



The Pluralistic Evaluation Framework

for policy impact assessment, appraisal & evaluation

The Pluralistic Evaluation Framework is a tool for considering diverse kinds of *goodness* in the design and evaluation of policies. It is based on the notion that there is a plurality of kinds of goodness, among which a good policy ought to aim for a balance that accounts for the interests of diverse stakeholders.

Given a complex situation (#1) to improve, how can a policy be democratically justified as *good* use of funds? The Pluralistic Evaluation Framework (PEF) recognises a spectrum of distinct aspects (#2) in which to analyse and improve the situation. These aspects help to define *systems and processes* (#3) that the policy is designed to influence, but the focus of the Framework is the *values* that may be attributed to the situation (#4): a plurality of kinds of goodness that should be considered. These “goods” exist in relationship to stakeholders (#5) who should be consulted so that their priorities may be taken into account, and options and scenarios can be explored to make the policy maximally acceptable.

The PEF does not provide a final metric for arriving at decisions or overall evaluation, because the challenge of integrating the diverse interests of stakeholders and the plurality of forms of goodness is ultimately a political one. The PEF is a decision-support tool rather than a decision-making tool.

1. A COMPLEX SITUATION...

e.g. sea-level rise forcing coastal realignment

To use the PEF, it is best to focus on the stages in reverse order. Start by identifying groups of stakeholders (#5) and considering the ways in which they benefit or suffer from a situation that the policy will address. This will help to frame goods that the policy should deliver (#4) and evils to minimise. Interventions may then be designed (#3) to achieve these goals.



Aspect	Systems affected	Goods sought	Stakeholders
Ultimate	Aspiration Religion	trustworthy sacred	religious groups
Ethical	Family life Community spirit	endearing lovable	voluntary sector
Jural	Democracy Legislation	equitable fair	campaigns taxpayers
Economic	Economy Business	efficient sustainable	business coastal farmers
Social	Society Community life	sociable welcoming	communities coastal communities
Symbolic	Language Records	informative significant	journalists; commentators
Aesthetic	Fashion	beautiful appealing	artistic groups
Formative	Development Education	progressive historic	historians
Analytic	Scientific analysis Computation (AI)	distinctive, diverse	scientific groups
Sensory	Mental life Games	comfortable lively	mental health services
Biotic	Biosphere Ecosystems	healthy clean	(animals)
Physical	Hydrology Climate		
Kinetic			
Spatial			
Numerical			

Systems Mapping

The PEF suggests a set of parallel *systems and processes* (physical, biotic, etc) that may be affected or targeted by a policy, as well as *goods* that may be sought (#4 above: biotic, sensory, etc) – see above-right for explanation.

A full analysis of the systems and processes (#3) would require a separate systems-mapping exercise, drawing upon different academic disciplines and interdisciplinary connections (coloured boxes down the right-hand side of this poster). This is an area for further development of the PEF.

The suite of aspects undergirding the PEF arises from the tradition of Reformational philosophy as pioneered by Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven in the mid-20th century.

The basic idea is that “reality is meaning”, and this meaningfulness is many-sided. Moving from the basic mathematical aspects through the ecological, cognitive and communal to the ideological aspects, we find complementary perspectives on everyday experience.

Such aspects are evident in the plurality of basic academic disciplines (coloured boxes to the right), which may yield insights about the systems that the policy targets (#3).

The “good vs. bad” distinction that is primary in human interpretation of entities and situations can be theoretically analysed and refracted into a multiplicity of values described by these aspects. The first three (‘mathematical’) aspects are taken as foundational and not intrinsically value-bearing; the physical aspect too does not provide a clear value dichotomy, but is the basis of analysing physical processes and systems. Values become salient from the biotic aspect upwards, and progressively more culturally variable towards the top of the diagram. Ultimate values are highly variable and indeed partially control the values that people hold and attribute lower down the scale.

Yellow boxes provide a worked example (coastal realignment policy) based on one of the policymakers’ workshops where the PEF has been trialled.

Below: a group of policymakers at a PEF workshop in July 2018



As developed so far, the PEF is best used as a checklist for policy impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation. Future work should see it packaged as a set of tools to help (i) elicit values from stakeholders, (ii) facilitate systems mapping and (iii) contribute to multi-criterion assessment.

Academic disciplines† to consult

Religious studies

Ethics

Law; Politics

Economics

Sociology

Linguistics

Aesthetics

History

Epistemology

Psychology

Biology

Physics

Mechanics

Geometry

Maths

† Subjects like Geography and Anthropology do not appear here as they cross multiple disciplines (Religious Studies too may belong in this category).

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