

LONERGAN'S *INSIGHT* PRINCIPLES AND THEIR APPLICABILITY IN THE PUBLIC POLICY MAKING PROCESS

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Abstract: This article explores the insights of Bernard Lonergan and their relevance to the field of public policy making. Lonergan's theory of *insight* provides a unique framework for understanding human cognition and decision-making processes, which are crucial in shaping effective public policies. The article examines key concepts of Lonergan's work, such as functional specialization, communal inquiry, and the dialectic of history, and explores their application in enhancing the policy-making process. It also addresses challenges in applying Lonergan's insights practically and responds to common criticisms. Ultimately, it argues for the integration of *insight* theory with existing policy-making frameworks to address contemporary policy challenges more effectively.

Keywords: Lonergan, insight theory, public policy making, cognition, communal inquiry, dialectic of history

1.0 Introduction

Bernard Lonergan's insights into human cognition and understanding offer valuable perspectives for enhancing the public policy making process. This article explores Lonergan's key concepts, methodologies derived from *insight* theory, and their applicability in policy making. It examines how these insights can contribute to overcoming biases, fostering communal inquiry, and promoting a more comprehensive understanding of social and political issues. By integrating Lonergan's ideas with existing policy-making frameworks, this article proposes a more robust approach to addressing contemporary challenges in public policy.

1.1 Exposition of Lonergan and His Work

Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) was a prominent Canadian Jesuit priest, philosopher, and theologian known for his profound contributions across philosophy, theology, and economics. His intellectual journey began with studies in philosophy and theology in Canada, England, and Germany, culminating in his doctoral studies in theology in Rome in 1940. Lonergan's extensive body of work spans disciplines such as philosophy of history, philosophy of science, and systematic theology, with seminal texts including "*Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*" (1957) and "*Method in Theology*" (1972)¹.

Lonergan's methodology is marked by its systematic rigor, interdisciplinary approach, and engagement with both contemporary issues and classical philosophical and theological traditions². His influence extended beyond academia, notably shaping documents of the Second Vatican Council and contributing insights to development economics. Throughout his career, Lonergan received numerous honorary degrees and awards, underscoring his intellectual stature and enduring impact on scholarly discourse³.

Philosophically, Lonergan was deeply rooted in the scholastic tradition, particularly influenced by Thomas Aquinas's emphasis on reason and understanding. He critically engaged with Immanuel Kant's epistemology, integrating

¹ Frederick Crowe, *Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 36.

² Robert Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History: Lonergan and the Philosophy of Historical Existence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 56.

³ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957), 26.

insights on human cognition and consciousness into his own explorations. Lonergan's overarching aim was epistemological: to uncover foundational principles that govern human understanding and to develop a method for systematic inquiry into these principles⁴.

Lonergan's engagement with phenomenology, particularly through Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, enriched his reflections on consciousness and the structures of experience. His work, including *Insight*, responds to contemporary debates in science, philosophy, and theology, offering a structured framework for understanding human cognition amidst evolving intellectual currents⁵.

Central to Lonergan's critique was a departure from simplistic empiricism and foundationalism. He challenged the narrow focus of empiricists on sense data alone and critiqued foundationalists who reduced knowledge to self-evident principles. Instead, Lonergan proposed a dynamic theory of understanding centered on the concept of *insight*. *Insight*, for Lonergan, involves a comprehensive process encompassing experience, understanding, judgment, and reflection, facilitating a deeper grasp of the intelligibility inherent in data⁶.

Lonergan's contributions to the philosophy of science were significant, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates empirical data with the intellectual operations that structure and interpret that data. His work continues to influence diverse fields, advocating for a nuanced and process-oriented understanding of knowledge acquisition and justification⁷.

Ultimately, Bernard Lonergan's intellectual legacy resides in his rigorous exploration of human cognition and understanding. By synthesizing philosophical, theological, and scientific insights, Lonergan provided a robust framework that continues to shape scholarly inquiry and practical applications across disciplines. His emphasis on *insight* as a fundamental component of understanding remains a cornerstone of contemporary philosophical discourse.

1.2 Applicability and Public Policy-Making

Insight Theory is fundamentally about understanding through insights, which are moments of clarity and resolving questions or problems. The article articulates some core principles of *insight* theory in Public Policy.

Empirical consciousness; policy-making begins with the crucial step of emphasizing the collection of data and sensory experiences crucial for understanding the current state of affairs, such as environmental data for developing policies⁸.

Intellectual consciousness; follows, involving the analysis and interpretation of data to generate insights into policy issues, such as understanding factors affecting educational outcomes⁹.

Rational consciousness; then critically evaluates these insights to assess their validity and potential impact on policy options, ensuring decisions are evidence-based¹⁰.

Responsible consciousness; focuses on ethical implementation and continuous evaluation of policies to achieve desired outcomes, illustrating a systematic approach to effective policy making grounded in empirical data and rigorous analysis¹¹.

1.3 Methodologies of *Insight* Theory in Public Policy

⁴ Lonergan, *Insight*, 29.

⁵ Lonergan, *Insight*, 32.

⁶ Lonergan, *Insight*, 101.

⁷ Lonergan, *Insight*, 220.

⁸ Lonergan, *Insight*, 23.

⁹ Lonergan, *Insight*, 37.

¹⁰ Anita D. Gregory and Roy Endacott, "Developing Judgment and Decision-Making Skills in Nursing," *Nurse Education Today*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2007):289.

¹¹ Lonergan, *Insight*, 17.

Insight theory in public policy encompasses methodologies aimed at generating, understanding, and applying insights to inform decision-making and policy formulation. This article explores key methodologies derived from Lonergan's *Insight* Theory and their application in the public policy context.

Functional Specialization: divides the policy-making process into distinct tasks, assigning each to specialized teams¹².

For example, in developing education policy, researchers gather data while another team drafts policy based on findings, and a third engages stakeholders. This approach manages complexity, enhances efficiency, and ensures policies are comprehensive and expertly crafted¹³.

Critical Realism: balances subjectivity and objectivity in policy development, emphasizing grounding decisions in both theory and real-world data. This ensures policies are theoretically sound yet practically applicable¹⁴. For economic policies, this means applying economic principles to actual conditions like inflation or unemployment, fostering policies rooted in empirical reality rather than idealized assumptions.

Communal and Collaborative Inquiry: involves engaging diverse stakeholders in policy-making, ensuring policies are equitable and comprehensive. In public health policy, for instance, involving community leaders, healthcare professionals, and patients provides a broad spectrum of insights, enhancing policy relevance and acceptance¹⁵. This approach fosters consensus, transparency, and stakeholder commitment, crucial for effective policy implementation.

Enhanced Application in Public Policy: These methodologies collectively enhance the public policy-making process by ensuring policies are detailed, realistic, and inclusive. Functional specialization allows for efficient handling of policy phases, critical realism grounds policies in reality, and communal inquiry fosters broad stakeholder engagement.

Together, they promote policy comprehensiveness, applicability, and legitimacy, addressing complex societal challenges effectively¹⁶.

Ultimately, the methodologies derived from insight theory offer structured approaches to navigating the complexities of policy-making; ensuring policies are both well-informed and widely supported by engaging diverse perspectives and grounding decisions in empirical evidence.

1.4 Importance of Cognition and Understanding in Human Knowledge

This article explores the significance of cognition and understanding in human knowledge, drawing heavily on Lonergan's insights. Lonergan emphasizes that genuine knowledge arises through a dynamic interaction of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, challenging reductionist perspectives on knowledge. This holistic approach underscores the role of context, bias, and the developmental nature of human understanding¹⁷. The article discusses the process of insight, which begins with empirical data and culminates in intellectual formation and evaluation of concepts. This iterative process highlights the interdependence of cognitive activities and the importance of rational assessment in decision-making.

Self-appropriation and self-transcendence are key concepts in Lonergan's theory. Self-appropriation involves recognizing and understanding one's cognitive processes and biases, crucial for developing authentic understanding and responsible action. Self-transcendence extends this understanding outward, encouraging individual, particularly policymakers, to move beyond personal biases and consider broader perspectives for more inclusive and forward-thinking policies¹⁸.

¹² Alfonso Montuori, "The Joy of Inquiry," *Journal of Transformative Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2008):14.

¹³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 33.

¹⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 38.

¹⁵ Lonergan, *Insight*, 32.

¹⁶ Fischer and Gottweis, *The Argumentative Turn Revisited*, 39.

¹⁷ Lonergan, *Insight*, 10.

¹⁸ Lonergan, *Insight*, 10.

The article provides practical examples of how these concepts apply to policymaking, such as in economic policy formulation and urban planning. It illustrates how policymakers, through self-awareness (self-appropriation), can mitigate biases and enhance the objectivity and robustness of their decisions. Furthermore, by embracing self-transcendence, policymakers can consider long-term impacts and the common good, ensuring policies are sustainable and inclusive¹⁹.

Overall, the article advocates for an introspective and holistic approach to knowledge and decision-making, grounded in Lonergan's insights into cognition and understanding. It emphasizes the transformative potential of these concepts in addressing complex societal challenges and promoting informed, responsible policymaking.

1.5 Principles of Insight Theory

Explores fundamental principles underlying insight theory, focusing on how sudden realizations and intuitive leaps contribute to problem-solving and decision-making. *Emergent Probability*: discusses the concept of emergent probability, which suggests that probabilities can evolve or emerge based on new information or changing conditions, challenging static views of probability²⁰. *The Notion of Development and Progress*: examines ideas surrounding development and progress, exploring how societies and individuals perceive and measure advancements in various domains over time²¹. *The Role of Bias and Its Transcendence*: analyzes the influence of bias on decision-making and understanding, and discusses strategies or mechanisms to overcome bias to achieve more objective perspectives²². *The Dialectic of History and Its Influence on Understanding*: explores the dialectical relationship between historical events and our comprehension of them, highlighting how interpretations of history shape contemporary understanding and vice versa²³. *Public Policy-Making Process*: investigates the complex process of formulating public policies, including the factors influencing policy decisions, stakeholder dynamics, and the impact of public opinion and political environments²⁴.

1.6 Application of *Insight* Theory to Public Policy-Making

Lonergan's *Insight* Theory offers a foundational framework for effective public policy-making, emphasizing the necessity of deeply understanding both the contextual environment and specific challenges at hand. The theory argues that such comprehensive understanding is essential for uncovering the multifaceted nature and root causes of societal issues²⁵. This approach advocates for a systematic and empirical approach, starting with rigorous data collection and analysis to construct an accurate portrayal of the current situation.

Policy-makers are urged to move beyond superficial observations, employing rigorous methods to delve into complexities and interrelationships shaping societal challenges. Lonergan stresses collaborative inquiry as crucial, involving diverse stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive understanding and foster inclusive, robust policy outcomes²⁶. Additionally, functional specialization in policy development enhances efficiency by dividing tasks among specialized teams, while addressing biases through self-reflection and critical realism promotes fair and objective decision-making²⁷. Despite its theoretical depth, Lonergan's *Insight* Theory faces criticism for its complexity, necessitating efforts to simplify and clarify concepts for practical application in policy-making contexts.

¹⁹ Lonergan, *Insight*, 22.

²⁰ Lonergan, *Insight*, 23.

²¹ Lonergan, *Insight*, 19.

²² Lonergan, *Insight*, 26.

²³ Lonergan, *Insight*, 28.

²⁴ Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, 24.

²⁵ Lonergan, *Insight*, 28.

²⁶ Lonergan, *Insight*, 22.

²⁷ Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 29.

1.7 Challenges in Practical Application to Public Policy

Although, *Insight* Theory provides a robust framework for understanding and decision-making, its theoretical nature poses significant challenges in practical application to policy-making. Policy-makers often require actionable solutions for immediate issues, contrasting with *Insight* Theory's reflective and process-oriented approach²⁸.

To bridge this gap, the article suggests practical strategies such as developing step-by-step guides, creating case studies, and establishing interdisciplinary teams. These efforts aim to integrate *Insight* Theory's theoretical insights with practical policy considerations, thereby enhancing decision-making processes.

Addressing criticisms of *Insight* Theory is crucial for its acceptance and utilization in policy-making. By simplifying concepts, developing practical application strategies, and showcasing successful case studies, the theory can become more accessible and relevant. Highlighting its adaptability to diverse policy contexts and its grounding in empirical data and critical analysis further strengthens its utility²⁹.

Insight Theory's potential in addressing modern policy challenges like climate change, social inequality, and global health is emphasized. Its emphasis on comprehensive understanding and rigorous analysis can help policy-makers synthesize complex information and formulate effective, sustainable policies. The theory's adaptability across cultural and social contexts underscores its relevance in today's diverse policy landscape.

Overall, the article advocates for a deeper integration of *Insight* Theory into policy-making processes, highlighting its capacity to enhance decision-making through a balanced synthesis of theory and practice.

Adapting Lonergan's emphasis on self-reflection and critical realism involves promoting continuous learning and policy adaptation among decision-makers, ensuring policies remain responsive and adaptable in dynamic environments through regular reviews and scenario planning.

1.8 Integration with Other Policy-Making Frameworks

Through combining *Insight* Theory with methodologies such as systems thinking or evidence-based policy-making, policy-makers can create a more versatile and comprehensive approach to policy development. Systems thinking, focuses on understanding the interconnectedness within systems, complements *Insight* Theory's emphasis on comprehensive understanding and reflective analysis. This integration enables policy-makers to anticipate broader impacts and design policies that are adaptive and resilient³⁰.

Similarly, evidence-based policy-making, which relies on empirical data and rigorous analysis, aligns with *Insight* Theory's emphasis on critical realism. By merging these approaches, policy-makers can ensure that their decisions are both theoretically grounded and practically effective, enhancing the overall robustness of policy development processes³¹.

Overall, integrating *Insight* Theory with other established frameworks offers a promising pathway to address complex policy issues more comprehensively and effectively, leveraging the strengths of each approach to achieve better policy outcomes.

1.9 Methodologies Corresponding to *Insight* Theory Principles

This article discusses the importance of evolving methodologies based on *Insight* Theory principles to address contemporary policy challenges effectively. Integrating advancements in technology, such as big data and artificial intelligence, enhances *Insight* Theory's empirical data analysis phase, improving decision-making with more accurate

²⁸ Lonergan, *Insight*, 33.

²⁹ Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 37.

³⁰ Lonergan, *Insight*, 17

³¹ Lonergan, *Insight*, 18

and comprehensive data. Additionally, incorporating participatory governance models through digital platforms fosters broader stakeholder engagement, supporting collaborative inquiry and communal decision-making³².

1.10 Enhanced Application in Public Policy

This article highlights how integrating Insight Theory with other frameworks and evolving its methodologies can greatly enhance the effectiveness of public policy. By emphasizing deep understanding and uncovering hidden motivations in human behavior, *Insight Theory* offers a valuable approach for developing solutions to complex societal issues³³. Combining *Insight Theory* with disciplines like behavioral economics and social psychology enriches policy analysis by considering diverse perspectives, leading to more holistic and robust policy solutions.³⁴ Continuous evolution of *Insight Theory* methodologies, informed by advancements in fields like cognitive neuroscience, enhances the precision and adaptability of policy interventions³⁵. Ultimately, integrating *Insight Theory* with complementary frameworks enables the development of more comprehensive and responsive policies that address the diverse needs and rapid changes of contemporary society³⁶.

1.11 Conclusion

This article has conducted a comprehensive exploration of the application of Bernard Lonergan's *Insight Theory* to the public policy-making process. By delving into its foundational concepts, methodologies, and key principles, alongside its relevance to cognition, understanding, and ethical decision-making, this discussion has underscored the potential of Lonergan's insights to foster more effective and ethical governance.

Lonergan's *Insight Theory* offers a profound framework that integrates empirical, intellectual, rational, and responsible consciousness, supported by methodologies such as functional specialization, critical realism, and communal inquiry. These elements provide invaluable tools for navigating the intricacies of policy formulation and implementation in today's complex societal landscape.

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³³ Guy Peters, *The politics of bureaucracy: An Introduction to Comparative Public Administration*, Routledge, 2020, 43

³⁴ Richard Thaler, "Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness", *Yale University Press*, New Haven, 2008, 356-360

³⁵ Paul Dolan and P. Galizzi, "Like Ripples on a Pond: Behavioral Spillovers and Their Implications for Research and Policy", *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 13.

³⁶ OECD, "Policy Responses to COVID-19", *OECD Publishing*, 2020, 26.

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