CHAPTER 4

The Analysis of Policy Goals and Objectives in Social Programs and Policies

“...behind every political agreement there lies a misunderstanding.”
—S. M. Miller

Introduction

The method presented in this book proceeds by first obtaining a close description of social policy or program implementation and then evaluating its merit according to specified criteria. Six fundamental policy elements are essential to implementation of all social policies. Chapter 4 will consider the first—mission, goals, and objectives—along with the various forms in which they are expressed. The chapter also will describe the difference between goals and objectives, identify sources and problems in locating statements of program and policy goals and objectives, and review their components and functions. In addition, the way in which goals and objectives differ in the personal social services and the problems of setting them in that context will be considered. The chapter will close with an extensive discussion of the task of evaluating the merit of social policy program and policy goals and objectives through the use of suggested criteria. The discussion in this chapter is intended to set a model for later chapter discussions on other operating characteristics.

Definitions and Basic Concepts for Analysis of Goals and Objectives

A goal is a statement, in general and abstract terms, of desired qualities in human and social conditions.¹ It is important to grasp the goals and objectives of a program so as to
answer the question: “What is the purpose of this program or policy?” In fact, all elements of the program or policy must be judged on the basis of their contribution to program goals and objectives; the extent to which program or policy elements make such contributions is a measure of the wisdom of choosing them as an instrument of policy operations. Therefore, the program or policy goals and objectives are the programmatic “measure of all things.” Program goals and objectives are highly variable, as the following examples are intended to show. The goal of the Social Security program known as Old Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) is to ensure that citizens will have income after they no longer can work. The goal of the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) is to reduce the impact of increased energy costs on low-income households. The goal of most child abuse programs is to protect or prevent the abuse of children who are too young to protect themselves. It is important to understand that when we describe the goal or objective of a policy or program, we are describing a desired end, not a provided service. It is easy to confuse the two when speaking of social policies and programs because programs often are described according to the methods they use to achieve their goals and objectives. Thus, when asked to define the purpose of their program, staff members and executives often say, for example, that they provide counseling or money or nursing care to people who need it. That, however, is not a legitimate goal; by definition, services are not ends in themselves. Thus, the provision of services or benefits is never, by itself, a legitimate goal or objective of a social program. To describe services and benefits is to describe program processes (inputs) or perhaps program designs, but certainly not goals or objectives. One of many reasons for not including service provision as a legitimate goal is that doing so makes it possible to consider perpetual service provision as a legitimate outcome by which to measure program performance. Think for a moment about how, under these circumstances, a social program can simply continue to give services forever and never have to look at whether it produces an important result. In effect, to express goals and objectives as services rather than outcomes makes it impossible to evaluate a program against its outcomes, rendering such a program essentially nonaccountable. If a social program cannot produce results that meet human needs, the welfare system must direct funding elsewhere.

Here is an example of how this distinction works in practice. Consider this common problem faced by those with responsibility for allocating funds for the delivery of social services. Assume you chair the board of directors of the Barrett Foundation, whose purpose is to fund social programs for general philanthropic deeds, and you exercise broad discretion in doing so. Assume further that while speaking with the director of a local program, the Cherry County Counseling Service, the director argues that the organization is a viable, successful operation due to the following reasons:

- Cherry County has a full staff, each of whom is an expert in three types of therapy (behavior modification, psychoanalytic therapy, and Bowenian marriage counseling).
- The number of clients served has increased by 20 percent this year.
- The number of treatment hours has increased by 35 percent this year.
- New satellite clinic offices were established in six counties over the past year.
- New consulting services were contracted for in two new school districts and in three high schools.
You must decide whether your organization should fund this operation for another five years at an annual budget of around $900,000. Based on the viewpoint about goals and objectives expressed before, the answer is no, because the operations data that are given tell you absolutely nothing about program effectiveness, only about program inputs and processes (mostly counseling), not program outcomes. The data speak only about means to ends, not ends themselves. Goals and objectives are not about delivering services (treatment hours, treatment access, consultation, and the like) but about achieving a desirable outcome in regard to the targeted social problem(s). If this board of directors doesn’t insist on this, it has no rational means by which to make a decision about funding this program. In an important sense, program outcomes are a public social program’s “profit,” without which program operations inevitably are taking resources away from opportunities to meet human need elsewhere. One key to the distinction lies in judging whether the policy or program goal or objective could be accepted as an end in itself. For example, could personal counseling be accepted as an end in itself? Not likely, for the mere fact of counseling does not by itself suggest any particular social problem that is being solved. The goal expressed as a proper outcome will be revealed by the answer to the question “Counseling for what, to achieve what purpose?”

Different Types of Goals and Objectives

The practical public policy analyst should be alert to the fact that goals and objectives come in a variety of forms. For example, sometimes social programs specify objectives as “long term” or “short term.” This specification is useful because it can relate to funding—there may be enough money only for outcomes having short horizons and the program may not last long enough to be concerned about a long horizon. Consider a highly politicized social problem like substance abuse. For a time, a drug education program for grade school children was highly publicized and appealed to the general populace. When these programs were first funded, they were fielded with very short-term goals—to increase children’s knowledge about the effects of drugs. Once programs were implemented, change was expected to occur over a matter of weeks. In fact, the program was designed to be delivered and the information learned in a very short period of time because funding not only was limited but also was restricted to a few months’ duration. When an intermediate step is crucial to a long-term goal, it is only logical to test for whether the intermediate step is attainable; further dollars await the outcome. The long-term goal here was the reduction in adult, long-term substance abuse, but in that funding environment, the long-term goal was irrelevant from a practical point of view.

Manifest and Latent Goals

A statement about a social policy or program goal is different from sociological statements about the social function served by a particular social program or policy. For example, Piven and Cloward conclude that the primary social function of the U.S. welfare system is to regulate the poor in two ways:
1. To ensure a supply of cheap labor to the economic system.
2. To ensure that discontent among the poor does not rise to levels where it becomes a major threat to social order.

These are theoretical conclusions about latent functions of a social welfare system from the point of view of sociological analysis. Policy or program goal statements are much less global, less inferential, and they are traceable to sources that can be observed directly; they are based on evidence from statements in such visible sources as legislative bills, administrative documents, and judicial decisions.

A manifest function is an explicit, stated purpose and so is a goal. Both are discovered through examination of statements in primary documents that contain goals and purposes such as legislation, administrative regulations, and court decisions. But, as sociologists and anthropologists have long pointed out, there are latent functions as well, functions that serve unstated purposes. And because they are unstated, latent functions are quite different from either goals or objectives, as the reader will see from the following example. One widely discussed latent example is the federal government's Section 8 Housing program that offers substantial rent subsidies to low-income families. The manifest goal or objective of this program is to make safe, adequate, and affordable housing available to the poor. Section 8 housing, located in scattered sites outside the inner-city urban ring, is reasonably expected to be an environmental improvement for low-income families and to reduce urban minority populations. As laudable as these goals and objectives are, some policy analysts argue that their latent goal is to gradually depopulate housing projects in inner cities so that they can be torn down and redeveloped as luxury apartments and condominiums. This charge is plausible in that one can easily point to housing projects in metropolitan areas that would be prime real estate development sites. Chicago's inner urban ring is one example in which housing projects are being vacated and discussions are being held as to their future. Whereas latent goals and objectives are very important (latent rather than manifest goals sometimes drive program features and implementation), the first-order focus in policy and program analysis is on a description of the stated (manifest) goals.

Distinguishing between Goals and Objectives

A goal is an abstract and general statement of desired outcomes, and an objective is a concrete, operational statement about a desired observable outcome. For any given goal, many different (sometimes divergent) objectives can be written. For example, the goal of Literacy, Inc., a social program, can be stated as follows:

- To increase the ability of native and nonnative speakers of English so that they can accelerate their acculturation

That goal seems specific and in some ways it is. It certainly conveys a clear idea of what the program wishes to ultimately accomplish. Note how this goal could concern several very different objectives:
To increase reading competence to the sixth-grade level and to the point where employment advertisements can be read with comprehension

To increase the ability to understand spoken English at a level where conversation with the average U.S. high school graduate can be conducted to the linguistic satisfaction of both parties

To increase the ability to read and speak standard English so as to eliminate any linguistic barrier to passing the GED high school certificate examination

The idea here is to show you that any one of these statements of objectives would be sufficient to satisfy the goal statement of Literacy, Inc. (It is unlikely, though not impossible, that such a program would adopt all three as objectives.) A good well-defined abstraction admits of an infinite number of concrete empirical instances.

The nature of goals is that they are quite general and abstract; therefore, they are not ordinarily intended to be directly measurable. Objectives, on the other hand, are intended to be measured. It is not too far out of line to say that the importance of goals is to mark out the general scope (conceptual coverage, one might say) or the theoretical territory of a policy or a social program. The implication is that, for goals, their clear definition is their most important attribute. The importance of objectives, on the other hand, is their concreteness, their observability. Note carefully: When a social policy or program is evaluated by a well-designed empirical study, it is to objectives, not goals, that the evaluative measures are related.

Objectives (Not Goals) Must Contain Target Group Specifications and Performance Standards

If objectives are to be of maximal use, they must clearly specify who is to be affected, changed, or whose circumstances or surroundings are the target of change efforts. In specifying a target group, the phrase “serving the homeless of the city of Pocatello, Idaho” is not an acceptable target group specification. All terms of an objective need to be concrete: for example, “serving the homeless, those without permanent, warm, secure, sanitary shelter with running water and a stool and those older than 60 years of age.” It is a mistake to write objectives without that kind of specification since, when it comes time to evaluate the program for effectiveness, program accomplishments will be judged against the standards implied in objectives.

Objectives (but not goals) must also contain performance standards, that is, statements about the extent of the changes or effects the program is expected to have. A performance standard for a housing program might be something like:

... within five years to secure safe, up-to-standard permanent shelter for one-third of the low-income population of Compton, Mississippi, such shelter is to be inhabited by no more than two persons per room, and has running water, sanitary toilets, and electric outlets in each room.
Certainly, the details can be argued, but the phrases “two persons per room” and “running water” are examples of performance standards. Any housing falling short of those descriptions does not meet this standard of performance and, thus, cannot count as a positive outcome of the program. Another example from the personal social services might be a program for integrating the severely emotionally disturbed into a pattern of community living where the objective is to have each

... person in the program living in a private household shared with at least four other persons, and who takes full responsibility for his/her nutrition, medication, plus has interaction with a nonhouseholder for at least ten hours a week.

In this case, the quoted phrases refer to explicit performance standards for the program. For program consumers for which those standards are not met, that instance does not count as a success for the program.

Most of us would not expect a program with limited resources to serve a total population, but program auditors and evaluators will not make that assumption. Thus, a program objective whose performance standards say it will serve the population of a city means exactly that. If target groups and performance standards aren’t specified, goals and objectives will almost always be read to indicate that the program will serve a larger population than is really intended or, for that matter, has adequate resources for. Absent target group specification and a performance standards program, evaluators and those who provide program funds would conclude that the Pocatello, Idaho, homeless shelter mentioned earlier would serve all the homeless in Pocatello. If a shelter has accommodations for only ten and there is a demonstrable demand for fifteen, it will almost inevitably be given bad marks because it didn’t do what it said it would, never mind after-the-fact arguments that the program didn’t really mean what it said.

In sum, it is desirable to constrain objectives and performance standards so that the program is never obligated to provide more service than allowed by the budget resources available. One way (not always ideal) to approach this is to set a percentage of a particular target group: “will serve 30 percent of the homeless” or “will serve an average of eighty teenage homeless persons over a one-year period.” Without hard information, performance standards based on local practice wisdom estimates are better than none at all. Needs surveys can provide reasonably reliable guidance for anticipating service demand; any sensible planning would require them. Sadly, funding is seldom available to conduct them.

**Purpose of Goals and Objectives**

Why have both goals and objectives when, in one sense, they refer to the same thing? It is because they serve different purposes. Statements about objectives are absolutely essential for two reasons.

1. They give the operational outcome toward which program operations are directed, and no administrator can make decisions about daily issues like constructing
budgets, distributing money among various program operations, and hiring and firing without a concrete objective in mind.

2. Programs cannot be evaluated for effectiveness unless there is an objective to serve as a measurable standard against which data from actual achievements can be cast.

Program goals are also necessary in that they provide a crucial link between the more concrete and specific objectives and the public documentary sources (laws, judicial decisions, administrative mandates) that establish the program or policy. Statements in such documents can never be sufficiently specific so that a program or policy can be constructed from them directly. Whatever their source, statements are quintessentially political, the product of political compromise; and political documents can never be truly explicit lest some party takes issue with them. If that happens, it may destroy delicate political, judicial, administrative, or organizational compromises that were necessary to promulgate the policy or program in the first place. Part of the art of politics is to avoid saying what will offend, and in that way both sides believe the issue is settled. As S. M. Miller states, “. . . behind every political agreement there lies a misunderstanding.” Thus, program designers must translate these documents into operating programs, and to do that they need to translate the goal in the public document into a statement at a concrete level, that is, a measurable objective. That statement will direct a choice of specific program operations and program provisions that will move events toward the stated general goal as well as allow observations to be made by which program success or failure can be judged.

The following is one example of how goals and objectives function to provide a link between legislative intent and program operations and to assist operations accountability. A large, private, statewide child welfare program is a major subcontractor receiving state and federal funds for in-home services provided to welfare mothers whose children are at risk for abuse or neglect. The source of these federal dollars is the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), formerly a categorical grant identified also as Title XX of the Social Security Act. Goal III/IV of Title XX speaks of preventing or remediating neglect, abuse, or exploitation of children. Notice that the Social Security legislation itself doesn’t speak of anything more specific than this general purpose: no definitions, no mention of how it should be pursued. Often that is the case for enabling legislation. But the private agency program that will administer these funds, likely the departments of child welfare of the several states, will supply program goals. In one state, these goals were

(a) to preserve, rehabilitate and/or reunite families.
(b) to do this by (note these intermediate goals):
  1. mobilizing the families’ own resources
  2. increasing family strengths
  3. increasing individual behaviors which support family integrity.

But it is at the level of program implementation, at which people in need (program participants/consumers) come face to face with staff members, that detailed outcome objectives are set forth, that is, those encounters are expected to have the following results:
1. prevention of the child from being placed outside the household (for 70 percent of the families)
2. individual program consumers achieve their individual objectives (75 percent of, in aggregate)
3. and 80 percent of program consumers will be satisfied with services

To see how the concrete outcome objectives are related—as links in a chain—to the intermediate goals, the general goal, and the legislative purpose, look for a moment at Figure 4.1.

This sets out the rough theory that underlies the program: For example, IF we can mobilize resources, increase family strengths, help program participants achieve personal objectives, and so on, THEN we will prevent outside-the-home placement (which is taken to be the rough equivalent of rehabilitating families, which is itself the equivalent of preventing further abuse). It is the IF-THEN sequence that defines the rational process here. The reader may disagree that the statement is rational, of course; and data from program outcome measures may show that the statement is false, but that is part of the point—rational process makes clear what is expected and why, data make clear whether those expectations have come true. Program theory and design are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

![FIGURE 4.1 Linking concrete objectives with abstract goals and legislative purposes.](image-url)
Setting Goals and Objectives in the Personal Social Services

It is easier to set goals and objectives for a “hard” benefit program (one that delivers goods like housing or food stamps) than it is to set them for personal social services—“soft benefits.” The food stamp goal is rather straightforward: to increase nutrition. Notice that the food stamp objective is phrased in ways that shape the buying habits of beneficiaries—thus, junk foods, alcoholic beverages, and tobacco cannot be bought with food stamps. There are other ways to shape buying habits toward improved nutrition. For example, some European Union countries provide a heavy subsidy paid to the retail grocery merchant so that prices for milk and cheese are significantly reduced to the consumer. This strategy hopes to shape buying habits and improve nutrition by making nutritious foods cheaper and more attractive to everyone.

The reader should be clear that it is not only the administrative or program staff or legislation that can set goals and objectives legitimately. In fact, in the personal social services, there is, or should be, considerable latitude for clients/consumers to shape and set their own objectives. Dedication to practice values like self-determination, maximizing personal choice, and empowerment would lead in that direction.

Personal social services require much more individualized objectives because they deal with individuals who are so different from one another. There is an unavoidable tension between program/policy goals and objectives and personal social service objectives. While practitioners would like to think that they are free to help their clients/consumers toward just about any personal objective, it turns out that there are limits on that freedom—in real life, whoever pays the bills has a good deal to say about how the money (and time and effort) is spent.

Client/consumer objectives and the policy or program objectives are often easily tied together at an abstract level. For example, in a residential care home for the developmentally disabled, one would expect to see very individualized objectives because functional capacities of residents are likely to be quite variable. Objectives like cleanliness, self-control, increased verbal expression, and the like are not difficult to gather under a general objective of increased socialization. But there are clearly specific, quite legitimate practice objectives that an employer of a social practitioner might insist not be included. Readers might want to think of some as an interesting exercise.

Whether a program’s goals and objectives are general, covering all program participants, or are specific to each person can have important consequences. Here is an example showing how highly individualized objectives create an incentive for good personal social services whereas generalized objectives for all clients/consumers do not. Consider residential care centers in which the state pays for client care. If care providers are paid the same for all clients/consumers without respect for their disability or level of care required, there is every motivation for the facility to admit those clients who are least disabled. That could lead to a shortage of beds for those more severely disabled who need care the most. One solution is to make home care reimbursement variable and dependent on client/consumer characteristics and level of challenges (code words for special and often difficult behaviors in residential settings). Although creation of a policy and program system that will identify client/consumer...
characteristics and behavioral challenges is itself no small challenge, it may carry a handsome payoff, as suggested by recent research. The point here is that unambiguous goals and objectives are an absolute essential.

Goals and Objectives Vary According to the Developmental Stage of the Program

In policy or program analysis, it is important to understand the developmental stage of the program at that moment. Social policies and program efforts are much improved when finally implemented if they were routinely pretested in one of two forms: pilots or models. Models (sometimes called prototypes) are program designs implemented under the ideal conditions for success. The idea is that if they cannot succeed under these conditions, they can never succeed in real life. Models are very tightly constructed and are not subject to midcourse changes. Pilot projects are likely to be the loosest type of demonstration program and the ones whose objectives are most subject to change. A pilot project searches for unexpected outcomes and the program design is changed on a simple trial-and-error basis “to see what happens” as a result. It is the strategy of choice when not much is known about the social problem of concern. Although this approach is social tinkering in its most blatant form, there is a clear place for it absent good guesses about the nature of a social problem. The actual objective of such a program is to gather more knowledge or information about the problem and the program, even though the tentative objective may be stated.

Methods of Identifying Goals and Objectives

Identifying program goals and objectives is not always a simple matter. There is no one source for the documents that are necessary to draw firm conclusions, even in the case of public social policies or programs. What follows, however, is a routine procedure that ordinarily will result in reasonably firm conclusions about the goals and objectives of public policies or programs. Note that the procedure does not necessarily need to follow the sequence presented. In fact, the sequence is more or less trivial since conflicting information might be obtained at each step described. Such divergence should be considered important benefits of a policy analysis since it sometimes explains why organizations work at cross-purposes!

Step 1: Locate the Enabling Legislation

All public social programs are “public,” in one way or another, when they are funded from the government treasury. Any treasury expenditure must be authorized by the elected officials constitutionally empowered to do so. Authorizations for expenditures are almost always made in terms of programs under the administrative control of various governmental departments. Programs are set up by what is called enabling legislation, acts that contain some statement about the purpose or goal of the act and for the program.
Step 2: Locate Legislative History

It is important to gain a deeper perspective on policy goals, purposes, and legislative intent, and the best source for doing so is ordinarily called the “legislative history.” Legislative history refers to a set of official documents or transcripts of legislative hearings and documents accepted as part of the background material studied by members of the legislative committees that considered the matter at hand and framed the legislation that subsequently was passed into law. Legislative history is more readily available for acts passed by Congress, but it is also available at the state level. Legislative histories can be found in any law school library, statehouse library, or university library public documents department. The privately published Congressional Quarterly and the publication of Congress called the Green Book also contain legislative histories. See Note 7.

Step 3: Locate Staff and Committee Studies and Reports

Other sources of program goals (besides the preamble to the enabling legislation itself) include staff studies prepared for use by congressional committees to study issues that may result in new programs or policies and amendments to existing legislation. Staff studies are usually considered reasonably authoritative sources for statements concerning the goal and purposes of public social policy and programs.

Step 4: Check Other “Official” Sources

There are several authoritative sources for statements about the goals and objectives of social programs that entail federal funds or administration. One is the official biannual Social Security Handbook, published by the Social Security Administration and housed in all federal document repositories. (Nearly all university libraries are repositories or, if not, have this volume in their government documents collection.) The Social Security Handbook is also available online at the Social Security Administration (SSA) Web site at www.ssa.gov. The National Underwriters Association, a private publisher, also produces annual manuals on Social Security and Medicare. Another major authoritative source for federally funded social programs is the Green Book, published at intervals by the Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives. The Green Book provides background material and data on programs within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means. It gives exhaustive detail on federally funded social programs as well as legislative history. The 2000 Green Book can be accessed on the Internet at http://aspe.hhs.gov/2000gb. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provides useful information on programs under its administration and can be accessed online at www.hhs.gov. A useful source on federal food programs is the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), which can be accessed online at www.frac.org. The many Internet sources that provide links to official program Web sites are too numerous to list here; however, a good starting place for the policy analyst is the Welfare Information Network (WIN) Web site located at www.financeprojectinfo.org.
The Government Performance Results Act of 1993 provides for the establishment of strategic planning and performance measurement in the federal government and for other purposes. As a result, each federal agency is required to submit to the Office of Management and Budget and to the Congress a strategic five-year plan for program activities, including a comprehensive mission statement, general goals and objectives (and outcome-related goals and objectives), and other program planning information. These strategic planning documents are an invaluable source of information on goals and objectives to the policy and program analyst. In many cases they can be accessed through federal agency Web sites. Many states (and U.S. territories) and local government entities have followed suit with government performance legislation (or administrative directives) of their own, which offer additional sources of information for social policy and program analysis.

Annual reports issued by state-administered social programs can be revealing sources for statements of current goals and objectives. In some cases they document performance over the past fiscal year in meeting goals and objectives. In the search to document public social program goals and objectives, do not overlook the rich resource of official administrative rules and regulations. Although social program administrators commonly prepare public relations material intended to describe programs and program operations, these releases usually are of little help and often are deliberately vague. Public program operations manuals, on the other hand, are very much public property, although they are not always easy to get (or to use, we might add). For example, the policy manuals for the public agency that operates state foster care and adoption programs routinely list thousands of rules and regulations. The Federal Register publishes into the public domain the multitude of rules and regulations and much else that pertains to federal agencies. Buried in these documents are explicit statements about goals and objectives, which, precisely because they are official, can be excellent sources of information on this point.

Locating Sources for Goals and Objectives in State-Administered and Private Social Programs

Social programs that are entirely administered by the state have documentary sources that are somewhat similar to those for federal programs, although exact titles and sources will vary by state. All state legislatures maintain current legislative history sources, and they can be obtained by a simple inquiry directed to the state legislature’s library, usually located in the statehouse. In regard to state-administered programs, look for official committee hearings, staff studies, and reports to committees. A simple inquiry to your local state legislator will usually net a short and helpful discussion with an aide about how to locate the documents desired. Checking amendments to bills as originally written will net information on what was not intended. A letter to the legislator who introduced the bill may also provide helpful data about intentions and will usually be answered quickly. Social programs in the private sector and those run by local governments, despite their importance to the total social welfare effort of this country, may not have easy-access official public documentary sources if such programs are not enabled or mainly financed.
by the state. Therefore, such goals are often fugitive and can be very difficult to identify. Usually, some kind of organizational document is available that supports or mandates the program and, therefore, can serve as legislative history. The most useful sources are program administrators’ and staff members’ reports. Verbal reports are also quite legitimate sources for goals and objectives. In fact, the objectives inferred from direct reports of the “organization-at-work” may be better than formal documents. In researching private sources, you may find organizations that have no overall goal-guiding operations; rather, each staff member has personal and professional goals for her or his practice. You may also find organizations that lack overarching goals, whose only goals and objectives are chosen by clients based on their own preferred outcomes. Based on certain assumptions, both cases are legitimate; note, however, that in neither case is a single social program or policy system in place. In effect there could be as many programs or policy systems as there are staff practitioners and clients/consumers. Consider the possibility that there is no public social policy or program at work here and, therefore, nothing to be analyzed. A group of practitioners who don’t share objectives or goals is a private practice, not a social program.

Evaluating Program or Policy System Goals and Objectives: A Value-Critical Approach

Having discovered the goals and objectives of a social program or policy system, how do we take the important next step, judging whether they are “good” goals and objectives? Everything hinges on what standards we’ll use to define “good.” What makes for a good goal or objective depends on what we most value in the human condition, so it is on the basis of those values that we want to analyze and criticize goals and objectives. Doing that is what is called a value-critical analysis.

The first step is to declare some fundamental value positions. Note that these value positions are not only a matter of an individual analyst’s personal perspective for we would like to convince the reader that some value perspectives are implicit in all analytic methods, including this one, and will set them forth here.

As the reader might expect, value neutrality is specifically rejected in a value-critical analysis because, when it comes to statements about the human condition at least, the viewpoint here is that very little can be said in an objective way—such that it is not rooted in a strong set of value commitments and, thus, inherently subjective. Value neutrality is a seductive ideal, fundamentally negative in its effects because it obscures the inherently value-laden nature of almost all ideas about human affairs. More than a hundred years ago, Max Weber set us straight on this idea, making clear that all social science must be ultimately value oriented and, further, that we can only save ourselves from utter subjectivity by making explicit (and in advance) the value positions that underlie our conclusions. The views of Weber and others like him are widely accepted but not universally, and so readers may disagree here and find themselves in a smaller but still respectable company.
Let us begin by noting that in conducting anything called an “analysis,” there must be an a priori commitment to the virtue of logic and rationality as a method of truth seeking. The preference here for rationality and logical consistency yields important things. How else might one have a basis for a belief that any program might actually solve a problem, any problem at all? Generalizing from prior practice experience is exactly one sort of act of rationality in the sense that any logical conclusion involves a thought process of the following kind: “. . . this (new) situation is like a former experience in important ways and since this strategy was successful before, therefore there is a good probability it will work again.” Rationality and logic also give us the freedom from the bondage of using only prior experience in developing social interventions. Good thing, for as practitioners and social program designers, we are often faced with human conditions that no one has experienced! It is our good fortune that from within the heart of another sort of rationality (hypothetico-deductive reasoning) can come wholly new ideas for better social program designs, designs whose logical chain lets us “see around corners,” that is, to have logical expectations for what we have never experienced. And, in that way, rationality provides grounds for believing that a program design might be successful even in advance of the actual trial run. As commonly said—“yes, that makes common sense.” That is, it seems to meet logical expectations.

In the final analysis, we will argue, it is our North American cultural preference for control and prediction and thus the implicit commitment of our political process that demands a rational basis for public expenditures. Legislative, judicial, and administrative accountability demands it. At the level of ideals, public appropriations, in our North American way of doing things, are not distributed simply by virtue of having faith in the person who will spend them. So, it turns out that the political ideology of our society demands rationality as an instrumental means to just and fair dealings with citizens’ money. It creates the necessity to have advance grounds for judging that a program will be adequate to answer the social problem of concern, equitable for prospective clients or users/consumers, and efficient in obtaining the most value for money expended. It has other virtues: It can provide a consistent standard for performance and a way of specifying how public social programs or policy systems should operate in order to usefully serve program participants as well as the public and collective good.

In addition to our stress on rationality and logic, the reader might already have noticed two other examples of value positions inherent in this policy analysis method: accountability and the notion that product counts. That means that all social programs, public and private, must be accountable to their relevant funding publics. In the public sector, that means accountability to taxpayers, their elected representatives, and social service consumers. In the private sector, that means accountability to private donors and social service consumers. In its most general sense, accountability simply means that social programs must do what their funding sponsors expect while attending to the satisfaction of program participants. With regard to the former, goals and objectives of a public sector program must reflect its legislative mandates—and so reflect the will of the citizenry whose taxes pay for it. No mystery here: If the legislation and official regulations specify program funding for the purpose of jobs for poor people, then the goals and the objectives of the program system must specify exactly that. Accountability means...
that the program must be willing to be evaluated on achieving outcome objectives for specified program participants, whatever else it may or may not do. Is this the occasion for social control in social programs? Yes and this is often the case. Although surely it is not always a negative feature, practitioners should always be attentive to that issue and how it might negatively affect the people they serve.

The value position that product counts orients the major effort of the program to producing particular results, that is, verifiable outcomes or best results at least cost, whatever else it might do. The perspective here is that social policies and programs are implemented precisely to solve social problems, and their performance in that role is the ultimate measure of their worth. But although these outcomes have the highest priority, note that product is not all that matters since there are other matters of priority: A main example is the satisfaction of program participants; another is unanticipated negative side effects of programs and policies.

When we come to personal social services, there are some disconcerting problems with regard to this commitment to “product,” this commitment to outcomes that are specified before a single consumer has walked through the front door. Think for a moment about how personal social services are so strongly characterized by individualization and how many involve an empowerment or treatment process. When they are directed at mental, social, and/or emotional disorders, those processes often belie specific outcomes or end products on the view that a treatment or empowerment process worth its salt concerns outcomes that go well beyond the scope of the defined social problem. Many human service practitioners prefer outcomes in personal social services to be the prerogative of the consumer/program participant. Personal social services conceived this way do not always appear to serve as a solution to the presenting social problem; for example, they might make it possible for a person to choose a different path for life, where that path might be concerned with some immediate and highly individual personal goal: a good friend, an intimate relationship, better housing, and a reduced anxiety state are all examples. But it may be quite plausible that attaining one of those more immediate objectives will create the conditions for not living a life driven by or at the mercy of a social problem such as, say, substance abuse, addiction, or spousal abuse. Experienced practitioners know that for many personal social services, the control of consumers over service outcomes constitutes a highly desirable general and radical freedom on the part of the person. And, further, to the extent that consumers don’t control outcomes, social services can be characterized as authoritarian and strictly in the service of social control. Those are a last, not a first, resort.

But, when services involve public funds, at some level they must concern the public and not be solely a private interest. So, does that mean that public social services must always deny consumer control over the direction (outcome) of the helping process? No, not quite, but it does require that program designers, managers, and practitioners take it as their task to make clear the connection between consumer control of outcomes and making an impact on a social problem. No mystery here: At a practice level, think of how often it makes sense to engage a service consumer’s interest by working on particular issues that are of immediate and pressing relevance, sometimes not those that seem directly related to the defined social problem and the goals and objectives of the program. That is, of course, a characteristic of the strengths approach, now a common intervention strat-
evaluators must be related to service outcomes so they create a public understanding of their relationship to the public interest. It is an important policy-level responsibility common to all practitioners.

Recall that in the introduction to this method of social policy and program analysis, four general types of evaluation criteria were cited as necessary for each policy characteristic. In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss each in order: (1) the fit of goals and objectives with the social problem analysis; (2) certain evaluation criteria specific to goals and objectives; (3) applying to goals and objectives the traditional economic evaluative criteria of adequacy, equity, and efficiency; and (4) those from the analyst’s own perspective.

Evaluating the Fit between Goals and Objectives and the Social Problem Analysis

Because providing a solution to a social problem is, in our definitions, the manifest purpose of a social policy or program, the merit of any of its features must be judged by how it fits that purpose. Social policies and programs should not be designed in the abstract, no matter how strongly they stand as innovative or “good” ideas. This conviction also applies to features, such as policy system or social program goals and objectives, whose purpose is to keep the policy or program going in the desired direction, that is, toward solution (or mitigation) of the social problem. Thus, the fit, goal relevance, and objectives are of premier importance. Unfortunately, a number of social policies and programs are misdirected in this way.

Consider for a moment a program of public child care for working parents. Note at the outset how varied the objectives for such child care can be because definitions of the problem to be solved by such programs can vary so widely. Common objectives for preschoolers (for example) include providing educational enrichment (develop preschool skills); providing safe and dependable substitute parent care during work hours; developing early cognitive and emotional creativity; providing nutritionally sound, emotionally stimulating, and health-attentive care. Program features of a multitude of day care settings are recognizable in that list. A neighbor who tends to fewer than three children in her own home but provides no explicit educational or creative stimulation exemplifies day care with a minimum of objectives—safe and dependable care. Alternatively, a local franchise of a national day care chain may focus on educational enrichment and development of cognitive and emotional roots of creativity, as well as program components having to do with nutrition, child health, safe care, and the like.

Imagine how different will be the objectives and organizational policies within these different programs. Behind all that is an implicit social problem analysis. In what follows, you will recognize the four elements of a complete social problem analysis (as described in Chapter 1): (1) problem definition, (2) causation, (3) ideology, and (4) gainers and losers. Thus, the favored definition of the social problem to be dealt with for the neighborhood scenario might be the parent’s need to have a dependable person to be in
charge of an infant during work hours and to feel at ease about the child’s nutrition, physical safety, and health. Although this objective may preoccupy many (if not most) day care parents, that is not to say that other objectives are superfluous. The Montessori school scenario has a much more complex, theoretical, even elegant social problem definition in mind. Perhaps its basic concern might be expressed as the absence of age-appropriate stimulation to the child’s cognitive and emotional capacities. Whereas preoccupation with a child’s safety and nutrition and the dependability of care may be present, the Montessori school or parents may demand more.

The point here is that goals and objectives must fit the social problem viewpoint to which the program is intended to be a solution, and so, for each different social problem/policy/program package, goals and objectives are likely to differ conspicuously. Demonstrating this fit is twofold.

First, it is shown by the equivalence between the terms in the social problem definition and the terms in which the goals and objectives are defined. Unless this fit can be demonstrated, it is possible that the programmatic solution is irrelevant to the social problem declared to be of interest. Of course, that is a major flaw to the extent that public expenditures are purchasing essentially irrelevant goods or services.

Second, the fit between objectives and the social problem analysis is shown by equivalence between the outcome objectives and the independent variables in the causal sequence of the social problem analysis. Thus, if the social problem analysis contains a causal chain in which the outcome (independent) variable is child abuse, the objectives of the program must relate to child abuse in some way (of course, there can be other objectives as well), but it is important that the same definitions be used. If, as actually occurs sometimes, program designers have developed a set of programmatic interventions targeted not on child neglect but on physical child abuse, then a serious flaw is involved. It is not difficult to make this kind of mistake in a field in which ambiguous definition is commonplace. It might be made because many continue to think of child neglect as simply a lesser version of physical child abuse—despite substantial research evidence to the contrary (concluding that child abusers inflicting serious physical damage are probably a breed apart). It makes no sense at all to contrive and implement an elaborate intervention directed toward a phenomenon that is entirely different from the one intended. The following sections address the second set of evaluation criteria—adequacy, equity, and efficiency.

Evaluating Goals and Objectives against Traditional Economic Criteria: Adequacy, Equity, and Efficiency

Adequacy

This criterion is applied by assuming that the goals and objectives are actually achieved and then asking to what extent will the social problem be reduced. In other words, are the goals and objectives adequate to their task? It is a useful question since it might avoid spending scarce money and effort to implement a program when an observant person...
can tell in advance it won’t do the job. Be warned, however, that despite the utter rationality of the question, raising it may not win popularity contests: (1) if a program proposal is the cherished idea of some staff members, raising the question of whether it will actually do its job may be taken as a personal insult and bring a hostile response; (2) no one may expect the program to be effective since the intention is only to satisfy a legislative constituency—and the organization will be embarrassed if that becomes public; and (3) if the intention behind discussing a program proposal is only a media event to show some effort in response to current negative publicity for the organization, the question might embarrass those in command. Readers need to be alert to bringing unwelcome news. “Killing the messenger who brings bad news” is a saying as old as ancient Rome, but experienced practitioners have seen it happen (metaphorically) in modern bureaucratic organizations. The point is not at all to advise against raising issues, only to think before speaking and be willing to brave the consequences.

Traditional economists might want the question of adequacy of goals and objectives answered in terms of how much reduction in dollar costs of the social problem is expected. Assuming that the social problem analysis has set forth the relevant dollar costs, then the next question is what savings on those costs should be expected given maximum program success. If the social problem is medical care for the homeless, then some direct dollar costs are such things as emergency medical care for the homeless who are susceptible to physical violence, malnutrition, communicable diseases, and infections associated with lack of ordinary medical care and timely treatment. The appropriate question is whether and to what extent the best possible program outcomes will reduce those (or other) costs. For example, one likely consequence of illiteracy is earning less than minimum wages and probable eligibility for such benefits as food stamps and housing subsidies. Direct costs are government expenditures like these, expenditures that would not be spent were the problem eliminated. There are also indirect costs, and those can be as great as direct costs, though they are more difficult to estimate with precision.

While there are ways other than dollar cost reduction to make judgments of the adequacy of goals and objectives, “monetizing,” that is, rendering outcomes in terms of dollars saved or earned, is probably the easiest way to do this task. The reader should notice that some goals or objectives don’t lend themselves very well to dollar signs. That is often true for personal social service programs; think only of programs directed toward child neglect, for example. It is quite true that it is possible to monetize the negative effects of child neglect, as for the medical costs of malnutrition and the extra educational costs of special education for the learning problems of such children when neglect creates developmental lags. But although that is important, it may be more to the point to evaluate its impact on the number of reported incidents of child neglect in a community. Thus, one might evaluate the adequacy of the objectives of a screening program for mothers of newborns by asking how many or what percent of decrease occurs in the incidents of adjudicated child neglect.

**Equity**

Equity is complicated, but the basic standard is that citizens must be treated similarly by a social policy or a social program as a matter of fairness or justice. The complication is
that there are two kinds of equity: (1) proportional equity, in which citizens receive benefits or services that are “in proportion” to their relative need for them, and (2) absolute equity, in which citizens receive benefits or services in absolutely equal amounts irrespective of their need. Thus, whether the program goal or objective treats one beneficiary the same as others turns on how equity is defined. Two families whose children receive the same standard course of vaccinations (rubella, DPT, etc.) irrespective of income or their ability to pay is an example of absolute equity. In contrast, here is an example of proportional equity. Suppose nutritionists say that it takes a minimum of $320 a month to feed a family of three at barely adequate nutritional standards. Those administering the food stamp program know that if such a family is to pay all its other bills (housing, utilities, etc.), it will only spend $150 a month for food, less than half what they should. It is well known that at low levels of income, families will pay standard costs like rent and utilities, spending whatever remains on food since, unlike the preceding costs, they can buy more or less of it without immediately disastrous consequences. The food stamp program designers reason somewhat like this: If a family of three with an income only half the poverty line is provided foods stamps worth $180 a month, it will create enough buying power for food so it matches the $300 per month standard for food expenses. The heart of proportional equity here is that although benefits are not equal in dollars for everyone, the benefit given creates equal purchasing power for food. Notice that program participants can, in justice, be treated both differently and equitably. If so, it must be justified by an argument that makes use of the proportional equity concept. Statements of goals and objectives need to be clear as to whether absolute or proportional equity is intended.

Equity cuts other ways as an evaluation criterion for goals and objectives. In specifying particular target subgroups in the statements of objectives, some groups will inevitably get more benefits or services or resources than others. Some statements of objectives might express an affirmative action sentiment: “Transportation services will be provided, first priority, for those sections of the community in which ethnic minorities reside.” The equity question here has several dimensions. If the ideological position is that ethnic minorities have been historically and systematically deprived of transportation, then proportional equity would justify the priority service given them in the preceding statement of objectives. On the other hand, if the statement of objectives specifies transportation services operated at the county level of government and specifies that they are to be focused on geographic areas closest to the county seat so they can link up with existing city transportation, the system will expand transportation opportunities for those who live on the city fringe but systematically deprive rural residents. The basic question is not answered solely by judging whether equity exists, but, if inequity exists, whether it is rationally justified as a good fit with the overall social problem analysis.

Efficiency

The efficiency criterion cannot be applied logically to the goals and objectives, basically because the concern of goals and objectives is restricted to outcome, whereas the concern of efficiency always lies with means to an outcome. The center of the efficiency question is always whether there is a better (least costly, more cost-effective) means to achieve a
given outcome. Because goals and objectives must refer to ends and not means, the efficiency criterion hardly applies.

Evaluation Criteria Specific to Goals and Objectives

Statements of goals and objectives can be evaluated against the following criteria: clarity; measurability (which only concerns objectives not goals, of course); manipulability; concern with outcomes, not delivering services; standards for expected program performance; and specification of the target group at which intervention is aimed. These criteria apply primarily to goals and objectives, not to other operating characteristics.

Clarity

Goals and objectives can only be clear if terms are well defined; a well-defined term easily distinguishes examples of things to which the term refers from those to which the term is closely related. In other words, meaning of the terms is not left to the imagination. Statements of objectives must be accompanied by definitions for terms whose meanings are uncommon or terms not in general use among the intended public. The following goal statement is unclear because its terms are not subsequently defined and probably are not familiar to most: “The goal of this policy is to raise the level of consciousness about work sharing and its benefits for the unit work group.” Note that if the terms work sharing and work group were defined, the statement might be clear. For example:

*Work sharing* means splitting one standard 40-hour week of a paid, skilled job into several parts of a workday, each part held by a different employee who works only part-time.

*Work group* refers to a group of people who are employed by and earn wages from the same employer, working in close proximity to each other at the same workplace.

What we have done here is simply to change the goal statement into what we could now call a statement of objective simply by making it concrete and observable.

The second definition holds a number of definitional options: One could loosen the definition (and include more people) by removing the qualifier “working in close proximity to each other.” That would increase the number in the work group but, more important, it would scoop up a very different set of people than is referred to in the first definition. The first would likely include people in relationships usually defined as primary; the second would include those usually defined as primary *and* secondary social relationships. It is easy to see how fundamentally arbitrary definitions are. Choices here depend on the purpose for the definition: Is the interest actually in primary or secondary relationships? Of course, the phrase “raise the level of consciousness” is more abstruse, but it is still capable of definition. The difficulty is that it could mean so many different
things that any one definition probably will seem arbitrary and strange to the ear. That
may be true, but that is not a fatal flaw here. A handy idea to remember about definitions
is the ancient distinction between genera and specie: One acceptable way of constructing
definitions is to have the definitional statement tell the general class (genera) to which the
thing defined belongs and then tell the things that make it different from all other mem-
bers of that class (specie). For example, “raise the level of consciousness” means acquir-
ing “understanding” (genera, the general class of things to which this thing belongs) of
why work sharing is a desirable work option (specie, the feature that makes this different
from all other kinds of “understandings”).

Measurability

Unless statements of objectives are capable of being measured, they are of little use in ad-
ministering or evaluating a program or policy. Remember, it is only objectives, not goals,
to which the criterion of measurability applies. Goals are so general as to be immeasurable
in principle (as discussed earlier in this chapter). To be measurable means to be quantified,
even if only in crude fashion (“none, some, much”). In practice, it seems likely that any
term can be measured; all that is required is to give it definitional substance. When defin-
itions are neither given nor carefully constructed, they cannot lead to measurability and
that is a serious shortcoming.

Manipulability

Some objectives concern factors that are just not open to change by any conceivable
means—literally nonmanipulable. Just to make the point, here are some silly examples:
“the goal is to develop in military service personnel the capacity to criticize their superi-
ors in the civilian press.” Or “the goal is to enable preschoolers to objectively evaluate
their parents’ restrictions on their behavior.” The terms in which these goals are ex-
pressed refer to factors for which there is no rational basis for expecting change. What
would it take to induce a military person to do the one thing that would be most likely to
destroy a military career, as the preceding suggests? Probably not anything with which a
social program would be capable. And, in the second example, isn’t it true that the em-
pirical data on the judgment processes of young children don’t support their plausibility?

Sometimes arguments about what is plausibly manipulable appeal to the illogic
of the ideas as against everyday experience. The more common use of this criterion
calls for some kind of evidence from empirical research—historical, experimental—
that would give a rational basis for believing that the variables in which objectives are
stated are open to influence. Consider an objective common among child abuse pro-
grams—preventing physical child abuse incidents. One common kind of prevention
program looks to “remodel” potential abusing parents via certain kinds of program in-
terventions, but note it must successfully predict precisely which children will be at po-
tential risk. To date, no empirical study has been successful in doing so. So, at present,
goals and objectives derived from this kind of child abuse prevention program design
would have to be judged negatively because it fails the manipulability test: successful in-
tervention cannot occur when the intended consumers cannot be precisely identified.
On the other hand, it has been clearly shown that a second abuse incident can be successfully predicted and objectives thus focused would pass the test presented by this evaluation criterion.\(^{10}\)

The demand for evidence of manipulability is not overly constraining since it is entirely acceptable to declare a program to be an experiment. The consequence is to loosen the expectation of achievement and to adopt program objectives as tentative hypotheses rather than firm outcome expectations. Later in this book an argument will be made that social policies and programs ought to do more of just that kind of thing, given the limited state of our knowledge. Doubtless, the nature of our enterprise is experimental and exploratory.

Good things flow from this attitude. We are more free and, thus, more likely to notice unusual things happening when a program is fielded, things no one expected in advance. And because we are speaking about programs and policies that affect human beings, clarity that a program effort is experimental or exploratory is a necessary condition for alerting program participants to that fact; often, it is a legal obligation. Finally, it is only ethical to be straightforward about such matters in dealing with those who make program and policy funding decisions. Too often, and ultimately to our misfortune, policy and program advocates promise more than they can deliver.

Concern with Outcomes, Not Services Provided

Concern with ends that are outcomes, not just “inputs” or services provided, is another standard that statements of goals and objectives should meet. An example common in social work practice in the personal social services is making studies of the “goodness” or “fitness” of a home for a child in adoptive or foster family care or decisions having to do with which of a child’s divorced parents the child should live. It is not acceptable to say that the objective of this social program is to “make home studies.” Home studies are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. A home study is surely not an activity that could stand on its own and be justified. There is simply no use for home studies unless they are necessary for a decision about a child. It is in this sense that we can say, in a commonsense way, that objectives and goals should be able to stand on their own as justified.

The Analyst’s Own Value Perspectives in Evaluating the Merit of Goals and Objectives

At some point, practical public policy analysts will find that their own personal value positions will intrude on their enterprise. Recall a point made earlier that such value intrusions are important sources of bias. So let us use some of these authors’ value commitments as examples of how these are likely to show up in judging the merit of social program or policy system goals and objectives. The concept of client/consumer empowerment refers to the idea that the fullest development of human potential takes place in an environment in which it is possible to bring one’s choices (empower those choices) into reality; “taking charge of one’s life” is a common description. It is, at root, the simple
idea that a life can be filled with circumstances that grind into dust the ability to act on the choices one makes: too little money, time, opportunity, training, the moral support of others, skill, vision, energy, health. Valuing client empowerment implies strong medicine, strong constraints on social work and human service policy and practice goals and objectives. For example, in one instance, it might mean that in preference for doing things for people, a practitioner will work toward helping a client/consumer take charge, but it also may mean in another instance that the practitioner will take charge of organizing resources for people who (at that moment) cannot do that by themselves. Making available those resources is a means by which it becomes practically possible for the person helped to take charge. Without direct assistance from a practitioner (or others) in providing resources or access to them, taking charge of one’s life in regard to housing and education is unlikely. Without money or training or skills or job opportunities, taking charge of one’s work life is often impossible.

Goals and objectives of social programs and policies will be preferred by the authors when they reflect that idea—when they reflect that value commitment. Now think of a shelter program for the homeless, the goal of which is to help its consumers avoid exposure to the elements; contrast it to one that also has goals and objectives reflecting empowerment goals, for example, service consumers learning how to do the following:

- Access medical care (empowering service consumers to maximum physical capacity)
- Access housing market facts and resources (empowering service consumers to search out their own housing)
- Access welfare income maintenance benefits plus skills in applying for a job (empowering service consumers to an independent income and all that implies for their ability to make other life choices)
- Support others who have social problems that are similar to their own (empowering them to help others)
- Form political constituencies for the homeless (empowering service consumers to exert political control over their own problems and work for political solutions of housing shortages, for example)

The last program or policy system will be preferred over the others simply because it has empowerment goals and objectives whereas the others do not. Do not be misled—the intent is not to imply that helping homeless people to survive is somehow trivial. The issue here is to stress how much better is the solution for the social problem whose goal also seeks to empower the homeless in a way that goes a distance toward assisting people to the point where they can work changes in their own lives and live in circumstances that allow them to pursue the choices they make freely. The fact that it might be preventive is important to us only because it reduces preventable basic human pain (always a value preference for almost anyone involved in delivering human services and because less recurrence is an efficient use of resources—it makes available those resources for better work with fewer people or for work on other important social problems).
Such value choices can be complicated because they are not benign in every respect or they sometimes impinge on the delivery of best or better services to everyone. That happens because a broad objective (like empowerment) requires so much in the way of additional program services. In a world where finite resources and demand for services exceed availability, doing more for some clients/consumers often means doing less for others. When some get so much that others may get nothing, those with nothing are unlikely to agree that our value choice is a better one. Although we don’t believe the preceding choice is always the best, in some instances, we are persuaded it is and here is the best case we can make for it. When a social program does only a little for everyone in need, it may be that a little can be worse (or at least not better) than nothing—that is, its contribution to the solution of the problem is either minuscule or may create even worse problems. Under many conditions, homeless shelter programs can be examples of the potential for that result. It is one thing for a shelter program to provide benefits in the aftermath of community disaster—tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes; it is another when the disasters are personal (or perhaps singularly economic). If a homeless shelter cannot provide enough services or benefits to make it possible to escape from the shelter, it can create a permanent resident population of those who cannot deal with the circumstances that brought them there in the first place; being institutionalized is not far around the corner. Before the advent of psychotropic medication for psychosis, mental institutions were very much in that position. Income maintenance programs like SSI, which has a maximum federal grant of $564 per month in 2004 for a single person, will help people survive but not move beyond that level of existence. The viewpoint in this book is that one aspect of the empowerment idea is that it assumes that people are continuously changing organisms, so that new paths (sometimes, but not always positive and growthful) are necessary as environmental conditions, experience, and social circumstances change around us all. The idea is that social programs, policies, and practitioners ought to keep that in mind and see their work, their goal, as a continuous effort to enable human potential to come out from under the grind of circumstance—and perhaps even from the outcomes of what we tentatively call not very wise or good choices.

Some Special Problems in Evaluating Goals and Objectives in Personal Social Services

There are some special problems in applying criteria such as these in the personal social services as opposed to applying them to the delivery of public service utilities or hard benefits like cash and commodities. In hard benefit programs (food stamps or housing), the steps in delivering benefits are reasonably direct with few if any intermediate steps. Many personal social service programs or policy objectives can have many intermediate steps in a whole social treatment process. For a personal social service agency that deals with the social problem of unemployment, its plausible objective might be retraining of unemployed workers in certain high-demand skills for a particular local job market. Thus, learning to operate a word processor might be one of several objectives; others might include learning how to read city maps to find addresses of employers or learning interviewing skills.
and how to fill out job applications. If obtaining employment is the ultimate objective, then the preceding examples are clearly intermediate to the ultimate objective.

Many personal social service programs or policy objectives contain intermediate steps in a whole social treatment process. Processes cannot be legitimately included as terms in a statement of objectives—not because they are unimportant, but rather because they cannot stand by themselves as serious outcomes if no other outcome happens as a result. As soon as a tangible outcome can be concretely specified, for example, the outcome of a psychosocial treatment—higher morale or less anxiety—it is exactly the tangible and measurable outcome that can then legitimately be thought of as an objective. Indeed there might be several such intermediate objectives. They could clearly stand on their own as outcomes—almost no one would argue these days that it isn’t ultimately a contribution to a worker’s skill to be able to use a word processor. They “stand justified on their own” in a sense for which foster home studies could never qualify. There is no use for home studies except for decision making. There is a use for word processing skills almost anywhere in today’s employment market. When intermediate objectives are present, they must be accompanied by other objectives to which they contribute with the full expectation that the program or policy will achieve both the intermediate and the more distant objective.

Another problem in constructing program and policy goals and objectives in the personal social services is that objectives will, of necessity, be highly individualized because, after all, that is precisely one of the defining features of personal social services. Recall how “hard-benefit” programs such as OASI (Social Security retirement) are governed by strict entitlement rules and that entitlement is a matter of demonstrating one’s membership in large groups (age 62 or over, Social Security contribution history)—no individualization there! Those rules govern everyone who applies and the objectives of the program are the same for all beneficiaries. Contrast that with personal social service programs like day care for the aged, in which the main feature is to set client-user goals that are unique to the elderly individual—increase social interaction, increase attention span, reduce anxiety and disorientation. Whereas many user-consumers might share some of these goals, not everyone would. So, it turns out that for each client there may well be an individual program; the individual learning plan for the education of the developmentally disabled is just another example. What is important is that in the abstract, the program has some goal that is applicable to all user-consumers. Increasing the socialization skills and personal comfort of the aged person might be one example; increasing learning levels for the developmentally disabled might be another. This interesting twist that characterizes personal social service programs adds an additional complexity to evaluating their goals and objectives; that is, the practical policy analyst must judge whether there is a fit between these highly individual objectives for user-consumers and the general goals to which the program is committed. And, of course, that is exactly the kind of value-critical judgment that the practical public policy analyst should be prepared to make.

Finally, the practical public policy analyst should keep in mind that the personal social services often have obvious social control objectives. On that account, personal social service goals and objectives should express them explicitly. For example, some organizations (courts and other legal and quasilegal agencies) that probation counselors work for...
have explicit social control objectives: mental institutions, youth detention centers, and camps are not very different. In fact, mental health clinics often have explicit social control tasks when they work with clients/consumers whose attendance at the clinic is court-mandated, whether for preliminary diagnostic evaluations or for treatment. When that is the case, client objectives should clearly express that. When a client is legally committed to residence at a state mental institution and the problem for which he or she was committed is, say, exhibitionism, then that behavior should be included among others in any statements of treatment objectives. Although it seems obvious, in practice, the principle often is violated in favor of others that ignore the very problem that created the basis for legal commitment. For example, a treatment program that increased self-concept, as desirable as that might be, will not be acceptable if it cannot show findings that such decreases, say, hostile behavior.

Human service and social work practitioners frequently are uncomfortable with social control purposes and they are easy to ignore. To conduct a value-critical analysis of personal social service programs, the analyst should look to see whether the program expresses those explicitly lest this feature be lost from sight. There is nothing intrinsically negative about the idea of social control or using public funds on its behalf. It is, after all, likely to be the reason the program is funded! To be clear on that matter with clients/consumers and organizational personnel is taken as a value position here in the belief that to obfuscate it only leads to serious problems with user-consumers who eventually will encounter it anyhow. Few of them are confused on this matter. Few adoptive parent-clients/consumers are confused about the fact that their friendly social worker who is supervising the last few months of their adoption actually can take their child away under certain conditions. Few children who are clients/consumers of social workers and human service workers in mental and penal institutions are confused about the fact that those workers exercise considerable control over whether and when and under what conditions they will be allowed to leave the institution. The value bias at work here opts for honesty and openness with clients/consumers, believing that “putting everything on the table,” so to speak, is one of the conditions required for being helpful to people. Sometimes that may prevent the possibility of helping people achieve objectives that require close personal, trusting, nonauthoritative relationships. Nothing is gained and perhaps everything can be lost by avoiding the issue of the existence of the authority factor in relationships when in fact that is the case. Social program goals and objectives should reflect that.

Summary

A goal is a statement, in general and abstract terms, of desired qualities in human and social conditions. Goals are an answer to the question “What is the purpose of this program or policy?” All elements of a program or policy must be judged on the basis of their contribution to the program goals and objectives. The program or policy goals and objectives are the programmatic “measure of all things.” When the goals or objectives of a policy or program are described they point to desired ends, not providing services. That is essential because a program or policy system with commitment only to providing
service can never be held accountable but could continue service provision indefinitely despite no tangible results. Goals can be manifest (public and explicit) or latent (unstated). Whereas a goal is an abstract and general statement of desired outcomes, an objective is a specific, empirical, operational statement about a desired, observable outcome. For any given goal, many different (apparently divergent) objectives can be written. Goals can also be long term, short term, intermediate, and ultimate.

There are several general types of evaluation criteria the practical public policy analyst should use in judging the merit of goals and objectives: (1) those that concern their fit with the relevant social problem analysis; (2) those from which the meaning of the traditional criteria of equity, adequacy, and efficiency are drawn; (3) those that are specifically relevant to particular policy elements; and (4) those that are the personal value commitments of analysts themselves.

A good fit between the social problem analysis and the goals and objectives of a program or policy system is a matter of demonstrating the similarity between how their terms are defined. A statement of a goal or an objective is clear if its terms are well defined; a well-defined term is one that easily distinguishes actual examples of things to which it refers from those to which it is closely related. Unless statements of objectives are capable of being measured, they are of little use in administering or evaluating a program or policy. The criterion of measurability applies only to objectives, not goals. Many personal social service programs or policy objectives contain intermediate steps (not necessarily ultimate outcomes) in a whole social treatment process. Goals and objectives in the personal social services create special problems because they must be highly individualized. After all, that is precisely one of their defining features. The fact is that personal social services can be and often are mandatory and operate with quite obvious social control objectives. Personal social service goals and objectives should express those explicitly where that applies.

**EXERCISES**

1. Two of your friends are arguing: One says that the reason for high schools in the United States is to keep teenagers out of the labor market for as long as possible so there will be less competition, better pay, and more jobs for adults; the other says that the school district charter says that the goal of high schools is to teach teenagers the skills they need to get a good job. What does the material in Chapter 4 teach you about goals that would help you sort out that argument? Is one or the other or both right, and why?

2. The Indian Child Welfare Act (P.L.95-608, 95 Stat. 3069) (Sec. 3) says that “it is the policy of this Nation to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families by establishment of minimum Federal standards for the removal of Indian children from families and placement of children in foster or adoptive homes which will reflect the unique values of Indian culture.” It also says (Sec. 101[a]) that “in any State court proceeding for foster care placement of or termination of parental rights to an Indian child . . . the court . . . shall transfer such proceeding to the jurisdiction of the tribe (Tribal court) . . . absent objection by either parent or the Indian child’s tribe.”
Write a one-sentence goal statement and a one-sentence statement of objective from the preceding quotations, using your own words. Write a short paragraph justifying the difference between the two statements, telling why one is a goal and the other an objective.

NOTES

2. Although there is a tendency in the literature to conclude that Congress in the 1930s never intended OASI to provide a living wage but to be a supplement to workers’ savings, that is plainly not the case, as a reading of the legislative history of the Social Security Act will show. It defies common sense as well because Congress was well aware that almost no worker in the depression of the 1930s would have savings in this amount, either then or in the expectable future.
9. D. E. Chambers and M. K. Rodwell, “Promises, Promises: Predicting Child Abuse,” *Policy Studies Review*, 8(4) (Summer 1989): 749–793. The comments here concern “secondary prevention.” Another kind is called “primary prevention” and doesn’t require identification of individuals who are at risk of abuse (here children); rather it applies an intervention to a whole population to achieve its objectives (e.g., an educational program in child development undertaken in all high schools that is to raise the understanding of age-appropriate infant/child behavior in the general population of those who will soon be of child-bearing age.)
10. Ibid.