

The Three I's of Policy: Intentionality, Instruments, and Investment

Queen's School of Policy Studies Thursday Lecture

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I want to begin by telling you a bit about what I do, because it provides the frame for what I have to say about how we think about policy.

The titles I carry are Founder and Chair of The Maytree Foundation, and Chair and CEO of Avana Capital Corporation. Maytree and Avana operate from the same suite of offices in Toronto, and many employees serve both organizations. Maytree is a charitable foundation my wife and I started over 30 years ago, with the aim to support antipoverty work in Canada. In our view, and I'll read you a bit from our website description, "Canada's tolerance of systemic poverty represses the human spirit and bears paralyzing costs to society. It is an urgent national imperative to reduce poverty. Maytree works with many partners to fight poverty. We listen to the voices of community to understand their needs and issues. We work with government, the central player in creating equity and prosperity. We work with civil society organizations, with employers, and with institutions to make them more effective in building strong and prosperous communities."

A main focus of Maytree's work is with immigrants and refugees in Canada, where we work at both a program and policy level. Immigration is a critically important element of nation building for Canada, and making it a success for the immigrant or refugee **and** for Canada is important for everyone. Nobody wins if we don't strive for mutual success. We need immigrants, and we need them to succeed

I am also chair of the boards and a co-founder of The Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement. Caledon focuses on both policy design and analysis related to poverty. Its notable achievements include the national Child Tax Benefit and various measures aimed to support Canadians living with disabilities. Tamarack works with and enables people on the ground in communities to design and implement local poverty reduction strategies ranging from transit subsidies for low income people to living wage campaigns. Its first initiative was Vibrant Communities which has now grown to a second major drive uniting 100 urban communities in Canada to engage in poverty reduction.

Avana Capital is a private investment company where we make the money we put into our philanthropic and community activities. We have a saying at Avana/Maytree that *we make the money in the morning and give it away in the afternoon.*

The Three I's

One of the discoveries we made in our work in all these organizations is that while it is important to deal with problems and issues as you encounter them in the community, at some point you have to look at root causes, and begin to deal with them. This led us to the importance of policy as a way of dealing with issues at scale. We became interested in public policy, as it flows from our governments, and also in corporate policy which is critical in things like the labour market, health, and community vitality.

We became increasingly aware of three necessary conditions in successful policy intervention, what I call **The Three I's**: Intentionality, Instruments, and Investment.

The first **I** is **INTENTIONALITY**. Whether it is in something you are undertaking, or something you are considering supporting, you must understand how intentional it plans to be. By that I mean there must be a serious intention to succeed. I've heard people talk about "trying something out", "dipping a toe in the water", pilot projects or baby steps. Donors do this to avoid making a big commitment, and charities often do it because they doubt they can attract the full support needed for a considerable effort.

On a number of occasions, in various countries, I've worked with foundations which had taken a tepid approach to something, and wondered at their lack of traction or success. They've blamed the basic idea, or the people involved, or the lack of other funders coming to the table. But when they've looked at their own behaviour and the half measures they've taken, they've come to understand their own role in that poor performance, and realized that they weren't intentional enough.

On the policy front, when we've worked with governments or corporations, we've found the same problem with intentionality. Governments operate in complex environments, and any file under consideration has many masters and many clients, and it isn't easy to find the solution

that fits all. Sometimes they need to do something, and sometimes they need just to be seen to be doing something.

If we are working with a government around, say, child poverty or skilled immigrants in the labour market, we can only have success when they are prepared to be intentional: to reduce child poverty materially, or to facilitate immigrant access to jobs for which they have training and experience.

Similarly, when we work with corporations on immigrants in the labour market, we only succeed with those companies who want to succeed at hiring them. Those with a lesser commitment waste their time and ours.

Intentionality means more than just thinking something is a good idea. It means that you intend to make something happen, that you intend to create change, and that you are going to be persistent and enduring. At Maytree and Caledon we talk about our approach being one of “*relentless incrementalism*”. *Incrementalism* is our nod to the difficulty of making sweeping change, and that most of our systems are geared to achieving the next achievable step. *Relentless* is the telling word, saying that when that next achievable step is achieved, we’ll be pressing on to the next achievable step, and the next one after that.

Without intentionality, actions are often vague, unfocused, and unsuccessful.

The second **I** is **INSTRUMENTS**. Good intentions often founder on a failure to put them into operation. Successful policy depends on designing the right instruments. A good instrument takes into account the broad context in which the policy operates, and also the various interests in play. As you are all aware, it can be impossible to satisfy every interest, and gridlock ensues that can only be resolved by good design and effective leadership. The design of instruments is critical.

Let me give you some examples.

Across Canada, through a Maytree initiative, we are developing a set of local immigrant employment councils, modeled on the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, or TRIEC. These councils have two main programs:

- A mentoring partnership which pairs an immigrant with a Canadian in the same line of work (a civil engineer with a civil engineer, a pharmacist with a pharmacist), so the Canadian can both coach the immigrant on job search and job

culture, and open up their own networks of contacts, which are so crucial in finding a job; and

- A training program for employers to help them develop human resource management skills in hiring immigrants effectively. For years the assumption was that immigrants had deficits in language, workplace culture, and skills, so we developed programs to remediate these deficits. But it didn't work that well until we realized that employers had deficits too, in assessing skills and credentials, and in adapting the workplace to people from different backgrounds. And so TRIEC and other modern programs recognize that the deficits are shared, and that instruments must be developed to remediate deficits in immigrants and employers. The employers who have been quickest to understand this are now the ones with the labour market edge. These instruments work effectively because they ultimately serve the interests of all the parties.

At www.TRIEC.ca you can find videos on HR practice, and other tools for success in integrating immigrants in the work force.

We have also developed instruments for increasing the diversity of people in governance roles, both in formally elected office and on the governing bodies of agencies, boards and commissions. *DiverseCity On Board* is a program which maintains a roster of diverse candidates who we have qualified by interest, experience, and capability. We can help organizations find the right candidate for their board through a matching process. DiverseCity on Board has been recognized internationally, and we are working with an international group to help adapt the idea to other countries.

And we have developed *School For Civics* and *Building Blocks*, which have developed curricula to train people who want to run for office, or manage an election campaign. In the last municipal elections in the Toronto region, 14 School For Civics graduates ran for office, and many more are gearing up for the 2014 and 2015 elections at all three levels of government. These programs can be found at the Maytree website.

In December 2011, Maytree led a trip to four German cities where we talked about immigrant integration, the so-called Canadian model. Our partners were the Canadian Embassy and four leading German foundations, Bertelsmann, Bosch, Korber, and Boll. In our touring group were Elizabeth McIsaac, who ran TRIEC; deputy chief Peter Sloly of the Toronto Police

Service; then academic director, now head of the Toronto District School Board Donna Quan; and CBC radio host Matt Galloway. Each of them talked about the instruments they've developed for better diversity and inclusion.

Peter talked about the police service *drive to diversity*, a necessity in a city where half the residents are foreign born, and half visible minority. The Service developed a Newcomer Outreach Program, and created a collaboration of 38 groups and agencies representing newcomers, assessing newcomer needs and issues. Based on that, they developed communication materials and new protocols of service delivery, as well as an officer recruiting program aimed at newcomers.

Donna talked about the detailed *census survey* the TDSB uses to gather information on the new student population and their families, using it as a tool for newcomers to state their desires, expectations, and needs. They integrate this information into school services and curriculum planning. They also conduct community and faith walks, where teachers and administrators go into the community to visit with people where they gather, in community centres, high streets, and places of worship. It is structured learning, to help educators be more aware and sensitive.

Matt Galloway talked about how CBC radio in Toronto was losing market share a decade ago, so they deliberately went about changing. They started with finding out who was in the community, and what they wanted. They asked people if they listened to CBC radio, and were humbled to find out that few did. Newcomers didn't think it was for them. So they decided to change, to change

- who the hosts were,
- who was interviewed, and
- what was talked about.

One of the big opportunities was the 2006 FIFA world cup. Matt, as a junior host, was sent to all the football bars in Toronto to interview fans while the games were on. People were surprised CBC was interested in "the world game", and began to tune in. Now CBC's market share has risen sharply, and Matt's Metro Morning has the biggest radio audience in Canada.

And my colleague Elizabeth McIsaac talked about TRIEC and its instruments, which I referred to a moment ago.

Further afield, in Chicago, financial instruments have been created by the Chicago Federal Reserve to help conservative Muslims with home ownership and small business investment while still observing Sharia law restrictions on borrowing money and paying interest. The Reserve has identified three types of Islamic loans, each existing somewhere between rental and ownership. The first option is essentially a staged transfer of ownership, the second is a lease-purchase, and the third is a more classical shared equity loan of the type common for affordable housing here in the UK. Without such instruments, Muslims who want to buy a home have to save hundreds of thousands of dollars to purchase it outright, or get loans from family and friends, or put aside their religious beliefs and take out a conventional mortgage.

So the design of instruments is vital to get traction on our intentions. The former treasurer of the province of Alberta, Jim Dinning, used to get all sorts of appeals from citizens and groups about their interests and causes. Most of it, he said, came in the form of complaint and urging, what I call the Culture of Complaint where people describe problems and assign blame. He used to tell people, “Bring me something I can say yes to”. He didn’t have the time to check out every description and devise a solution, but when a group came forward with a practical way to create change, usually imbedded in an instrument which could actually be applied, he paid attention. In our societies, politicians and senior public servants come to focus on *the next achievable step*, not some complicated piece of heavy lifting. If the next available step is captured in an instrument that fits within existing structures like the tax system or an existing program, success is more likely.

The third **I** is **INVESTMENT**. Without investment, good intentions and well designed instruments won’t work. Whether a government, company, or society is willing to put money on the line is a critical test of whether they want a particular policy to work.

It is not just a question of money but often of a different kind of capital, *political capital*. This is clear in our daily observation of political life where, in my view, politicians often dodge risking any political capital, marshalling it for some bold day that never seems to come.

Not only in governments, but in non-governmental organizations and businesses, there also needs to be political will by leaders who are prepared to ensure change happens. Too often corporate practice sticks with the way things have always been done, even when the evidence is that it is not working, or others are surpassing us. Leadership is often about making sure change takes root throughout the organization.

And there is another important type of investment to be made, an investment in complexity. Big problems are usually complex: there are many moving parts; they interconnect with each other in ways we don't anticipate; they change before our eyes; and they aren't all visible at the same time or from the each vantage point. It is easy to either get paralyzed by that complexity, or to look for some simple answer to avoid it.

There is a wonderful observation about simple solutions to complex problems: you can look for the simple solution that comes before you deal with the complexity, or you can deal with the complexity and look for the simple solution that you can implement. The latter recognizes that we do need solutions that we can actually implement, but that if they ignore the complexity they will likely founder. They won't be sustainable or effective.

So we need to make sure that we are prepared to make the investments required, and that other crucial actors make theirs.

When I talk about the three I's, I get asked which is the most important. And I can't answer that, because I think they must all be present if we are to succeed, *they must all be present*, Intentionality, Instruments, and Investment.

In my remaining time I want to talk about who gets to make policy. I've mentioned governments, and I've mentioned business. Governments in Canada hold the biggest levers for change, because they have enormous budgets, taxing authority, and sovereign power. Business is a key source of livelihood for people, and how they treat employees and communities creates much of the context for our lives.

And I've also mentioned some major institutional players, like the CBC, our police services, and our school boards. Major institutions in Canada influence how we live significantly, so their policy frameworks matter greatly.

I've also mentioned smaller organizations, like some of the ones with which I'm involved. We are by nature small for the most part, but we have an ability to innovate that larger organizations often find difficult. We have a greater ability to risk failure, a key factor in innovation. As such, we can often exercise our citizenship in a highly effective way.

What I mean by citizenship is a way of living life that builds the life of the community and the country. It may be attentiveness to feeding the hungry, sheltering the wanderer, or clothing the naked; it may be participating in the political life of the country; it may be creating the instruments of wealth creation in companies and institutions; it may be those simple acts of caring for those around us and the streets they walk. Citizenship, like city building or country building, is less often the broad or heroic strokes and more often the accumulation of hundreds of small acts to make our world better.

Those are the people we want as our fellow citizens, not mere cogs in the economic machine, or memorizers of lists of capitals and prime ministers (the current federal government's idea of what qualifies a citizen), but people who will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us in the great task of building Canada in the 21st century.

And it is to such people that I want to turn the remainder of my comments. There is at this moment across the country a flourishing of citizen groups who are taking back their communities, who have decided to stop waiting for someone else to act, to stop waiting for governments, to stop waiting to a change in the corporate agenda, to stop waiting for the institutions which are mired in internal processes.

In Toronto, which I know best, there are a number of groups to mention.

Some of you may be familiar with **The Stop**, which started life as a conventional food bank in 1982, one of the first in the country when we thought they might be a temporary stop gap. And they operated conventionally, waiting to be put out of business by returning prosperity lifting all boats, or by enlightened public policy. Ten years ago, The Stop recognized that wasn't happening, and it began to transform itself under the leadership of Nick Saul to reconnect food and human dignity for their clients. Now The Stop uses access to and quality of food as instruments to organize communities to deal with hunger and other outcomes of exclusion in their communities. The Stop developed The Green Barn as a part of the redevelopment of the old Wychwood streetcar barns, and uses it and their other facilities as a way of creating citizen involvement in neighbourhoods, not just among those in need but everyone. The programming is fun, educational, crosses age groups, and produces crops, recipes, stuff to eat, and ideas about social change for better communities. This has segued into a new organization Nick is heading, **Community Food Centres of Canada**, which is building the Stop model in communities across

the country. And they have caught the attention of politicians, particularly premiers McGuinty and Wynne in Ontario, and municipal leaders in many cities.

You may also have read about **Toronto Park People** which is engaging local residents in their neighbourhood parks across the city. Started by Dave Harvey, a former senior advisor to premier McGuinty, Park People is on one hand wresting parks from the bounds of bureaucracy and its tight rules while on the other hand working with the same bureaucracy to figure out how residents can help the city manage these vital local assets better. Like any dynamic and important process, it isn't always pretty and there is lots of friction, but real progress is being made, and public practice, and in some cases policy, is changing.

You may have participated in **Jane's Walk** which encourages and enables people to conduct their own tours of their neighbourhood, anything from an architectural tour to a tour of the best ice cream places. Developed as a tribute to Jane Jacobs, Jane's Walk has proven to be tremendously valuable as a tool to connect people to their neighbourhood and the other people living in it. Some of the tour leaders have been kids in Jane Finch, mothers in the concrete tower developments, or garden enthusiasts who are happy to show you their community, and who are learning about it anew as they do. Jane's Walk is now doing neighbourhood "walkability studies" for planners, developers, and city officials. Since its inception in Toronto in 2007, Jane's Walk has expanded rapidly. In May of 2013, more than 800 walks were held in over 100 cities in 22 countries worldwide.

Interestingly, all of these organizations have caught the ear of the commercial sector, which now invites them into their processes as consultants and advisers. Developers want advice about the food dimension of a new development they are planning, or about integrating community park amenities. Retailers want to know how to improve the pedestrian access to store sites.

I've mentioned just a few, and could continue with a long list which would include the founders and supporters of Spacing magazine and their numerous spinoffs and kindred organizations, Santropol Roulant in Montreal, The Halifax Initiative, and The Writers Exchange in Vancouver. And I'm sure you know about many others, some of which you might be involved with.

These great organizations are part of a rising wave of citizen activity that I see, and I'm greatly encouraged by it. In fact, I think in the future people will look back and say, "something

happened after The Great Recession of 2008-10, when people stopped waiting for something to happen and decided to make it happen themselves, when they took back their neighbourhood, community, and country, and changed the agenda and changed the conversation. They decided to stop waiting, and express the full power of their citizenship, and it made Canada a better place.”

One of the components of that is being able to link up what is occurring on the ground with those big levers I mentioned earlier. When I was a student in the 1960s, we had governments that were prepared to make those links, through programs like Opportunities For Youth and the Local Initiatives Programme. OFY and LIP welcomed community initiative, funded it, and linked it into policy development at the federal level, and in some provinces.

Some of you will end up in government at exactly the places where those links are forged. What will be critical is your attitude. Will you give these ideas emerging from communities wings, or will you give them shackles? It is something to consider as you move forward from this place.