

# **AVOIDING POLICY FAILURE: A WORKABLE APPROACH**



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**Steven E. Wallis**



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PUBLICATIONS

*Avoiding Policy Failure: A Workable Approach*

Written by: Steven E. Wallis

Library of Congress Control Number:

2011940984

ISBN: 978-0-9842165-0-5

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Printed in the United States of America

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ABOUT FAST

**T**he Foundation for the Advancement of Social Theory (FAST) is a long-view, transdisciplinary project dedicated to accelerating the advancement of social theory to fulfill the promise of the social sciences by providing theory that is unarguably effective in practical application. FAST is striving to identify new and more useful paths for validating social theory, benchmarking the advancement of theory, and supporting the falsification and application of effective theory in social systems. From a metapolicy perspective, FAST is here to quantify the internal coherence/integrity of policy and certify the potential effectiveness of that policy. Where others analyze the issues and create policy, we analyze policy using rigorous methodologies to quantify the internal logics of that policy. We also provide specific, workable, recommendations for improving policy. This unique service supports governments, IGOs, NGOs, agencies, corporations, and policy analysts in their efforts to create policy that will be more effective in practical application. Another way we work to accomplish our goal is to support our Research Fellows in their efforts to conduct rigorous critical and integrative metatheoretical research. FAST provides education and mentoring to help new and established scholars to conduct effective research and increase their rate of publication in the academic literature. Please, visit us at: <http://ProjectFAST.org>.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some parts of this book were derived in part or whole from: "Towards the development of more robust policy models" as published in the *Integral Review*, 6 (1). <http://integral-review.org/>

Among many others, I would like to thank Greg Daneke, Gianfranco Minati, Ilya Garber, Katrina Rogers, and Robert Silverman for their constructive suggestions that resulted in a more clear and coherent publication. Of course, any errors remain strictly my own.



## PREFACE

**T**his book is targeted at graduate students, scholars, analysts, and decision makers who are teaching, learning, and working in the policy field. Specifically, those who are seeking better ways of understanding, creating, choosing, and implementing more effective policy. As such, this book may be applied as a textbook for learning innovative and useful methods, as a scholarly study showing how complexity thinking may be applied to policies, and as a starting point for creating new insights into metapolicy analysis.

Policy is important because each policy serves as a guide for decisions of organizational, corporate, community, national, and global importance. The text of each policy may be seen as a “lynchpin” in the process of research and practice that determines the effectiveness, efficiency, and the validity of decisions that may cost trillions of dollars (for the national budget) thousands of lives (in military conflicts) and touch the lives of billions of human beings (for economic and environmental issues). With better policy, our society will make better decisions that could save thousands of lives, billions of dollars, and reduce needless suffering.

Generally, studies have focused on the goals, reasons, actions, and results of policy. In an important and innovative contrast, the present investigation is focused on the policy text, itself. Here, the text is seen as a logical cognitive construct that is amenable to objective analysis and quantification. The text represents the policy maker’s understanding of the situation, not the goals desired or the actions required. That difference will allow us to make

policy decisions that will lead to more policy successes than the many policy failures of the past.

As I write this book, we approach the tenth anniversary of September eleventh, 2001. Only now are we beginning to extricate ourselves from two long and costly wars. It is easy to imagine that we might have completed those wars much earlier if we had possessed more effective military policy. It is even possible that we might have avoided those wars completely by avoiding the unexpected terrorist attacks that triggered them. To do so, we would have needed policies of unprecedented quality in their ability to help us understand our world and predict world events.

Recent advances in critical metapolicy suggest new approaches for analysis based on insights from complexity theory. Specifically, that we can quantify the complexity and the co-causal relationship between the propositions within a policy. And, critically, that there is a correlation between the quantifiable structure of a policy and the effectiveness of that policy in practical application. It has been suggested in the literature that we can use methods such as propositional analysis (PA) to determine the effectiveness of a policy prior to implementation based on the policy text. Such an approach would enable scholars to develop more effective policy and provides a new tool for practitioners to choose between competing policies.

In this book, I test that assertion by applying PA to six policies in three comparative case studies. Cases include military policy, economic policy, and international policy. Because of the great difficulty associated with finding policies that were effective (let alone comparable

cases), these studies may be seen as somewhat obscure. I certainly invite all readers to join in an effort to find additional cases for more comparisons.

In each case comparison, the quantified structure of the policy is compared with the historical consequences of implementing the policy. Generally, the results of the study support the assertion. I found that policies with higher levels of structure (higher internal integrity and greater complexity) tend to be more effective in practical application. And, conversely, policies of lower complexity and less internal integrity tend to be less effective. Additional insights are also discussed along with implications for future research and application. Some important next steps for this line of research would be to conduct additional case comparative studies as well as larger scale, statistical analyses. The usefulness of this methodology across a range of policy fields suggests that it is generalizable across most, perhaps all, areas of policy interest.

# GLOSSARY

## *Aspect*

The part of policy that represents a concept, idea, or notion. The aspect may be as concrete as in “apple” or as abstract as in “truth.” An aspect is typically detectable, that is to say empirically measurable, but that is not an absolute standard.

## *Atomistic Logic*

A kind of logical structure found within a proposition that is reductionist such as “A is valid” or “A is true.” Or, more concretely, “Apples are important.”

## *Branching Logic*

A logical structure found within causal propositions including three or more aspects where a change in one aspect causes change in two or more other aspects. For example, a branching proposition might say that changes in A will cause changes in B and C. For a more concrete example, “More teamwork will lead to more cohesion, *and* more results, *and* more frustration.

## *Complexity*

A measure representing the number of aspects within a policy. The calculated diversity of ideas within a policy document. For an abstract example, consider a policy containing the propositions: A is true; More B causes more C; More B causes more D. In such a model, there are four aspects (A, B, C, D). Therefore, the Complexity of the policy is  $C=4$ .



### *Concatenated Logic*

A logical structure found within a casual proposition including three or more aspects where changes in two or more aspects cause change in another aspect. For an abstract example, a concatenated proposition might state that changes in aspect A *and* aspect B will cause changes in aspect C. In that example, C is the concatenated aspect, while A and B exist within a concatenated relationship but are themselves not concatenated. For a more concrete example, "More collaboration *and* more shared goals will result in more teamwork." Here, "teamwork" is the concatenated (and better understood) aspect.

### *Causal Relationship*

Where two or more aspects are related so that a change in one causes a change in one or more others. A causal relationship is often expressed as a proposition, hypothesis, or a diagram. A causal relationship such as, "More A causes more B." may also be used as a general term in place of other more specific terms. Instead of saying "more" other indicators might be "better" or "less" (for example). Similarly, instead of "causes" more specific indicators might include such terms as "creates," or "engenders." In any case, the description must be specific to be valid. It is not useful to state (for example) that "A and B are interrelated" or "More A may cause more B" because the nature of the relationship is not causally defined. Logical structures often describe casual relationships (e.g., linear, branching, concatenated)

### *Critical Metapolicy Analysis*

Rigorous and repeatable investigation of policy document according to a carefully structured methodology to quantify some understanding of the policy.

### *Dimension (or scalar dimension)*

An aspect of policy that represents quantitative or qualitative variations. For example, a dimension of “size” might be used to represent whether a system is smaller or larger.

### *Functional (Complexity / Robustness)*

The idea of functionality suggests that a policy may have a different level of Complexity or Robustness than is clearly identifiable in the policy text. That is to say, the Complexity and Robustness have not been effectively communicated through the text so they are not adequately addressed in the analysis. There may be, for example, tacit assumptions that are in opposition to (or in concert with) the explicit policy. The usefulness may be higher or lower than indicated by the text.

### *Integrative Analysis*

Combined processes of qualitative and quantitative analysis involving rigorous hermeneutic deconstruction of text and rigorous re-integration of multiple texts following a structured methodology.

### *Linear Logic*

A logical structure found within a proposition describing simple causal relationship between two aspects. Such as, “More A causes more B.” Both A and B exist in linear relationship to one another. Here, A is the causal aspect

and B is the resultant aspect). Linear structures can be of any length (e.g., More A causes more B which causes more C which causes more D... which causes more Z). For a more concrete example, "Having more shared goals leads to more teamwork which, in turn, leads to more productivity." Within an explanation, this may also be phrased as, "A is true because of B and B is true because of C... because of Z).

#### *Logic Model*

A set of interrelated logic statements such as a theory or a Policy Model.

#### *Metapolicy*

Generally the study of policy. This may be rigorous as in the use of propositional analysis or fuzzier as in the use of historical narrative. May also be used to describe a policy on how to make policy.

#### *Metatheory*

Primarily the study of theory, including the development of overarching combinations of theory, as well as the development and application of theorems for analyses that reveal underlying assumptions about theory and theorizing.

#### *Policy*

A cognitive structure (like a theory) representing how a community or organization understands the world, thus enabling them to take specific actions to achieve their goals. The policy, as a cognitive sense-making structure, does not (strictly speaking) include goals or actions.

### *Policy Model*

Concise representation of a relatively complete policy. May be explicit—as in a diagram or it may be relatively implicit as found in a set of causal propositions.

### *Proposition*

“A proposition is a declarative sentence expressing a relationship among some terms.” (Van de Ven, 2007: 117). For example, “More travel leads to more discovery.” (See Causal Relationship).

### *Propositional Analysis*

A process of metapolicy analysis for investigating a policy to determine the Complexity of the policy (diversity of concepts) and the Robustness of the policy (the ratio of concatenated aspects to the total number of aspects). For an abstract example, consider a theory which states that changes in A *and* changes in B cause changes in C. Such a theory contains three aspects (A, B, C), one of which is concatenated (C). Therefore, the Robustness of the theory is 0.33 (the result of one concatenated aspect divided by three total aspects).

### *Robustness*

A ratio describing the interrelatedness between aspects of a policy on a scale of zero to one. Robustness is calculated by dividing the number of concatenated aspects by the total number of aspects in a policy (see Propositional Analysis). Robustness is a measure of how well integrated the propositions of a policy are, the degree to which they are understood as existing in a systemic relationship, and the level of co-causality between the aspects. Robustness

is also related to the effectiveness of the policy in practical application.

### *Social Science*

The purposeful study and advancement of understanding in all fields of human interaction including (but not limited to) psychology, sociology, policy, ethics, business, management, human development, organizational development, economics, and social anthropology.

### *Theory*

An ordered set of assertions. Weick (1989: 517. Drawing on Southerland).





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