
Letter to the Editor

Harrison, K. 1999. Letter to the editor responding to J. Ehrenfeld's letter regarding K. Harrison's (Summer 1998) "Talking with the Donkey: Cooperative Approaches to Environmental Protection," *Journal of Industrial Ecology* 2(3): 51–72.

I appreciate Professor Ehrenfeld's thoughtful response, and thank him for the "heads up" on several pertinent forthcoming publications. I too find simple typologies of policy instruments less than satisfying, and have thus continued to think about some of the issues raised by Professor Ehrenfeld since I completed "Talking with the Donkey" last summer. The fact that there are so many typologies of policy instruments in the literature, not limited to several cited by Professor Ehrenfeld, suggests that other authors find each other's typologies equally unsatisfying.

Why? I think the fundamental problem lies in trying to boil down the distinctions between multi-faceted policy instruments into any one dimension. Different authors tend to focus on different dimensions in developing their own typologies. For instance, I used the work of Doern and Phidd (1992) as a starting point, which is implicitly predicated on formal manifestations of public policy (laws, expenditures, non-binding guidelines), though I offered various subcategories pertinent to voluntary instruments. Vedung (1998) on the other hand distinguishes between instruments based on the resources being used by government to influence the target population's behaviour: coercion, financial incentives, and moral or intellectual appeals. Vedung is less concerned with the formal expressions of policy than the source of influence underlying them. (One can imagine further differentiation between the kind of influence the state thinks it is using and what actually influences different members of the target population.) Although Vedung's three categories of instruments – regulation, expenditure, and persuasion – are nominally similar to Doern and Phidd's, he would consider a non-binding voluntary program driven by the threat of regulation to be a form of regulation, while I (and I presume Doern and Phidd) would consider it to be a form of exhortation, since it is not legally binding.

Clearly, both dimensions are important. It is relevant to distinguish between a government-sponsored voluntary program that merely offers encouragement and one that is predicated on a threat of regulation, and indeed to distinguish between the motivations of different actors faced with the same program. Similarly, there is an important distinction between a voluntary program driven by the threat of regulation and an actual regulation, not least in the kinds of actions immediately available to government (and often third parties as well) in response to noncompliance.

Professor Ehrenfeld cites several typologies that emphasize still other dimensions of policy instruments, including who develops and implements the program: government, government and non-governmental actors, or non-governmental actors alone. Those interested in this subject might also consider an excellent new book by Gunningham and Grabosky (1998). At the risk of sounding indecisive, all these dimensions are relevant. Clearly, there is a need to strike a balance between parsimony, which serves to underscore the one or two factors

considered most important, and recognition of the multifaceted nature of policy instruments, including those in the environmental field. While it is not desirable to devise so many distinctions that each policy effectively becomes a category unto itself, Professor Ehrenfeld's letter suggests to me that it is time to move at least part way in the direction of great complexity in this debate. The task before us is to design and carry out research programs that identify and compare the most relevant characteristics (plural!) of alternative approaches to environmental protection and conservation.

On a more specific note, I agree that ARET is a tough one to classify, but continue to believe it fits more easily within the category I call voluntary challenges and Lyon and Maxwell call public voluntary schemes. Although, like voluntary agreements (also known as environmental agreements), ARET was negotiated by the state with various stakeholders, in agreeing to the terms of the ARET challenge those stakeholders did not commit themselves to meet the objectives of ARET, as do parties to a voluntary agreement. Rather, they agreed on the wording of a broad challenge to the entire business community and public sector, which they, like other actors, would have the option of signing on to or not. I believe that an important distinction between a voluntary agreement and a voluntary challenge lies not in whether it is negotiated or not, but in the nature of commitment made by the target population.

Doern, G.B. and R.W. Phidd. 1992. *Canadian Public Policy: Ideas, Structure, Process* 2nd ed. Scarborough, ON: Nelson Canada.

Gunningham, Neil and Peter Grabosky. 1998. *Smart Regulation: Designing Environmental Policy*. New York: Oxford.

Vedung, Evert. 1998. Policy Instruments: Typologies and Theories. In Marie-Louise Bemelmans-Videc, Ray C. Rist, and Evert Vedung, eds. *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons: Policy Instruments and their Evaluation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

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