

Dynamic Transformational Mechanisms in Policy Success and Failure

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Motivation

- Failures get more attention than successes
- ‘Success’ studies focus on conceptualization or assessment
- Yet to deliver a framework to *explain* differential (multidimensional) performance
- No systematic attempt to study the role of social mechanisms in achievement, consolidation, or reproduction of policy success
 - Which is what we propose to do

(Transformational) Mechanisms

- Mechanistic perspective for valid causal inference (hence, this workshop)
- Dynamic perspective necessary for explanation (of policy outcomes)
- *Transformational* mechanisms

Circular Causality

- Complements the advance from linear causal models towards *circular causality* and *causal loop* thinking
- Complexity, interaction

Policy Success

- Performance:
 - Programmatic – purposeful and valued action
 - Process – thoughtful and effective policymaking practices
 - Political – stakeholder and public legitimacy for the policy
- Each dimension of performance unfolds over time
- To be *successful*, a policy's performance (in each dimension) must endure

Dynamic Transformational Mechanisms and Policy Success

- We aim to evaluate the contribution of specific mechanisms to policy success
- 2 preliminary examples
 - Positive feedback
 - Coordination

Example Mechanism: Positive Feedback

- U.S. Social Security Act
 - Bundle of policies to target economic insecurity; esp. pensions and medical care
 - Political success helped by positive feedback
 - Other dimensions of success?

Example Mechanism: Coordination

- International anti-money laundering regime
 - Rules to target corruption, drug trafficking and most recently terrorism
 - Homogenization due to multiple , despite absence of programmatic performance
 - Resulted in coordination, lock-in

		Transformation Mechanism	
		<i>Positive Feedback</i>	<i>Coordination/lock-in</i>
		Policies endure by creating their own constituencies, shifting center of gravity of the policy agenda	Policies produce benefits that increase as others adopt/participate, encouraging further adoption.
Example		The Social Security Act created a political coalition: retired seniors (Campbell 2003).	Gains from convergence in international money laundering regulation (Drezner 2005)
Dimension of Policy Success	Programmatic	Establishment of constituency and implementing institutions generate inertia, increasing the likelihood of continued performance.	Benefits improve over time as stakeholders and actors subsequently adopt the policy.
	Process	Attention and oversight by constituency provides impetus for adequate funding and administrative resources.	Conditional on initial policy design, collaboration can increase participants' willingness to coordinate in policymaking processes.
	Political	Support coalition mobilizes to protect original goals of the policy, and ensures reputational benefits associated with the policy.	Widespread adoption creates a coalition in favor of the status quo, and may legitimize the policy among stakeholders and policy makers.

Conclusion & Future Questions

- Insight from complex causality: interaction among mechanisms explains outcomes
- Preliminary analysis here
- How to expand this initial attempt?
 - More mechanisms
 - Theory families
- (How) can this contribute to design of successful public policy?
 - Does wholesale adoption of the “PMM” & design orientation spell the end of large- N observational (statistical) research designs in public policy?