues, usually issues involving the intermingling perspectives, rights, responsibilities and interests of stakeholders.

There are many books written on Policy Analysis and the policy process. Among them is a notable reader written by Beryl A. Radin, a faculty in the Georgetown Public Policy Institute and McCourt School of Public Policy at George Washington University. This book is the second in her series chronicling the practice and systematization of Public Policy, and titled, *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife* (2013), the first being *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife* (2004). In the work under review, the author provides an overview of Radin’s book and looks at the three fictional persons that Radin develops, and explains how these three persons represent different ways of doing policy analysis. The author also critiques Radin’s model by looking at the strengths and weaknesses of each different approach. In the final analysis, the author deliberates on which model represents the best way to doing policy analysis with an understanding that each has its merits.

2. Book Chapters Summary

Radin’s *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife* (2013), is a nine-chapter book that explores the critical issues that confront policy analysis practitioners, changes in the field, the impact of globalization on policy analysis and the dramatic changes in the policy environment (Georgetown University Press, 2013). Radin (2013) explores the conflict between the imperatives of analysis and world of politics, the analytic tools that have been used, created, or discarded over the past fifty years, and the relationship between decision makers and analysts as the field has multiplied and spread (Radin, 2013; Georgetown University Press, 2013).

Radin’s *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife* (2013), begins with an extensive Preface and Introduction in which she asks and answers the question: “What does it mean to be a policy analyst?”

According to Radin (2013), the field of Policy Analysis has grown over the last decades and despite this, it still remains a profession about which the general public lacks understanding. She goes on to discuss the development of feelings and perspectives regarding the field, academically, socially, and professionally, and the surprise those in the profession may encounter when they communicate what they do. According to Radin (2013), her book is designed to help students, practitioners, and faculty to explain who they are and what they do as policy analysts, and it also explains the changes that have taken place in Policy Analysis between 1961 and the 1990s, as well as casts wider lens on the field; essentially, Radin's book contrasts the realities of the policy analysis profession over and during three periods: 1960s, 1990s, and 2010s.

Chapter 1 of Radin's book is titled "A Portrait of the Past", and looks at the origin of the policy analysis field, even as far back as the ancient practice of advising the "prince" – a decisively Machiavellian conception, and the practice of policy analysis from its early stages in the 1960s. Chapter 2, titled "Policy Analysis by the 1990s: Dueling Swords", explores how the field of policy analysis expanded within and outside of government and the impact of a changing environment and how analytic activity in the field has expanded (Radin, 2013). Chapter 3, titled "Policy Analysis in the Twenty-First Century", describes how the field has moved across the globe and how those in the field have responded to changes in the decision-making process (Radin, 2013). Chapter 4, "Profiles of Practice", presents the profiles of nine organizations engaged in the practice of policy analysis and then contrasts their approaches regarding clients, staff, skills, roles, ideology and information (Radin, 2013). In Chapter 5, "Dealing with Two Cultures: Politics and Analysis", Radin (2013) contrasts assumptions about politics during the early stages of policy analysis and those made today, noting the existing challenges to such assumptions and the ideas of neutrality and objectivity. Chapter 6 deals with "The Tools of the Trade", and reviews the various methodologies and analytical techniques that are used by policy analysts. Here, Radin (2013) notes alternative formulations that have emerged in the field in recent years. Chapter 7 is titled "Information—Just Give Me the Facts?" This chapter explores views regarding the appropriateness and availability of information and integrates current perspectives concerning utilization and investment in information. Technology's impact on the availability of information in the policy process is explored. Chapter 8, "The Policy Task", deals with the shifts that have taken place in the policy making task – moving from analysis focused on the creation of new programs to the fine-tuning of existing programs and analysis of cutbacks. This is where the author explores the relationship between policy analysis and the budget process (Radin, 2013). The final chapter, Chapter 9 of Radin's *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife* (2013), asks three questions: "Where Are We?", "Where Are We Going?" and "Has Policy Analysis Reached Middle Age?"

3. The Three Fictional Persons: Three Eras of Policy Analysis

Central to Radin's exploration of policy analysis as a field of study and profession over three periods: the 1960s, the 1990s, and the 2010s, are three fictional persons or fictional policy analysts she presents. What Radin (2013) does to teach us the development and intricacies of the policy analysis process during and over these three periods is to look at the critical issues that have confronted the policy analysis practitioners – the three fictional persons, and the changes in the field, including the globalization of policy analysis, and the dramatic changes in the policy environment characterizing and bridging practice between the three eras. Thus, the three fictional persons or policy analysts work in three different periods or eras: the 1960s, the 1990s, and the 2010s.

John Nelson is the first of the three fictional policy analysts used by Radin (2013) to contrast work and professionalism in the policy analysis field over the three periods. John Nelson, a policy analyst working in the 1960s, is an economist who entered the field in its early stages. John became an expert on the techniques of economic analysis and learned how to apply these in addressing a wide range of policy issues. Working only a few years with the federal government, John was a specialist in analytic techniques and a generalist in terms of the content and substance of policy analysis (Radin, 2013). In contrast, the second fictional person, or policy analyst of the 1990s, Rita Stone, focused her interest and experience in a specific policy area and was trained in an interdisciplinary public policy academic program. As such, Rita is familiar with a variety of analytic approaches and dedicated herself to being a career public servant in the federal government (Radin, 2013). Still in contrast of the former two fictional persons or fictional policy analysts is Veronica Lopez, the third policy analyst who works in the era or period Radin designates as the 2010s. Veronica began her career as a Doctor of Medicine and a policy specialist on health issues inside the federal government, and she became involved in international issues early in her career (Radin, 2013). Veronica moved from the U.S. government to working with the Pan American Health Organization, and then from there to a staff position at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Radin, 2013).

As seen above, Radin (2013) clearly demonstrates the differences in the policy analysis profession in the three periods or eras – 1960s, 1990s, and 2010s. She does this not just by virtue of the changes in the profession's scope, but also in training, qualifications, focus, as well as in terms of how policy analysis has expanded along with transformations or changes in society and our challenges. For example, John Nelson who worked in the 1960s policy environment was not a policy analyst by training or education, but an economist who

applied his existing expertise related to the field. This is expected as the profession and field were under development and the “pioneers” are usually individuals who must “make do with what they have” as the field is systematized and become more specialized or focused rather than generalized and undefined in processes, methods, practices, and principles. As we can see with the 1990s policy analyst, Rita Stone, she was trained in an interdisciplinary public policy academic program with her interest and experience focused on a specific policy area. Here, we have the policy profession emerging strongly as a focused area where education and training in the field developed along with the ideas and theory surrounding the practice of policy analysis. Rita unlike John in previous era, learned the approaches specific to policy analysis and her career path was steadfast as a public servant in the federal government (Radin, 2013). This means that the 1990s saw increased specialization in the field and could be regarded as a maturation of policy analysis profession. Then came the changes and transitions or dynamism in policy analysis and the profession characterizing the 2010s and the environment in which the third fictional policy analyst Veronica Lopez works as a policy specialist and expert in her occupation. Here, Radin (2013) alerts us to the expansion and integration of policy analysis as a field and as a profession. Veronica, after all, started out in Medicine and then worked as a policy specialist on health issues with the government before launching into working with associations and what is seen as global-level policy analysis with the Pan American Health Organization and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Radin, 2013). Based on the above contrasts, we could say that policy analysis as a field and profession has through the periods or eras of the 1960s, 1990s, and 2010s, gone from being broad and undefined to narrow and specialized, and then to multidisciplinary public-private and integrative. Whatever the case, Radin (2013) reminds us that the field of policy analysis and its profession are still being developed and defined through changing political, social, and global processes including information technology influence and the new and emerging challenges of this current era, the 2010s.

4. Conclusion

Radin’s *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife* (2013), can aptly be characterized as a textbook and manual for students, faculty, and policy analysts or practitioners, and these are the audiences she writes for and uses as examples in her seminal work. When considering the “three approaches” to policy analysis proposed by Radin (2013) via the three fictional persons or three policy analysts of the three eras, definition or identification of a “best approach” depends on individuals’ perspectives and ideology surrounding policy analysis as field of study and profession. This author believes that the integrative and globalization-based approach characterized by the cross-sector example we see with the third fictional policy analyst, Veronica Lopez, is more reflective of “best approach” when we consider the contexts of today and the environments and issues on which policies must be developed and implemented. The third functional policy analyst must function in an environment where heightened sense of service has made policy analysis a domain of both the public and private sectors, and where individuals must utilize existing expertise regardless of formal policy analysis education training to apply their skills – technical, interpersonal, and conceptual – in solving problems across the globe. Policy analysis is occurring in a dynamic environment today and Radin’s third policy analyst is equipped to deal with this.

Radin’s *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Reaches Midlife* (2013) is an excellent book and well-written to educate those who are researchers, scholars, practitioners and students of policy analysis. The author delivers the entire policy process from the 1960s to present (the 2010s) in an artful and entertaining way, and the use of the three fictional persons brings alive the issues and challenges that Radin attempts to point out to her readers, whether these issues stem from professionalism and practice, from environmental or ideological philosophical changes, or simply from conscious systematic and scientific development regarding the policy process. This is an excellent book and will certainly increase readers’ knowledge and understanding of policy analysis, its emergence, practice, development, growth, and transformation up to present!

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