The art of judgment: A study of policy making

Brian Patrick, Bowling Green State University - Main Campus

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/brianpatrick/6/

Brian Patrick

Dr. C. Willis

BGSU – EDLS 7010
In The art of judgment: A study of policy making, Sir Geoffrey Vickers gives insight into the history of social interactions as they relate to decision making in public service. By pointing out the notion that decisions of public bodies are much more unambiguous than the decisions of individuals, Vickers throws light onto the fact that social interactions and psychological factors need to be recognized by those individuals who make public policies. In order to minimize risks when finding solutions to answers, Vickers insists that policy-making individuals should confront their social and psychological models that may hinder their progress.

Policymaking is a mental skill and like all any other mental skill it is restrained by the limitations placed upon it by the individual’s pre-conceived notions. Vickers explains that differences exist between policy making elements and executive elements and that policy making elements are becoming widely less regarded in today’s world. Solutions to public problems require widespread thought that encompasses all of the interactions present in today’s public service. Failure of a public executive to comprehend these policy-making elements simply creates new public policy problems. The public policymaker should covet advances in technology, risk assessment tools, and their ability to predict reality. Vickers sums this up cleverly when he states (p. 97) “wisdom lies in masterful administration of the unforeseen, rigidity is to be feared and flexibility is to be prized.”

Today’s policy makers are confronted on every decision they make by their citizenry’s “ideal norms” (p. 117). These ideal norms are what the individual’s mind judges to be valuable, typically in the context of perfect world value. Policymakers need to be cognizant of these value judgments and should stand ready to explain in the context of the current situation that almost all public policy decisions are made outside of ideal situation parameters. Due to the limitations
placed on public service officials in the way of political, cultural, and financial constraints, ideal norms are not a practical possibility.

The art of judgment is a necessary read by any public official who creates policy on any public issue. The notions presented by Vickers are timeless and will carry value whether read today or in ten years. Vickers’ makes the reader aware of social interaction issues that are likely to occur. With this information, the reader can possess a consciousness that will allow for creative decisions outside of the typical parameters that constrain him. Vickers’ appreciative system theory, which attaches meaning to communication in terms of the world in which we live, the communicated world in which we share with others and the experienced world of ourselves, is essential knowledge. Only when we realize that our norms, values and beliefs are not common to others will we be able to see policymaking decisions that take into account the visions of all stakeholders.

Works Cited