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# Carrots, Sticks, and Sermons: The Triad and the Book

*Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation*  
Volume 21, Issue 50, 2025

**JMDE**  
Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation

ISSN 1556-8180  
<http://www.jmde.com>

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**Background:** That evaluation results should come to use is a dogma in the evaluation community. One way of making evaluations useful (better criterion than use) is to construe their evaluands as cases of something more general. One possibility is to focus on the policy-instruments part of the evaluands, in particular their power content.

**Purpose:** This article is about carrots, sticks, and sermons, a general framework (presented in a book by the same name) for evaluating classifying and labeling the policy-instruments part of interventions.

**Setting:** Not applicable.

**Intervention:** Not applicable.

**Research design:** Not applicable.

**Findings:** Unexpectedly, the trifold framework and the book have been quite successful as far as sold copies and citations are concerned.

**Keywords:** *power; policy instruments; economic instruments; informative instruments; regulations; carrots-sticks-and-sermons metaphors.*

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On September 2, 2020, when opening my digital mailbox my eyes fell upon the message “Policy Instruments, 20 years after the Stick, Carrot, and Sermon Typology.” The sender, unknown to me, was Dr. Raul Pacheco-Vega<sup>1</sup>, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Mexico City. Writing from the point of view of environmental policy, his message ran as follows:

In 1998, Evert Vedung posited what became one of the most popular typologies of policy instruments.... [He] argued that we could classify policy instruments along a continuum of an increasing degree of coerciveness, from less coercive (information-based and voluntary) to more coercive (regulatory command-and-control). This framework is cognitively simple as it facilitates classification of each type of instrument along the continuum, and while it defines three major

categories, it also allows for policy mixes.... The Vedung typology gained enormous popularity and remained quite central to the work on environmental policy instruments broadly defined. (Pacheco-Vega, 2020, p. 620)

## Carrots, Sticks, and Sermons – Much Cited

In reading this, it was already clear to me that the *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons* volume and its trifold scheme were remarkably noticed and referenced across Europe and the Atlantic world. Some quick searches today of the Google Scholar citation index (Table 1) show that the attractiveness of the book and the triad is still around and growing:

Table 1. Google Scholar Citations, as of September 23, 2024

Entry expression	Number of citations
Policy instruments carrots sticks and sermons	17,300
Carrots sticks and sermons	17,000
Rist carrots sticks and sermons	16,300
Vedung carrots sticks and sermons	3,000
Bemelmans carrots sticks and sermons	2,750
Vedung carrots sticks	3,140
Vedung Doelen Sermon information programs	139
Lemaire Stick Regulation as a Tool of Government	77
Rist Choosing the Right Policy Instrument at the Right Time	75
Leeuw The Carrot	45
Hudson Contracting-out	4

My conclusion about the popularity of triad is strongly supported also by the Olejniczak et al. contribution to this special edition.

## The Structure of My Contribution

Let me start with an explication of the gist of the trifold scheme, on power as its fundamental basis of division, that its three types are minimally defined, and that two renowned scholars outside the field of evaluation inspired me in this. In practical policy, instruments can be mixed in many

ways; here, vertical, horizontal, and temporal packaging will be covered. The paper will end with Ray Rist’s particular contribution in all this to the field and profession of evaluation.

## The Triadic Scheme: Regulations, Economic Means, and Information

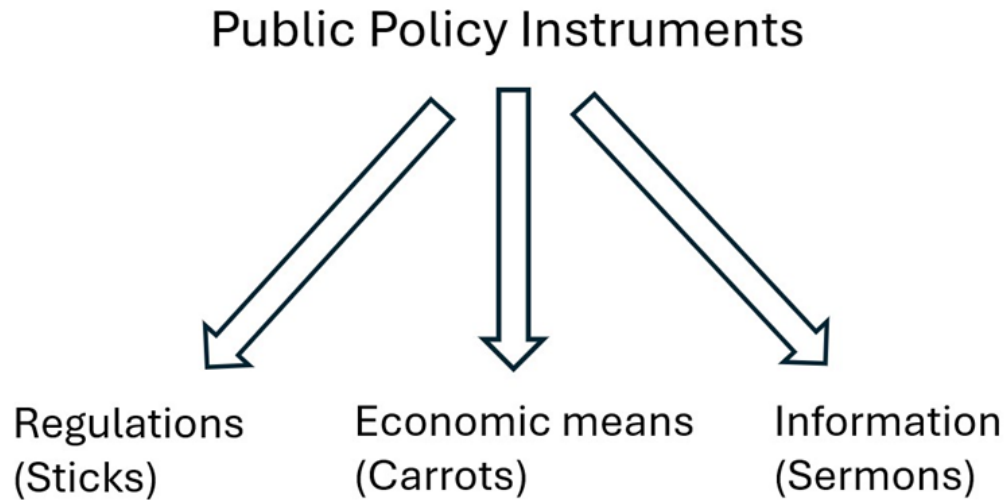
Public policy instruments are a set of techniques by which governmental authorities—or proxies acting on behalf of governmental authorities—wield their

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/author/Pacheco-Vega%2C+Raul>

power in attempting to ensure support and effect or prevent social change. The three fundamental types

of policy instruments may be pictured as in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Threefold Typology of Public Policy Instruments



*Note.* From “Policy Instruments: Typologies and Theories,” by E. Vedung, in *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons: Policy Instruments and Their Evaluation* (p. 30), by M.-L. Bemelmans-Videc, R. C. Rist, & E. Vedung, (Eds.), 1998, Transaction.

Regulations (sticks) are measures adopted by governmental units to influence targets by means of verbally formulated rules which mandate them to act in accordance with what is ordered in these rules. Differently expressed, to mandate is to issue authoritative commands, i.e., formal orders from superiors that their inferiors must obey.

Economic policy instruments (carrots) are measures adopted to make action by targets easier or more difficult by adduction or deprivation of material resources. Economic tools always leave governance subjects with certain leeway within which to choose by themselves whether to take an action or not. Economic incentives / disincentives neither prescribe nor prohibit the actions involved but make them cheaper or more expensive in terms of money, time, efforts, and other valuables for targets to pursue certain actions. That makes them principally different from regulations.

Economic instruments include both non-monetary and monetary material resources. The delivery of free medical services at public hospitals and the provision of free medicines from pharmacies are economic instruments to the same extent as the disbursement of child allowances in cash.

Like regulations, economic instruments contain norms indicating under what circumstances material resources will be adduced to or deprived from the target population. Economic instruments consist of both these norms and the material resources to which the norms refer.

Information, the third type, covers institutionalized attempts at influencing people through the transfer of knowledge, reasoned arguments, persuasion, and norms. The information dispensed may concern the alleged nature of the problem at hand, how people are actually handling the problem, measures that may change the prevailing situation, and reasons why these measures ought to be adopted by the addressees. However, no more than communication of purported knowledge or persuasive reasonings or norms are offered to influence people to do what the government deems desirable.

Information is a catch-all term for all communication campaigns; for the diffusion of printed materials like brochures, pamphlets, booklets, folders, fliers, bulletins, handbills, and posters; for advertising, labeling, audits, inspections, demonstration programs, custom-

made personal advice, training programs, and educational efforts; and for other forms of amassing, packaging, and diffusing of knowledge and recommendations. In addition, messages about what is good or bad, right or wrong, or how they should act and behave are also included in the information category. In other words, informative policy instruments encompass also judgments about which phenomena and measures are good or bad, and recommendations about how citizens should act and behave.

As with the economic tools of statecraft, no government obligation is involved. This absence of coercion also makes information different from regulation, which by definition contains mandatory rules of conduct.

Yet, information is different from economic policy instruments also in the sense that no handing out or taking away of material resources is involved. Governments neither materially reward people who take the action, nor materially deprive people who do not do anything. The only thing offered is data, facts, knowledge, arguments, and moral appeals. So far, information has been regarded as a policy instrument in its own right. Yet, information is special in that it may also function as a *meta-policy instrument*; it may be used to disseminate knowledge of the existence, meaning, and availability of the other three policy instruments, information included. Seriously designed regulations and economic instruments require that intended targets are informed about these instruments' existence and meaning. In addition, information can also be disseminated that there is information (in printed form, for instance) to be required from a government authority. Such information may be called information *on* policy instruments as opposed to information *as* a policy instrument.

### The Triad: Based on Power – Inspired by Sociologist Amitai Etzioni

Two more comments will follow on the demarcations of the three instruments. First, the fundamental dimension underlying the division into sticks, carrots, and sermons is *power*. Power may be regarded as the authoritative force involved in governance efforts. The authoritative force concerns the degree of constraint that governing bodies have invested in their governance attempts. Regulation is thought to be more constraining for the targets than economic means, and economic means more constraining than information.

My source of inspiration for choosing power as fundamentum divisionis was German-born Israeli-

American sociologist Amitai Etzioni and his three kinds of power (1975, p. 5 ff.), which I have clarified and somewhat developed. Later, I also had the pleasure of discussing various power aspects with him personally over the internet.

### The Triad: Minimal Definitions — Inspired by Political Scientist Giovanni Sartori

Second, I have used the technique of minimal definition. I have attempted to keep the definitional properties of the types as few and lean as reasonable by not including, e.g., hypothetical empirical variables on causes and effects of their use by governments. I learnt this technique from the Italian political scientist Giovanni Sartori, whose Committee for Conceptual and Terminological Analysis (COCTA) I was a member of in the 1970s. (Sartori, 1984, p. 14 ff., passim; Sartori, 1976, p. 58 ff.; Vedung, 1982, pp. 89–90, 99–100).

Let us consider the regulations category as an illustration.

1. Regulations are measures adopted by governmental units to influence targets by means of verbally formulated rules which mandate them to act in accordance with what is ordered in these rules.

*Conclusion.* This is a minimal definition of regulations.

2. Regulations are measures adopted by governmental units to influence targets by means of verbally formulated rules, caused by the units' discontent with the targets' obstinate behavior in the past, and which mandate them to act in accordance with what is ordered in these rules and the effects this produces among them as well.

*Conclusion.* This is not a minimal definition of regulations, because an empirical phenomenon (in this case, a cause) is included in the definitional properties.

### Ideal-Type Policy Instruments Packaging

Lecturing on carrots, sticks, and sermons, I have been asked why I did not join organization to the policy instruments in the triad. For instance, Elliott Stern, editor of the international journal *Evaluation*, urged me both publicly and privately to write a piece on this combination.

Actually, a small step along this line was taken already in the Conclusions section of the 1998 volume coauthored by Bemelmans-Videc and me—or, more exactly, in the first section of it (on policy-instruments packaging), written by me (pp. 257–268).

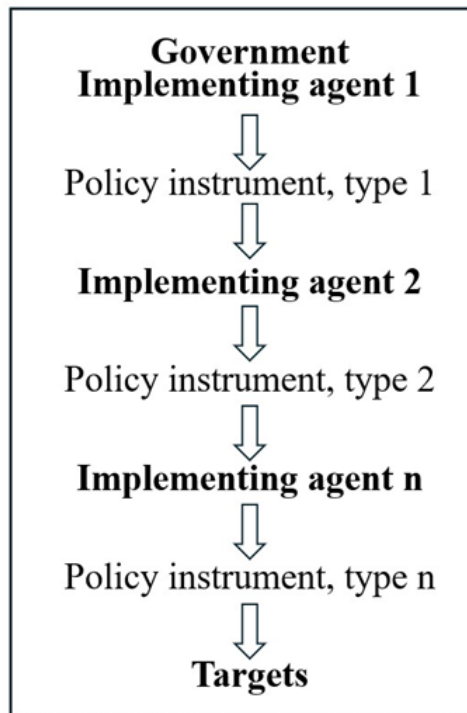
## Vertical Packaging

In vertical packaging, one instrument is directed at the implementation of a second one and the second one at a third, etc. From this top-down perspective, policy instruments are employed by the government toward its own higher-level agencies,

by these agencies toward some intermediary agencies, and by the latter toward the final targets. Figure 2 suggests three vertical levels of implementing organizations, each of them using a different type of policy instrument. Alternatively, it might be two, four, five or six levels, etc., of actors and similar numbers of policy instruments.

It should be stressed, perhaps, that models of this type are intended neither as depictions of empirical realities, nor as normative ideals. They are intended as Weberian ideal types to be employed as heuristic tools of analysis. They might provide theoretical counterpoints to discursive, institutionalized, and other kinds of empirical observations.

Figure 2. Vertical Packaging of Policy Instruments



*Note.* From “Conclusions: Policy Instruments—Types, Packages, Choices, and Evaluation,” by M.-L. Bemelmans-Videc & E. Vedung, in *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons: Policy Instruments and Their Evaluation* (p. 258), by M.-L. Bemelmans-Videc, R. C. Rist, & E. Vedung, (Eds.), 1998, Transaction.

In the book (p. 259 ff.), vertical mixing is illustrated by the case of *mandatory labeling*, provided by Donald Lemaire (1998, pp. 59–76). It shows a regulation–information kind of package. Another more complicated illustration (p. 262) is selected from the DelMarco-Rist chapter (1998, pp. 185–210); it shows a regulation–regulation–economic–economic type of mix.

## Horizontal Packaging

In horizontal packaging, two or more agencies direct policy instruments simultaneously at the same target group and for some common purpose. For instance, by regulation a target group is forced to act in a certain way (stick), but in order to

facilitate its compliance with this regulation the government may also offer financial help (carrot, economic instrument) and advice (sermon, information).

## Chronological Sequencing

Chronological packaging, finally, implies a serial time order in the application of the three basic policy tools. For instance, first information is used, after some time economic instruments are adopted, and finally, after some more time, regulation is institutionalized as a means of last resort.

Bruce Doern and Vincent Wilson have argued that “politicians have a strong tendency to respond to policy issues (any issue) by moving successively from the least coercive governing instrument to the most coercive”: first by the provision of information such as uttering a broad statement of intent, subsequently by the application of selective economic incentives, and lastly by the establishment of regulations (cited in Vedung, 1998, p. 40).

Is this really a “strong tendency” in public policy? I have strong doubts. Yet even though it rarely occurs, the order-of-increasing-constraint idea is interesting. A fictive case of cigarette smoking may illuminate. Information, the least coercive tool, is instituted first, although the introducers know that it will not create satisfactory compliance. After some time, the authorities introduce taxation, an economic instrument, on cigarette purchasing, although they realize it will not eradicate the smoking problem. And after some more time, prohibitions on smoking on certain premises are inaugurated as a last resort. Then, if targets and people in general protest, policy makers may respond that they have tried voluntariness to begin with, then economic instrument of taxation, both to no avail. That’s why they now introduce prohibitions which should evoke legitimation because the time-order is reasonable and acceptable since all other possibilities are applied. Conclusion: policy instruments are introduced not only for *effectiveness* but also for *legitimacy* (see Doelen, 1998).

## Membership of the Rist Working Group and Its Policy Instruments Subgroup

I became a member of the working group in late 1990 or early 1991. It was probably Rolf Sandahl who suggested it to me, since he was already a member of the group, and the other prime suspect, Jan-Eric Furubo, was not. The subgroup on policy

instruments evaluation was founded at the 1991 Bruges meeting where I participated. Already from its start, I was a lively supporter of it. In May 1992, at the sessions in Ottawa, I agreed to be a coeditor of its upcoming publication. Also, there were animated interchanges on the policy instruments paper that I presented; aside from Ray and Marie-Louise, Frans van der Doelen and Frans Leeuw contributed constructive criticisms I noted in my calendar.

The problem of how to fruitfully classify policy instruments (Swedish: *styrmedel*) was a major subject in my research from at least 1980. In my first printed publication, Rolf Sandahl’s upcoming PhD dissertation on policy instruments is included among its references (Vedung, 1982, p. 172), and Jan-Eric Furubo is mentioned in a list of people interviewed (p. 164). A major suggestion among the three of us was a division into administrative (regulative), economic and informational instruments (Sandahl, 1983, and Furubo in the same year in the Energy Savings Commission’s report on informational policy instruments, SOU, 1983, p. 34, 42–45, 6, and 186). The policy-instrument section of my just-mentioned first published report is centered around that triad (1982, 19–22). Later, in my 1985 teachings at Kyung Hee University in Seoul, I divided policy tools into regulatory, economic, and informative types; in 1988 at Kyung Hee and Vienna University, my overheads were changed into the sticks-carrots-and-sermons metaphorical trinity.

I probably brought the sticks-carrots-sermons metaphors with me to the Rist policy instruments subgroup. I am sure that the triad was not suggested by Marie-Louise, because her interest lay with national policy styles. And it did not originate from Ray Rist either; on the contrary, I vividly remember that he was skeptical and found the trinity somewhat lightweight, cheap, even condescending. I protested, of course, and argued my case. I am also sure that the change from sticks / carrots / sermons order into the much more melodic “carrots, sticks and sermons” was not suggested by me. I still recall my total surprise and joy about the change when the whole manuscript for the book came to me for an ultimate check. I suspect that Ray lay behind this elegant improvement. But I have never asked him.

Before that, during my spring 1995 stay at Odense University I worked from early morning till late at night on editing the complete volume. I vividly remember my efforts with locating Donald Lemaire, who at the time had disappeared into the Amazonas, and Jean-Pierre Nioche, who turned out to be unable to participate. The whole manuscript

for the book was sent to Ray Rist and Marie-Louise Bemelmans-Videc, who did the final editing.

### Ray Rist's Contribution in All This

I will end with some thoughts on what Ray has meant for international evaluation and academic policy research by his work on carrots, sticks, and sermons based upon my own overview, supplemented by the Olejniczak, Kupiec & Wojtowicz article in this issue:

- By establishing and leading a subgroup on policy instruments evaluation within his standing working group on evaluation
- By grasping the importance of the triadic scheme and becoming convinced to focus the book on this
- By revising the sticks-carrots-sermons triad into the much more melodious carrots-sticks-and-sermons trinity, and publishing the edited book under the title *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons*
- By disseminating the triad and other contents of the book during his enormous lecturing in all corners of the world
- Thereby, inspiring researchers and evaluators to use the triad in their work
- And finally, by this raising the generality of an impressive amount of both evaluation and research by focusing on a middle-range-theory triadic typology of instruments instead of on very specific and detailed local programs.

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