

POLICY SYSTEMS ANALYSIS AS A NEW PARADIGM FOR DEBATE

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Academic Debate and Pedagogy

In the modern world a common measure of the worth of a service is its utility to the receiver. If a service can provide the consumer with something useful, that service is deemed worthwhile. Academic debate is such a service. The purpose of academic debate is to provide students with knowledge and skills that can be utilized by functioning members of our society.

In achieving its purpose, academic debate should prepare students for realistic debating situations. As advocates within the institutionalized frameworks of government, the students of academic debate could well aid in the discovery of solutions for many of our most serious social problems. Of course, academic debate within itself is not a solution to social problems, but it can prepare citizens by providing the knowledge and skills necessary to take the first step toward a solution.

This study explores methods of aiding the pedagogical function of academic debate through a possible change in the paradigm. A paradigm which enhances the student's knowledge of political decision-making, gives the student some experience as an advocate of policy, and sharpens the student's skills of analysis with reference to decision-making more fully realizes the educational goals of academic debate.

Unfortunately, the current state of debate does not necessarily lend itself fully to achievement of educational goals. On the other hand, the policy systems analysis model may have greater utility in terms of attaining the educational goals of academic debate.

The State of Academic Debate--Fragmentation:

Theory vs. Practice

A certain degree of diversity of perspective is healthy for almost any discipline. It is often the existence of variety in thought and action that produces the necessary innovation for the growth of a field. Yet, when the degree of diversity becomes too large, the positive benefits cease, and only fragmentation remains. This has been the problem with academic debate. The result of this apparent fragmentation between theory and practice has not been, for the most part, beneficial to the discipline. As Ziegelmüller stated, many of the effects of the fragmentation have been detrimental: ... in recent years the extent and degree of diversity within the American forensics scene have created misunderstandings of concepts, confusion of goals and conflicts of interest.¹ The diversity involves the emphasis placed on the educational and competitive aspects of forensics. Either one or the other of these aspects is emphasized to an extreme by some members of the forensics community. The only interest that some coaches and debaters have in

academic debate is the competition. Other coaches ignore the opportunity to use the competitive format to enhance the achievement of educational goals. As a result of this conflict of interest, many students often only perceive academic debate and its concepts from a limited perspective.

The ideal situation within the field of forensics is for theory and practice to complement one another. The theories of decision-making provide guidelines for debate and advocacy. The theories help to channel thought along acceptable lines and reduce unnecessary and perhaps wasted effort. In contrast, the practice of debate lends itself to application of theory through actual use. Practice in forensics is designed to develop and enhance skills of logical reasoning and communication. Forensics (especially academic debate) depends on theory to identify the educational goals and on practice to help achieve the educational goals, but theory and practice must ultimately work together in terms of the method of goal achievement before there is success.

The state of academic debate is such that the methods required by theory and the methods used in practice are quite different. For example, the theory of academic debate requires certain standards for arguments and evidence. This quality of argument and evidence required by theory is often replaced by quantity of argument and evidence in actual practice. Although theory required the logical development

of arguments supported by sufficient, clear, reliable, and verifiable evidence, the practice frequently has been the use of arguments lacking in the necessary explanations, logical development, and qualified supporting evidence. From a general standpoint this difference in methods is the primary source of the fragmentation.

Application of the Current Model of Debate in Reality

In academic debate, it is the paradigm which determines the methods of operation for the forensics educator as well as the forensics participant. The current model for academic debate is supposed to be the forensics model of the classical period of rhetoric. The theories of debate are based upon this early model and, in fact, have changed very little over time. The early model encompassed both forensic and deliberative theory. This duality was possible at that time due to the similarity and closeness of political and legal decision-making. This relationship between forensic and deliberative theory remained viable even until the early period of American History. In the interim English common law further entrenched the close relationship between forensic and deliberative theory.²

The current situation with regard to forensic and deliberative theory is quite different. There is a gap growing between forensic and deliberative rhetoric. The closeness between the two theories is not as applicable in

in reality as it once was. The relationship that once existed is at this point a problem to the growth and development of deliberative theory as a separate entity.

Initially, using the forensic model for deliberative debate did not pose a serious problem, because in the Greek city-state, the Roman forum, or the New England town meeting, the processes of and the setting for legal and political debate were quite similar. But today, with courts and legislatures operating as separate agencies in different settings and following different decision-making procedures, this close tie between forensic and deliberative theory becomes a handicap.³

Thus, in reality the union between these two types of decision-making has been broken. Yet, the forensics community still attempts to apply the two theories as a single unit in academic debate. The handicap of this can be seen by considering the type of proposition which is most frequently debated.

The usefulness of either the forensic or deliberative paradigm depends upon the type of proposition involved in debate. The prevailing attitude in debate currently favors the use of the proposition of policy. As Conklin and Shultz suggest, when the forensic community chooses the national topic, the choice will most likely be a proposition of policy.

... the National Question Committee has submitted to debate coaches an occasional value proposition for consideration as the national debate topic. Generally these questions have gathered little support and have been voted to the bottom⁴ of preferential lists upon which they appeared.

Because of the adherence to the proposition of policy by the forensic community, the deliberative or legislative model seems more appropriate to the decision-making situation than the forensic or judicial model. It is most common for policy to be determined by legislative methods rather than forensic. However, it cannot be denied that the judicial model has had effects on policy, but the judicial model is not the basic policy determinant. Unlike the legislative model, the judicial model affects policy by mandating consistency between policy and the existing fundamental legal framework or legal precedent. At best, the judicial model only serves as a de facto policy-maker based upon precedents provided by the legislative model. It can be reasoned that the model which most closely resembles its "real world" counterpart as far as generating original operating policy is concerned is the legislative or deliberative model.

Since current debate practices as well as theory attempt to apply both forensic and deliberative decision-making (often in a mismatched fashion), there is no true "real world" model that can be turned to for clarification and greater understanding.

An Explanation of the Systems Approach

The systems approach has applications in many different fields. It may be misleading to refer to the operation as "the systems approach" because defining the concept by its

application gives the impression that little relationship exists between the definitions. However, the relationship is founded on the basis of the systems approach. Essentially, the systems approach examines an entire system and its processes rather than viewing only units of the system and only partial processes.

The systems approach was derived from general systems theory. As Boulding defines general systems theory, it is a model builder.

General Systems Theory is a name which has come into use to describe a level of theoretical model-building which lies somewhere between the highly generalized constructions of pure mathematics and the specific theories of the specialized disciplines.⁵

This rather abstract definition can best be illustrated by examining the procedures of the Council on Wage and Price Stability. The Council on Wage and Price Stability (ideally) is concerned with the workings of the entire United States economic system. The Council analyzes the input of both the public and private sectors utilizing a workable model of our economic system, various mathematical constructs, and economic theory to predict the effects that changes instituted by the public sector and/or private sector will have on the overall economy. Likewise, when the systems approach is applied to academic debate in terms of choosing policy alternatives, the basis for a theory of decision-making has been created. It is at this level that this study is concerned with the systems approach. Since in academic debate the systems approach is best applied to deciding questions

of policy, it is referred to as policy systems analysis. policy systems analysis can best be defined in the following manner:

... a systemic approach to helping a decision-maker choose a course of action by investigating his full problem, searching out objectives and alternatives, and comparing them in light of their consequences, using an appropriate framework insofar as possible analytic--to bring expert judgment and intuition to bear on the problem.

There are six steps which can be identified in the process of policy systems analysis. The steps can be listed as follows: (1) Identify the goal of the system; (2) Decide the objectives of the system; (3) Discover alternatives; (4) Determine the impact of the alternatives; (5) Decide on the decision-making criteria; and (6) Generate the model.

However, before a decision-maker begins to follow this schematic, he must complete the preliminary procedures. The preliminary procedures require that the policy-maker identify the system involved in the problem area, label the components of that system, and examine the relationships among the components. The best way to illustrate the process itself and the initial procedures is to provide a consistent example and manipulate that example through the entire process. The problem area of consumer product safety (borrowed from the 1976-77 intercollegiate debate resolution) is an excellent example.

The Preliminary Procedures

The policy-maker can in most instances identify the system in question by utilizing the definition of a system. A system can be defined as an assembly of objects all of which are related to one another by some form of regular interaction or interdependence so that the assembly can be viewed as an organic or organized whole.⁷ When this definition is applied to the problem area of consumer product safety, for example, the system most likely to be identified is the market system. In this particular case, it is the market system which is the system most involved in the problem area. The system identified should account for the majority of variables in the particular problem area. In this case the market system accounts for such variables as cost, safety, quality, products, manufacturers, consumers, supply, and demand. Therefore, it seems that the market system meets the definitional burdens necessary to be identified as a system because of the interaction of the variables as an organized whole. As with identifying the system, knowing what a component is will aid the policy-maker in labeling the components of the system. Components are defined as discrete, unique, or constituent parts that compose a system.⁸ The most critical components of the market system are the consumer or purchaser, the product, and the manufacturer. Of course, all of the variables previously mentioned can be called components, but they are either

functions of or dependent upon the critical components of purchaser, product, and manufacturer. Finally, the policy-maker must carefully observe the relationship which exists among the components of the system. Brock, Chesebro, Cragan and Klumpp suggest that a relationship is the action of a system or the identity that exists between two or more components.⁹ There are three types of interaction which can usually be identified--unilateral, mutual, and feedback loops.¹⁰ Because of the requirement of and difficulty in demonstrating a single cause-effect relationship, the policy systems analyst normally rejects the first two types of relationships. Both unilateral and mutual interactions impose strict limitations on the system and its components. The flexibility of the descriptive relationship referred to as feedback loops is the most useful to the policy systems analyst. In the feedback loop relationship, one component is said to directly affect another component, and the second component affects the first component in an ordered sequence of time.¹¹ For instance, within the marketplace the consumer has an effect on the production levels of the manufacturer through the amount of demand. At the same time, the manufacturers influence the consumer by creating demand for products through advertising. Once the decision-maker has ascertained the system, the components, and the relationships, he must follow the steps in the process of policy systems analysis.

Identify the goal of the system

The goal of a system is the aim, end, or final cause toward which human actions and institutions are directed.¹²

similarly, goals can be called sets of desired relationships between the system and its environment.¹³ The policy systems analyst should be aware of the fact that a system has two different types of goals--stated and operational. Operational goals are determined by the on-going process of the system. In other words, they are simply a description of what is occurring.¹⁴ In the system of the marketplace, the operational goal would be the continued production, sale, and consumption of a product. Unlike the operational goals, the stated goals are externally imposed value judgments of men. Stated goals are not necessarily a natural function of a system. Currently within the marketplace, the externally imposed goals are such things as production of quality products, a good profit margin for the manufacturer, and general economic stability for the economy as a whole. It is at this level that the policy-maker decides to alter the system. The policy-maker's options at this level are to change a stated goal or add an additional stated goal. In the spirit of the example, the policy-maker would add the stated goal of producing safe products for consumer use.

Decide the objectives of the system

The objectives are determined by what the decision-maker intends to accomplish by his decision to alter the system.¹⁵ At this point the similarity between the stated goal and the objectives can be noted. The difference, however, is the fact that the objectives are the specifics of what the decision-maker hopes to accomplish. The stated goal is to

increase consumer product safety, but the objectives might be to reduce consumer injury from products, prevent consumer death from products, or to eliminate any type of future harm from consumer products. In other words, the objectives are simply a more specific statement of the externally imposed goal of the system. For the purpose of the example, the policy-maker here has the objective of reducing consumer injuries from products.

Discover alternatives

Once the objectives have been determined, the next step in policy systems analysis is to discover the alternatives which are the options by which the objectives can be attained. The policy-maker must find ways to reduce consumer injuries from products in this case. Some of the alternatives that might be considered by the policy-maker could be such as banning existing products which have a high rate of accidents to the consumer when used, making the manufacturer legally liable for the costs involved in every accident, or increasing the quality control used by the manufacturer to prevent the production of hazardous products. The decision-maker cannot make a choice with only the alternatives at hand. It is necessary for him to consider the effects that each alternative might have on the system as a whole.

Determine the impact of the alternatives

With the alternatives designed, the policy-maker must determine the impacts of the alternatives on the entire system. Basically, the policy-maker must determine the

possible outcome of each alternative. It is the assumption of the decision-maker that all of the alternatives will solve the problem, and it is the potential adverse effects that concerns the decision-maker. The adverse effects of the ban alternative would be the cost to the manufacturer, the retailer, and whoever does the actual removing of the products from the shelves. An operation of this nature which was comprehensive in scope would have enormous costs to all those involved. The alternative of making the manufacturer liable for the costs of all the accidents could, like the ban alternative, be so expensive that it would force many manufacturers out of the marketplace. In addition, in the case of the liability alternative, it could create a barrier which would prevent the entry of new manufacturers into the marketplace. The impact of the alternative of increasing the quality control might be increased costs to the manufacturer which would be passed on to the consumer effectively reducing the consumer's buying power. Even after the policy-maker knows the alternatives and has discerned their impacts, he is not at the point to make the best decision.

Decide on the decision-making criteria

Critical to a policy-maker is the fifth step of policy systems analysis. That step is the determination of the decision-making criteria with respect to the alternatives. Quade explains the importance of the criteria this way: A criterion is a rule or standard by which to rank the

alternatives in order of desired ability. It provides a way to relate objectives, alternatives, and impacts.¹⁶ At this stage of the analysis, the policy-maker must utilize the tools of cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit.¹⁷ Cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit are the predetermined criteria of policy decision-making. Other criteria are determined by the specifics of the situation and, thus, may vary. The operative terms of these ratios (cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit) are costs, benefits, and effectiveness. Costs are consequences which the policy-maker would like to avoid, or, at least, minimize.¹⁸ In other words, costs are undesirable impacts resulting from a decision. Benefits and effectiveness are the opposite of costs. They are the positive values associated with a decision which the policy-maker wishes to obtain and maximize.¹⁹

By applying the criteria of cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit, the policy-maker is attempting to weigh the input against the output of a particular system. In this sense, cost-effectiveness would be defined as a form of analysis in which alternatives are compared on the basis of resource cost and the effectiveness level of each alternative in attaining the objective.²⁰ Likewise, cost-benefit analysis depends on a comparison, but cost-benefit makes its determination among alternatives on the basis of which alternative has benefits which outweigh costs by the greater amount.²¹ In theory, cost-benefit is the more powerful tool because it can be used

to choose between very diverse alternatives.²² With cost-benefit analysis, the costs and the benefits do not have to be on comparable levels as with cost-effectiveness. For cost-benefit, the size of the ratio is the determining factor.

The purpose of this step in policy systems analysis is to gain quantification. The predicted outcomes should be translated into common units of measurement so that the alternatives may be compared on an equivalent basis. For example, the major cost of alternative X is measured in manpower terms or the drain on the labor pool. The major cost of alternative Z, however, is measured strictly in monetary terms. Unless the costs of both alternatives are measured in similar terms, there is no effective way to compare the impacts of the alternatives. On the other hand, if the effect of the drain on the manpower pool is estimated in its monetary value, the impacts of the two alternatives can be compared. Most frequently the factors are converted into their monetary equivalents to make both comparison and quantification possible. Quantification is an ideal which is sought because of the belief that it improves communication and understanding thus leading to better decision-making.²³

As an illustration, the alternatives of increasing the legal liability of a manufacturer for his products and banning existing hazardous products will be compared using the tool of cost-benefit analysis. The cost of increasing the legal liability of the manufacturer for his products is

etermined to be a loss of 100,000 jobs, but the benefits of this action are discovered to be the prevention of 500,000 accidents. The cost of the ban of existing hazardous products is estimated to be a loss of 200,000 jobs, and the benefits of this decision are computed to be the prevention of 200,000 accidents. The policy-maker would choose the former alternative because of its ratio of costs to benefits. With the first alternative for every unit of cost there are five units of benefit. However, with the second alternative the ratio of costs to benefits is much lower. Of course, this example is obviously oversimplified. There would be other costs and benefits that would be considered by a real policy-maker in deciding between the alternatives.

Generate the model

The final step in policy systems analysis is the generation of a model. At the center of any decision analysis there must exist a means to indicate or predict the consequences that result from a choice of an alternative.²⁴ The generation of a model is necessary to allow the policy-maker to forecast and plan for the implementation of the chosen policy alternative.

In terms of the procedures involved in the two actions, forecasting is the prerequisite to planning.²⁵ Forecasting is attempting to predict the environment that will exist when the policy alternative is implemented. The purpose of the forecast is to reduce uncertainty of future situations by attempting to account for the critical variables involved

in policy alternative implementation. The prediction is by no means absolute. It merely allows the policy-maker to estimate the degree of uncertainty (economic, technical, or operational) and take steps to compensate for the uncertainty. In contrast to forecasting, planning deals with the preparation of alternative sets of decisions or courses of action to make the implementation of policy alternatives possible under various circumstances.²⁶

Based on prediction, planning sets forth alternative courses of action to be used to ensure achievement of the objective as warranted by the particular situation at the time of implementation of policy alternatives. For example, in the case of increasing the legal liability of a manufacturer for his products, the policy-maker would utilize the forecasting stage to determine the availability of the necessary funding to cover the cost of implementation and operation of this policy alternative. The forecast would most likely estimate the availability of the manpower necessary to implement and operate the alternative of increasing the legal liability of the manufacturer for his products. With this information the policy-maker would use the planning stage to seek out and designate various sources of funding and manpower. Here, budget ceilings and the manpower pool would be the major factors that the policy-maker would consider in setting up his alternative courses of action to ensure the implementation of his chosen policy alternative.

In summary, policy systems analysis is a process used by policy advocates and policy-makers in developing solutions to problems involved in policy propositions. In essence, policy systems analysis implies the use of intuition and judgment. The activities provide insight into an anticipated issue or problem to evaluation of a completed program.²⁷

The Unification via Policy Systems Analysis

As stated before, the basic paradigms of current academic debate were developed at a time when deliberative and forensics theories were closely related. The historical relationship which once existed is less valid in contemporary settings for human decision-making. However, debate finds itself attempting to function on the basis of theories which do not match updated procedures. As a result of the mismatch between theory and practice, the field of forensics is in an unbalanced state in an attempt to mend the breach between theory and practice. Unfortunately, the concentration of change has been in terms of practice rather than theory. The result has been innovations in method which have little or no theoretical foundation.

The utilization of policy systems analysis would help to alleviate the problem by moving academic debate away from reliance on less valid theoretical foundations for the current time period. Policy systems analysis would lead the forensics community into reliance on modern deliberative theory and the more practical framework of legislative decision-making.

Policy Systems Analysis and Reality

The achievement of educational goals is critical to any modification of debate theory and debate practice. As Hufford stated the student is the most important element of the forensic community.

If we insist on putting the stress on the development of theory rather than students, like the purveyors of Diophantine equations we can propound theories that will astonish the learned and overwhelm the neophyte, without really contributing very much to most students or to society.²⁸

The natural educational goal is to provide students with training that will be useful outside the purely academic setting. Academic debate should be structured to meet basic educational goals. Forensics is a part of the broader field of communication and society itself. Moreover, it is appropriately assumed that forensic training must be applicable or transferrable to the real world; it cannot be a closed system unresponsive to cultural changes and needs.²⁹

By comparison, the traditional model of debate is less responsive to changes in the real world than the policy systems analysis model. The traditional model gives the student less that is applicable in relation to real world decision-making than does the policy systems model. The policy systems analysis model gives the student relevant knowledge and experience in dealing with the existing social, economic, and political systems. Therefore, extensive training with the guide of the policy systems model

would provide students with knowledge and insights that are transferrable to the existing structure and process of decision-making more readily than would the traditional model.

Policy systems analysis is more beneficial to the student because of the fact that the real world is not static. The environment in which we live is a process controlled by multiple and interrelated forces and causes. Policy systems analysis most closely relates to the process of the real world. Policy systems analysis would help a student more readily understand and deal with the real world around him.

FOOTNOTES

¹James W. McBath, ed., Forensics as Communication (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1957), pp. 2-3.

²Bernard L. Brock, James W. Chesebro, John F. Cragan, and James F. Klumpp, Public Policy Decision-Making: Systems Analysis and Comparative Advantages Debate (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 146-164.

³Ibid., pp. 147-148.

⁴Forrest Conklin and Michael Shultz, "Analytical Directions for Debating Value Propositions," The Journal of the Tennessee Speech Communication Association, 2, No. 2 (1976), 4.

⁵Kenneth E. Boulding, "General Systems Theory--The Skeleton of Science," in Modern Systems Research for the Behavioral Scientist, ed. Walter Buckley (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1968), p. 3.

⁶E. S. Quade, Analysis for Public Decisions (New York: American Elsevier Publishing Company, Inc., 1975), p. 24.

⁷Brock, et al., p. 27.

⁸Ibid., p. 39.

⁹Ibid., pp. -41.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 41-42.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 42.

¹²Ibid., p. 44.

¹³Robert T. Holt, "A Proposed Structural-Functional Framework," in Contemporary Political Analysis, ed. James C. Charlesworth (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1967), p. 93.

¹⁴Brock, et al., p. 45.

¹⁵Quade, pp. 46-47.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 24-28.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

²¹ Ibid., p. 26.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 161.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 239-240.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

²⁸ McBath, p. 98.

²⁹ Brock, et al., p. 166.

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