

groups. Chapter 5 outlines roles for new institutions that have many of the same attributes of next-generation unions. The authors' vision for next-generation unions and new labor market intermediaries holds promise. These organizations can clearly help members hone their skills and help match workers to employers; however, it is not clear how effective they can be at protecting workers' basic interests (pay, benefits, and working conditions).

Chapter 6 suggests changes in government policies, such as promoting portable benefits and allowing greater worker-management communication. The authors argue that their policy prescriptions should not be taken piecemeal but rather as a comprehensive agenda. Yet, it is difficult to imagine their diverse policy ideas coming together in a single legislative program. It is even more difficult to imagine that their comprehensive agenda could be enacted. Nevertheless, it is possible that coalitions could form around specific legislative items, such as reforms to the unemployment insurance system to allow more workers to qualify for benefits.

Finally, the book concludes with a discussion of how these new approaches could come together to address some of the persistent problems in today's labor market. Specifically, the authors describe how the transformed labor market institutions they envision could address low-income labor markets, mobility, and work/family concerns. Many of the suggestions the authors make in chapters 3 through 6 do address various aspects of these problems, and they should—after all, it is these problems that motivated the suggested changes. Nevertheless, the authors leave many blanks to be filled in. For example, the authors state that low-income workers would benefit if the government pursued macroeconomic policies that spurred labor demand, but they do not go into detail about the policies they have in mind.

Although *Working in America* falls short of a fully actionable blueprint for the new labor market, it does provide many useful ideas for ways in which employers, unions, communities, and the government can evolve to better meet the demands of today's labor market. One specific comment casts light on a key principle for thinking about the future of the labor market: A worker observes that "security" no longer means keeping the job you have, it means the ability to get the next job. This underscores the importance of several of the authors' suggestions: worker and employer organizations should interact to help match available workers with jobs, professional organizations should provide skill-building opportunities which the government could subsidize, and pension benefits should be made increasingly portable.

GREGORY ACS is a Senior Research Associate at the Urban Institute.

KATHERIN ROSS PHILLIPS is a Research Associate at the Urban Institute.

Ann Chih Lin

The Limits of Policy Change: Incrementalism, Worldview, and the Rule of Law, by Michael T. Hayes, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001, 204 pp., \$21.95 paper.

Improving Governance: A New Logic for Empirical Research, by Laurence E. Lynn Jr., Carolyn J. Heinrich, and Carolyn J. Hill, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001, 224 pp., \$24.95 paper.

What is good policy? The books reviewed here, *Improving Governance: A New Logic for Empirical Research*, by Laurence E. Lynn Jr., Carolyn J. Heinrich, and Carolyn J.

DOI: 10.1002/pam.10143

Hill, and *The Limits of Policy Change: Incrementalism, Worldview, and the Rule of Law* by Michael Hayes, offer two quite different accounts. Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill bemoan the lack of widely accepted standards for good policy research, which in turn would produce effective policy. That this preference is not indisputable is illustrated by Hayes, who claims that good policy arises not from research but from democratic conflict and consultation, and develops over time.

Improving Governance is a call for better scholarship on policy. By this, the authors mean scholarship that is based on theories of institutional or individual interaction; that operationalizes those theories with carefully defined variables, relationships, and standards of proof; and that contextualizes findings with reference to their limitations. Implicit in this argument is a disciplinary agenda: were all studies to make such elements explicit, it would be possible to create a body of policy knowledge “whose value equals or exceeds the sum of its numerous parts” (p. 15). Their vision is one where researchers would not merely study merit pay for teachers, performance goals for welfare workers, or bonus systems for police officers, but would also frame those studies as attempts to measure the success of incentives at motivating performance. Such researchers would take care to explain how they translated incentive theory into the specifics of the incentive systems they studied, and to consider the limitations of their operationalization along with their findings. As a result, future researchers, whatever their substantive focus, would find it much easier to predict the likelihood of success of incentives (or the conditions under which incentives would likely be successful).

The authors also contend that this kind of policy research is most likely to be useful: that it will give policymakers and administrators valid and general knowledge to guide their work, rather than the hodgepodge of dubious suggestions and case examples that they often receive from academics today. If studies across multiple professions have shown that incentive systems work better than “management by walking around,” for instance, a case study about a particularly effective perambulating manager might not have the impact that it currently does. Similarly, if incentive systems have generally been shown to fail, policymakers would know to avoid them despite their “common sense” appeal.

Having made these points, however, Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill do not put much effort into proving them. Instead, *Improving Governance* is best read as a handbook of exemplary ideas, studies, and approaches. It introduces theories the authors find particularly compelling at the level of public institutions, organizational management, and primary work; explains data sources, methods, and models they find promising; and summarizes numerous studies that are good examples of the research they wish to see. On the one hand, this makes for a fascinating reference; the authors are widely read, and their choices are eclectic and interesting. On the other, it makes for a somewhat odd compendium; one cannot help but wonder what the standards for inclusion, and exclusion, were.

Is the lack of a specific argument for inclusion or exclusion important? If the intent is simply to illustrate, then it is not. But if the intent is to defend a particular set of assertions about policy scholarship and knowledge, then it may be. *Improving Governance’s* assertions about theory-based research and its value for policy are not very controversial if the object is to call for clear definitions and standards of proof. But if the object is to identify theory-based policy research solely with particular kinds of theory, methods, and data—such as public choice theory, hierarchical linear modeling, or administrative data sources—then the argument merits a defense. Similarly, if the argument is that policymakers will get more out of good studies than bad ones, the proposition is self-evident. But if the argument is that policymakers should choose

policy tools based on high average performance as determined by social science research, then the claim is too controversial to rest simply on assertion.

Michael T. Hayes' book, *The Limits of Policy Change: Incrementalism, Worldview, and the Rule of Law*, illustrates why we might not want to take such arguments for granted. Hayes' goal is to promote a renewed appreciation for the merits of incrementalism as a theory of policy change. Incrementalism, he argues, is superior to the alternative, which he terms rationalism: the reliance upon reason and comprehensive analysis to produce policies that fulfill a pre-determined end. While the ends in question—for instance, universal health care, protection of the environment—may be unimpeachable, the desire for change directed by reason alone is likely to encourage the tyranny of experts. By contrast, incrementalism respects the clash of interests, the safeguards of checks and balances, and the simple discovery of solutions through consultation, trial, and error. While rationalist change might seem on its face to be better at righting social inequities, in practice incrementalism is better at respecting democratic values.

Hayes understands that one way to promote a position is to admit its shortcomings. Thus he notes that there are bad reasons as well as good for incremental policy change. Unequal access to power and the political system can create a policy process that is insufficiently conflictual for good policy to result. Such a system may look incremental, in that change seldom occurs; but it does not produce more democratic or more informed policy. Hayes argues, however, that when there is unequal access to power, non-incremental change is as likely to be biased as falsely incremental change. To illustrate this, he examines two policies normally considered non-incremental—the Clean Air Act of 1970 and welfare reform in 1996—as well as one—Clinton's health care reform—in which rationalist change was thwarted. Since advantaged groups triumphed over disadvantaged groups in each of these reforms, rationalism cannot claim an advantage over incrementalism.

This is an important and insightful advance on discussions of incrementalism, particularly so because Hayes also describes different policy processes that correspond to different manifestations of bias in politics. But it leaves a crucial question open: would incrementalism, under a political system that was fairer to the less advantaged, actually produce better results than rationalism? Hayes uses various political theorists to argue that it would, but he brings no empirical evidence to bear. More importantly, he does not develop the arguments of those theorists into a research agenda that could demonstrate their claims. Such an agenda would contrast the extent to which a wide representation of interests, the operation of checks and balances, or the discovery of appropriate solutions in fact characterizes incremental or rationalist reform. It would require operationalization of the type that Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill advocate, as well as a nuanced assessment of the definitions chosen. Hayes' failure to do this limits his persuasiveness for those who do not share his basic values or worldview.

Some may see the lack of a commonly accepted definition of good policy as a weighty problem to overcome for those who study policy. But these books, taken together, suggest that the lack of consensus may be an advantage. Without commonly accepted definitions, policy research requires us to defend both the values behind the assertions we make and the evidence we use in their defense. This may not create consensus, but it can create a rich and multi-faceted discussion.

ANN CHIH LIN is Associate Professor at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan.