

***The Australian Policy Handbook: A Practical Guide to the Policy-Making Process* (6th Edition), by Catherine Althaus, Peter Bridgman and Glyn Davis. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2017, pp. 320. RRP \$55.00.**

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One of the many strengths of *The Australian Policy Handbook* is the background of the authors. All have hands-on experience navigating the challenging complexities that surround the formulation, implementation and analysis of public policy, and the politics that often influence its final shape. Two of the three authors have also taught public policy at the university level, which has enabled them skillfully to identify the gaps between theory and practice.

Associate Professor Catherine Althaus is an academic. Her expertise in the policy field spans two countries (Australia and Canada) and includes time as a policy officer in Queensland Treasury. Peter Bridgman is a barrister. His career includes time as a psychologist and as a consultant in the areas of public governance and integrity. Bridgman has headed a variety of government agencies and is currently a member of Queensland's Civil and Administrative Tribunal and the Queensland Mental Health Review Tribunal. The career of Professor Glyn Davis AC spans academia (teaching public policy) and senior leadership positions in government and academia. He is currently Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University, having previously been Vice Chancellor of Griffith University. Professor Davis also headed the office of Premier and Cabinet in Queensland for two premiers and was the Foundation Chair of the Australian and New Zealand School of Government.

These brief biographies serve to highlight why anyone interested in gaining a greater understanding of public policy and public administration, from an academic and practitioner perspective, should read this well-written, logically structured and highly informative book.

The Australian Policy Handbook consists of 13 chapters, as well as a useful Appendix that provides policy checklists for practitioners and an extensive Glossary that will be particularly useful to anyone who is not an expert in public policy. Each chapter ends by posing questions designed to enhance classroom discussions and raise interesting

points for public sector practitioners to consider. *The Australian Policy Handbook* will also be a valuable resource for anyone in the private sector involved in public-private partnerships and government-business relations more generally.

The *Handbook's* first chapter explains the difficulties associated with trying to precisely define public policy. The authors point to the multitude of definitions put forward by political scientist over the past 70 years. They have chosen to describe policy in "four different but compatible ways" and to discuss why it can be seen as the authoritative choice of governments; as a hypothesis; as the objective of governmental action; and as public value (a variation of policy as objective). The chapter concludes by reiterating the authors' 2015 proposition that, 'The policy cycle does not assert that policy making is rational, occurs outside politics, or proceeds as a logical sequence rather than as a contest of ideas and interests'.

Chapter 2, 'The Institutions of Public Policy' outlines the institutional context surrounding public policy in the context of the Australian system of responsible government. The chapter alerts readers to a very diverse third sector, which does not form part of the public and private sectors but includes charities, lobby and interest groups, schools and tertiary institutions, think tanks and a variety of voluntary organisations. This diverse sector, the authors argue, plays an influential role in society and can affect the shape and outcome of public policy.

The 'policy cycle' is the focus of the relatively brief Chapter 3, which outlines issues that arise as policy progresses from the identification of issues through to evaluation of its consequences. Chapters 4 ('Identifying Issues'), Chapter 5 ('Policy Analysis'), Chapter 6 ('Policy Instruments'), Chapter 7 ('Consultation'), Chapter 8 ('Coordination'), Chapter 9 ('Decision'), Chapter 10 ('Implementation') and Chapter 11 ('Evaluation') describe and analyse in some depth the issues that arise at different stages of the policy process. These chapters all offer theoretical and practical perspectives, with the emphasis being on the latter. The practical approach the authors offer will greatly assist anyone trying to make sense of the policy process.

In Chapter 12, 'Managing the Policy Process', the authors begin by making reference to an obvious but sometimes overlooked aspect of public policy, namely that 'the policy process does not run itself'. This opening remark reminds readers of why policy actors need to ensure that actions are sequenced so policy can progress as smoothly as possible from the ideas stage to implementation and evaluation. Most importantly, this chapter moves beyond public policy management and planning to highlight the need for procedural integrity, ethical decision-making and the value of frank and fearless advice. Chapter 12 also notes a decline in policy capacity, largely attributed to state of political leadership and public service executives.

The final chapter, 'When Policies Succeed and Fail', explains why policies often fail. It points to poor design, inadequate implementation, under resourcing, knee-jerk responses by governments pressured to react to real or perceived problems, and external factors that can impact quickly on policy decisions. However, the authors do not focus solely on failures. They discuss policy successes and what contributes to them, drawing on Jill Rutter's seven factors for successful public policy, as well as former United Kingdom Cabinet Secretary Gus O'Donnell's thoughts on good public policy practice.

Based on 30-years of experience, O'Donnell makes the following recommendations: be clear about the outcomes you want to achieve; enhance policy as objectively as possible; do not bear false witness against your neighbour's policies; do not assume the government must solve every problem; do not rush to legislate; honour the evidence and use it to make decisions; be clear who is accountable for what and line up the powers and the accountabilities; do not kill the messenger; remember that it is a privilege to serve; and keep a sense of proportion. O'Donnell's list should be placed on the office wall of every person involved in the policy process.

I wish *The Australian Policy Handbook* had been available when I did my degrees in public policy many years ago. Students did not have the advantage then of being able to access such a comprehensive, well-researched and well-written policy handbook, which outlines very clearly the complex, frustrating but nevertheless fascinating processes and relationships that influence good and bad public policy outcomes. I have no hesitation in recommending *The Australian Policy Handbook* to anyone wishing to learn or learn more about all aspects of public policy.