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(Original article)

# Provide a Model for Evaluating Public Policy with an Emphasis on Professional Ethics

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## Abstract

**Background:** As societies have become more complicated to manage, it is already unavoidable for governments to evaluate public policies. Moreover, adherence to professional ethics is an important criterion in evaluations. Therefore, the present research sought to provide a model for public policy evaluation based on the aspects of professional ethics.
**Method:** The approach of the present study was mixed (qualitative- quantitative) and in terms of purpose it was applicable research. In the qualitative section, participants included academic experts and governorate experts of Golestan province, 14 of whom were selected by purposive sampling. The research tool was semi-structured interviews and coding method was used to analyze the data. In the quantitative part, the statistical population was the managers and experts of the governorate and governorates (630 people) that the sample size was 248 people and the sampling method was random. Data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire based on qualitative findings. Friedman statistical test with Spss26 software was used to analyze the data.
**Results**: The results showed that from the experts' point of view, 6 main themes (quality of effective evaluators in policy, ethical nature of policy, how policy is implemented, factors related to economic planning, openness and accountability and attention to structural issues) and 19 components in public policy evaluation model emphasizing the quality of the dimensions of professional ethics in the governorates of the country. Quantitative results showed that the ethical nature of the policy was the most important component of the general policy evaluation model with emphasis on professional ethics (M = 5.23).
**Conclusion**: It can be concluded that the public policy evaluation model with an emphasis on professional ethics has different cultural, economic, social, and professional elements, which for better governance of provincial governments, they must be considered by executive authorities at the country's macro and micro levels.

***Keywords***: Public policy, Professional ethics, Ethics

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## Introduction

Public administration requires policy-making in various areas of social, economic, cultural, and political and so on. One of the most important issues for governments at the macro level of policy-making is to maintain the dignity of accountability, to improve the public policy process, or in other words, to improve the performance of policy-making, both of which can only be achieved through careful and Knowledge-based evaluation (1). The policy-making system has been created with a specific mission and strives to achieve certain goals. Marking forms a process cycle that includes several activities and steps. Some researchers consider the policy-making process to be problem identification, policy analysis, policy tools, consultation, coordination, decision-making, application, and evaluation (2). In general, the general policy-making process involves recognizing, understanding, and articulating an issue or problem; referral and problem solving in public organizations and institutions; formation, preparation and formulation of public policy; legalize and legitimize public policy; communicating and implementing public policy and evaluating public policy (3). Policy evaluation also deals with whether the implementation of policies leads to the achievement or increase of desired values in society or not. Policy evaluation can be a comprehensive process and involve from the beginning to the end of the policy process (4). Some researchers consider the four main functions of policy evaluation to include improvement, accountability, insight, and dissemination of information for advertising (5). Evaluation can be done for one or more of these purposes. Of course, the depth and accuracy of the policy evaluation depends on the opinion of those who ordered it or committed to implement it (6). Policy evaluation helps to adopt policies that are most effective and least costly by providing appropriate evidence, and that decision-making and policy-making are more informed (7). Other researchers consider policy evaluation as the main goal of achieving policy goals and the method adopted to achieve the goals (8).

In the matter of evaluating public policy, it is very important to pay attention to the professional ethics of employees (9-11). Paying attention to professional ethics in service organizations and paying attention to ethical issues can produce different results. Ethics includes a set of value judgments, the duties of behavior and conduct, and instructions for their execution (12, 13). Professional ethics deals with ethical issues and questions and the ethical principles and values of a professional system and oversees ethics in the professional environment (14). Paying attention to ethics and moral principles that have been developed in each society according to the type of culture of that society is one of the factors of society's success (15). The role of ethics in all aspects of the organization and its effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization has been agreed by researchers and ethical behavior has a significant impact on the activities and results of the organization, because it increases productivity, improves communication and decreases risk (16). On the other hand, ethics in Iran has long roots. Iranians from the Achaemenid period considered the observance of ethics in various fields, such as work and profession. At the same time, in Islamic teachings, moral responsibilities in the profession have a special place. Considering the positive effects of ethics, one of the most important key factors for the success of organizations is professional ethics (17). The more professional ethics in organizations are paid attention by managers and employees, the more successful the organization will be in achieving the anticipated goals (18).

There has been very little research in the field of policy evaluation in Iran without addressing the issue of professional ethics. Researchers have presented a model of factors affecting the evaluation of the quality of public policies in Iran and have concluded that the most important steps influencing the quality of public policy are the stage of public policy development and legitimacy, which have an impact factor of 0.68 and 0.57 (19). Another study has shown that poor implementation of policy in Iran has led to consequences such as policy

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failure, loss of public trust and damage to the credibility of the policy (20). Other results have shown that public policy evaluation is an unnecessary and unavoidable exercise for any country in the world (21). Another study has shown that age, the degree of justice seeking and working conditions have a significant relationship with the perception of the ethical process of policy evaluation (22). Other researchers have found that the policies and conditions of the future political process are involved, especially in the moral value of judgments. On the other hand, public participation is needed if politics is to be effective (18).

Governorates, as a local strategic body at the provincial level, have major tasks that make correct and rational and ethical decisions that can overshadow the overall control of all processes in the district, city and provincial centers. In addition to routine and repetitive tasks and special work missions, the form and structure of decision-making in this institution is such that it needs to be continuously improved and improved. The focus of ethics in the work charter of organizations today, alone does not meet the current inefficiencies and should be systematically, focusing on ethics and ethical codes and also its application in the policy-making process in organizations to pay attention. Be sensitive to the work ethic of all employees and the management of this institution. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to provide a model of public policy evaluation with emphasis on professional ethics in the governorates of the country.

## Material & Methods

The approach of the present study was integrated (qualitative method - thematic and quantitative analysis) and in terms of purpose it was an applied research. In the qualitative section, participants included some university professors related to management and general policy orientations and some experts within the Golestan province who were familiar with the theoretical issues of calligraphy and had experience and writing in this field and the possibility being in access (table 1). The sample size was obtained based on the theoretical saturation criterion and until reaching this criterion (14 interviews) the experts were interviewed and the sampling method was purposeful. The research tool was semi-standard in-depth interviews and the data analysis method was thematic coding-analysis. The interviews were conducted in such a way that first the general purpose of the topic was explained to the participant and then the research questions were asked. Participants were asked about their observations about the evaluation of public policy and its examples in each of the steps and questions related to specific examples in governorates and governorates. Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 90 minutes on average. After each interview, the transcripts were analyzed and coded. Coding method was used to analyze the data, which finally identified 19 main codes in 6 components. In the quantitative part of the research, the statistical population included managers and experts of the governorate and governorates of Golestan province (630 people) whose sample size was 248 people and were selected based on Morgan and Krejcie table. The sampling method was also simple random (table 2). The research instrument was a questionnaire based on qualitative findings, the validity of which was based on the views of professors and Cronbach's alpha test was used for reliability, which was 0.91. Friedman statistical test with Spss26 software was used to analyze the data.

**Table1: Some characteristics of research participants**

| Code | Post | Major/ Profession | Considerations | Code | Post | Major/ Profession | Considerations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Professor | Public policy | Teaching and writing policy principles | 8 | Deputy Governor | Strategic management | Provincial policy evaluation experience |
| 2 | Deputy | Economic | Policy Assessor | 9 | Expert | Management | Experience evaluating a related research project |
| 3 | Political deputy | Political sciences | Member of the Board of the Supreme Provincial Council | 10 | Professor | Executive Expert | Compilation of a policy book in the governorates |



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| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Professor | Management | Teaching general management | 11 | Deputy manager | Deputy | Macro executive history |
| 5 | Professor | General Management | Implementer of 2 national projects | 12 | Deputy manager | Faculty member | Teaching related courses |
| 6 | Expert of planning | Political sciences | Member of the Management Council | 13 | Professor | Faculty member | Experience of deputy governor |
| 7 | Professor | Strategic management | Teaching management principles | 14 | Expert of governor | Strategic management | Write a book |

**Table 2: Some characteristics of the research respondents**

| Characteristics | N | Gender | | Education | | | Work experience | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Male | female | B.A | M.A | Ph.D | 10 ys> | 10 to 20ys | 20 to 30ys |
| Frequency | 248 | 40 | 208 | 100 | 128 | 20 | 90 | 100 | 58 |
| Percentage | - | 16 | 84 | 40 | 52 | 8 | 36 | 40 | 24 |

## Results

The findings of the qualitative section showed that 19 key concepts were extracted which in the next step were axially coded by MAXQDA qualitative software and were classified into 6 central themes and 19 indicators based on the recognition of similarity and semantic similarity (table 3).

**Table 3: Primary and secondary coding**

| Primary coding | Secondary coding |
|---|---|
| 1. Competence of evaluators<br>2. Capability of evaluators<br>3. How to deal with the policy<br>4. Ability to predict environmental changes | Quality of assessors in policy |
| 5. Tools<br>6. Support evaluation<br>7. Policy transparency | The ethical nature of the policy |
| 8. Support stakeholder groups<br>9. Policy effectiveness<br>10. Performance of the organization | How to implement the policy |
| 11. Social developments<br>12. Cost reduction<br>13. Performance-based inter-organizational collaboration | Factors related to economic planning |
| 14. Comprehensive<br>15. Being responsive<br>16. Career promotion | Openness and responsiveness of evaluation |
| 17. Feasibility<br>18. Efficiency<br>19. Effectiveness | Attention to structural issues |

1. Quality of assessors in policy

This theme refers to the quality and competence of evaluators and oversees four components. The following statements are important:

Evaluation is a specialized job, so I think people who do policy evaluation should be really competent themselves (expert 1, professor). The issue of competence in evaluation is very important. Now in the country, the main problems are related to the fact that the evaluator is not very capable and does not even have much moral competence (expert 9, expert of the organization). Or another expert believed that how to communicate and interact is now so important that sometimes the best evaluation can be done with it (Expert 5, Professor)

2. The ethical nature of the policy

This theme also refers to the important ethical components involved in evaluating public policy and has three components in the present study. The following is the importance of each component of some examples of narrations from the perspective of experts:

It is very important how you do the evaluation or activity. In my opinion, this way of doing it should be very clear and obvious so that no vague points are seen (Expert 2, Deputy Governor). Another participant believed that all government experts and evaluators should support responsible and even ethical evaluation. I think we should do our moral responsibility by ethically supporting policy evaluations (expert 5, Professor).

3. How to implement the policy

This theme also emphasizes how policies are implemented and in the present study has three components: "supporting stakeholders", "policy effectiveness" and "organizational performance". Some experts believed that the implementation of the policy

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is more important than the policy itself and therefore should be evaluated to the best of its ability. For example:

In my opinion, evaluation is an academic specialty and someone with professional qualifications should be on the evaluation team. Especially the evaluation of the macro-level policies of the country, which is very sensitive (expert 13, deputy governor). Another expert believed that the implementation of the policy should take into account the support of the interests of all groups. For example, if the implementation of a policy by the governor is underway, even the environmental benefits should be considered (expert 11, professor).

4. Factors related to economic planning

Research participants believed that other factors such as social issues, cost reduction, and inter-organizational collaboration should be considered in evaluating policies. The following are some of their statements:

In my opinion, a good evaluation of the policy should be to consider its costs. I mean, you shouldn't evaluate in a way that costs a lot. The use of electronic space must be seen (expert 14, organization expert). Or another participant believed that without extensive government cooperation and all organizations, the implementation of policies would be incomplete and therefore the evaluation would be incomplete (Expert 10, Professor).

5. Openness and responsiveness

This theme refers to the openness of evaluation and accountability in evaluating policies and includes three components: "holism", "responsiveness" and "promotion". For example, one participant believed:

A good evaluation of the policy should also have responsibility for its expert judgment (expert 7, university professor). In my opinion, a major problem in all public assessments of the country is that no one is very accountable for their activities. This feature is crucial for evaluating policies (Expert 8, Deputy Governor).

6. Attention to structural issues

This theme has three main components: "feasibility", "efficiency" and "effectiveness". Participants believed that the evaluation structure of government policies should be able to respond to three important factors: feasibility, efficiency and effectiveness. For example:

It should be possible to evaluate all policy outputs (Expert 14, Deputy Governor). Or another believed that a policy that should be associated with total cost and time and is supposed to be beneficial to the country, that action and program should have effects on people's lives in various dimensions (expert 1, professor).




**Fig. 1: The final research model based on the average importance of each component**

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After determining the components and indicators of general policies based on professional ethics, Friedman test was used to rank the indicators and components. In this test, it is first examined whether there is a significant difference between the rank of variables in terms of individuals or not. Then, with the help of the average reported rankings, the variables are ranked in order of importance.

**Table 4: Mean rank of components and indicators by Friedman test**

| Components | Mean | P | Ranking | Indicators | Mean | P | Ranking |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Quality of assessors in policy | 4.27 | 0.008 | 4 | Competence of evaluators | 3.84 | 0.001 | 1 |
| | | | | Capability of evaluators | 3.51 | 0.001 | 2 |
| | | | | How to deal with the policy | 3.18 | 0.001 | 3 |
| | | | | Ability to predict environmental changes | 2.93 | 0.001 | 4 |
| Ethical nature of policy | 5.23 | 0.012 | 1 | Tools | 2.76 | 0.001 | 1 |
| | | | | Support evaluation | 2.55 | 0.001 | 2 |
| | | | | Policy transparency | 2.14 | 0.001 | 3 |
| How to implement policy | 3.35 | 0.001 | 5 | Support stakeholder groups | 2.68 | 0.001 | 1 |
| | | | | Policy effectiveness | 2.43 | 0.001 | 2 |
| | | | | Performance of the organization | 2.11 | 0.001 | 3 |
| Factors related to economic planning | 4.11 | 0.03 | 6 | Social developments | 2.78 | 0.001 | 1 |
| | | | | Cost reduction | 2.51 | 0.001 | 2 |
| | | | | Inter-organization cooperation | 2.26 | 0.001 | 3 |
| Openness and Responsiveness | 5.08 | 0.002 | 2 | Comprehensive | 2.66 | 0.001 | 1 |
| | | | | Responsiveness | 2.48 | 0.001 | 2 |
| | | | | Career promotion | 2.39 | 0.001 | 3 |
| Attention to structural issues | 4.49 | 0.003 | 3 | Feasibility | 2.75 | 0.001 | 1 |
| | | | | Efficiency | 2.60 | 0.001 | 2 |
| | | | | Effectiveness | 2.31 | 0.001 | 3 |

The findings of tables 4 show that the significance level (sig) is less than the value (0.05), so the null hypothesis is rejected at the 99% confidence level. Therefore, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the rank of indicators and components in terms of individuals. The most important components were the ethical nature of the policy and openness and accountability of the evaluation and the component of factors related to economic planning were the least important from the respondents' point of view.

## Discussion

One of the most important actions of any country is to formulate and evaluate policies for the administration of that country, which requires a lot of action. One of the important steps in this direction is the evaluation of policies by governments. The governorates, which are considered to be the main body of the government, have an important role in implementing the macro and micro policies of the country. On the other hand, evaluations are necessary according to professional ethics. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide a model for evaluating public policies with an emphasis on professional ethics. The results showed that 6 central themes and 19 indicators can be a model for evaluating policies in the provinces. Findings showed that the successful evaluation of public policies in governorates includes factors such as effective policy evaluators, the ethical nature of the policy, how the policy is implemented, factors related to economic planning, openness and responsiveness, and attention to structural issues.

The results of the present study are in line with the results of some studies; the research results showed that the most important factors influencing the quality of public policy are the public policy development and legitimacy, which are also mentioned in the present study (19). Other results have shown that poor policy implementation in Iran has

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led to consequences such as policy failure, loss of public trust and damage to the credibility of the policy, which was also mentioned in the present study(20). Other results emphasize the importance of seeking justice and job conditions with the perception of the ethical process of policy evaluation, which was also mentioned in the present study under the theme of the ethical nature of policy evaluation and in this respect is consistent with the results of the present study (22). Other researchers have concluded that policies and conditions of the political and structural process are important in evaluating policies, which in the present study was also referred to as structural issues (18). In another study, researchers concluded that the economic evaluation dimension in public policy is one of the important pillars of policy evaluation that is consistent with the results of the present study (23). Other results showed that the use of multidimensional dimensions in policy evaluation increases the quality of the policy, which the results of the present study were presented in the form of a multidimensional model (24). In explaining the results, it can be said that evaluation is a specialized and professional policy that examines the effects of the program. The nature and ethical identity of the policy is an element that is relevant to policy makers and if this issue is not considered when formulating the policy, it can affect the evaluation and implementation of the policy based on professional ethics. Factors related to economic planning were also identified as one of the influential elements in evaluating public policies based on professional ethics. In most organizations, the economy and the amount of budgeting required to establish the ethical infrastructure and accuracy in evaluating and reviewing the process requires spending money, and the issue of policy evaluation in the form of professional ethics is no exception. Attention to structural issues in the form of feasibility - efficiency and effectiveness is another factor that can consider the correct evaluation of a policy based on professional ethics. This is always overshadowed by the views of the organization's top managers and policymakers on what they expect from the evaluation and may even set a policy for the evaluator. The dimensions of evaluation in most models and research presented in the form of dimensions of policy evaluators, the nature and process of the policy, effective implementation of the policy and the economic dimension with it have always been approved. In this regard, the proposed model of the present study addressed the issue of policy evaluation from different angles and in general showed a multifaceted model from the perspective of experts that emphasizes different issues in policy evaluation and can be considered by planning and political stakeholders. . However, there are limitations to generalizing the results that should be viewed with caution. The nature of the research was qualitative and it was not possible to study more statistical population. Also, the research method was qualitative and if it was studied with the integrated method, the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative approaches could be used. Another limitation was that there was still insufficient research on public policy evaluation in the country, and this posed a challenge to reconcile the results with the previous model. In line with the results, he presented the following practical suggestions:

1. The results showed that ethical issues are as important as evaluating policies; therefore, it is suggested that ethical issues be given more attention in the evaluation.
2. The results showed that one of the important components of policy evaluation is openness and accountability; therefore, serious attention should be paid to liquidity in all stages of evaluation.
3. Strengthen the nature and existence of the developed policies by formulating a clear policy and providing a clear instruction for the expectations of the employees.
4. Considering the important factor of economic planning, the policies of the central government in promoting the developed policies and evaluation based on ethics should always be on the agenda. Also, the necessary investments in this regard should be considered in the form of financial budgets or budgets aimed at improving the organization's staff and evaluators.

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5. Considering that the structural factors could be explained in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, the orientation of the organization should be determined first. Given that the issue of ethics and social responsibility plays a special role in the advancement of organizations today, it is not without merit to pay attention to this issue.

## Conclusion

The public policies of each country are the mainstay of goal setting and the overall growth and development path of that country. Therefore, the evaluation of policies is crucial. The model of the present study showed that the evaluation of public policies includes 6 main dimensions (quality of effective evaluators in the policy, ethical nature of the policy, how the policy is implemented, factors related to economic planning, openness and responsiveness and attention to structural issues) and 19 indicators that addressing each dimension, especially the components of ethical issues, and paying attention to it can be a good model for evaluating standards.

## Ethical Consideration

Given the qualitative nature of the research and the ethics of the research, the purpose of the research was first explained to the participants and then they were asked to record their views and opinions during the interview if they wished. Also, if they need to leave the interview in the context of the interview, there is no restriction and they can leave it. At the end of the research, to reassure the participants, all the concepts and statements of the participants were sent to it.

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