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 priority 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.

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.

The suite of aspects underlying 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 physical 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.

5. DIVERSE INTERESTS

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.

The PEF suggests a set of parallel systems and processes (physical, biotic, etc) that may be affected or targetted 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.

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