ERC Advanced Grant 2015
Research Proposal [Part B2]

Success in Public Governance:
Assessing and explaining how public problems
are sometimes addressed remarkably effectively

Section a: State-of-the-art and objectives

A1 Importance of the research topic

Societies can only have a serious shot at thriving when they are governed through public institutions – such as legislatures, governments, bureaucracies, judiciaries, networks, partnerships - that are trustworthy, reliable, impartial, uncorrupted and competent (Rothstein, 2011). For societies to work, their public governance needs to work. However, during the first decade and a half of the 21st century, even the institutions of the stable democracies of Western Europe have been deeply challenged by deep and fast changes in their operating environment, such as globalization, technological innovation, recession and fiscal crisis, new geostrategic turbulence, the internet revolution, and the pervasiveness of 'wicked problems.' There is an urgent need for new guidance on governing today's turbulent network societies: To inspire a next generation of researchers to find out what works under these circumstances and to guide a next generation of public sector innovations to formulate a fitting response to changing times.

However, in the empirical mainstream of public policy and public management studies, the bulk of research effort and journal space is devoted to documenting the unintended consequences, paradoxes, frailties and shortcomings of public planning, programs, projects, bureaucracies and reforms. This focus on failure extends to disciplines such as public administration, political science, and policy analysis, but also environmental science, planning, and urban studies. Over the last half century, this has yielded a rich body of knowledge about what does *not* work.

Among that yield are anatomies, typologies, theories and comparative case studies of: gaps between policy as planned at the center and its implementation and impact on the ground (Presmann and Wildavsky, 1973), unintended consequences (Margetts et a, 2011), planning disasters (Hall, 1982), government deficiencies (Hanusch, 1983) and blunders (Crewe and King 2013), bureaucratic failures (Peirce, 1981), policy pathologies (Hogwood and Peters, 1985) and fiascos (Bovens and 't Hart, 1996; Gray and 't Hart, 1998; Shuck, 2015; Opperman and Spencer, forthcoming), escalation of public megaprojects (Flyvbjerg et al, 2003), organizational catastrophes (Vaughan, 1996; Anheier, 1999), public procurement and government IT disasters (Gauld and Goldfinch, 2012), systemic corruption (Rose-Ackerman, 1999, Rothstein, 2011, Charron et al, 2013), administrative 'evil' (Adams and Balfour, 1998), even 'state crimes against democracy' (DeHaven Smith and Witt, 2011).

Studying the nature, forms and causes of the 'dark side' of government and governance does yield important insights. It helps us to critically evaluate the claims of competence and integrity that governments and other public elites routinely make to elicit public support. And it helps to identify, prevent or mitigate errors and flaws in the design and management of public institutions and governance processes and accountability mechanisms. In short: knowledge about what does not work in public governance can inform policy actors within and beyond government about mistakes to avoid.

However, achieving sustained high performance and legitimacy in public governance should entail more than only striving not to fail, even though disciplined attention to the possibility of failure is one critical component of it (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). The quest for good public governance should take serious notice of the evidence-based litany of possible failures, but should also be informed by the systematic study of what people see as desirable governance practices, and how these practices can be achieved and sustained. In short, we need to develop a systematic and scientific approach to study the definition, assessment and attainment of governance success.

A2 Objectives and research questions

The central aim of the proposed research program is to conceptualize, identify and explain successful public governance. It examines how in a world of complexity, conflicting values and interests, and human and institutional imperfection, certain public governance institutions are nevertheless deemed remarkably successful. Specifically, we have the ambition to:

- Move beyond simplistic 'best-practice' and 'performance indicators' snapshot accounts of successful governance by looking at performance, legitimacy and endurance of policies, agencies and networks
- Develop a systematic understanding of the social mechanisms by which governance success is being assessed and create the methodological tools to capture these mechanisms
- Use these insights to theorize about metagovernance principles and practices that underpin successful governance in a turbulent network society
- Inspire other researchers to incorporate the scientific study of success in their work

These objectives have been translated into five interrelated research questions:

1. How is success in public governance defined and assessed by those who engage in it and those who observe and experience it?

2. How and why are public policies and public reforms enduringly successful?

3. How and why are public organizations enduringly successful?

4. How and why are interactive, collaborative governance initiatives enduringly successful?

5. How do the lessons from these successful policies, organizations and networks jointly contribute towards understanding the principles of a theory for public governance success?

The fruits of this inquiry will increase our insight into the pivotal yet ill-understood phenomenon of governance that 'works'. They will challenge the academic study of public governance to reconsider its traditional slant towards identifying and explaining governance failures, and offer a set of theoretical tools, research methods and empirical findings for a next generation of researchers to work with.

A3 Previous research

We are not altogether the first scholars to go down the path of studying success. There exists a considerable array of prescriptive and self-help books designed for public sector managers and policy makers, particularly in the United States (Levin and Sanger, 1994; Morse, 2014). Osborne and Gaebler's now classic *Reinventing Government* (1992) has been a trail-blazer of this genre, galvanizing an already emergent world-wide New Public Management paradigm that shaped many of today's public governance practices including privatization, purchaser-provider splits, performance measurement, and 'lean' public services (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Some of these clarion calls are thoughtful and intuitively plausible. But their theoretical and empirical grounding is limited. They often 'jump' to prescription on the basis of personal experience, deductive reasoning, or incidental case narratives. Moreover, many such studies import research findings or how-to recipes gleaned from the business sector (Weeks and Bruns, 2005; De Waal, 2010; cf Collins, 2005) without examining the distinctive context of the public sector.

Such studies cannot substitute for systematic, comparative, empirical research specifically designed for and conducted within public sector contexts. Take for example the issue of assessing success. In the complex, necessarily political context of public governance choosing criteria and setting standards for evaluation is often considerably more challenging than in most corporate or non-profit settings (see Gill and Meier, 2001; Radin, 2006). What various stakeholders, professionals and publics choose to call success is likely to differ depending on their positions, values and interests. How then can we develop meaningful methods for distinguishing between instances of successful and less successful governance? Assuming this can be achieved, the explanatory question becomes to what extent instances of successful public governance are achieved through deliberate 'agency' (e.g. in institutional design, leadership and management), or through less amenable contextual and situational factors.

There is some systematic research in the area to build upon, and this will be done explicitly in the descriptions of the various proposed projects presented below. The proposed research program as a whole will apply, adapt, refine, extend and integrate concepts, propositions and research methods from three

emerging lines of research on success in public governance success. Hitherto, these three bodies of knowledge have developed completely separately. This proposed research program will compare, contrast and integrate them for the first time.

The first of these lines of inquiry comprises conceptual and comparative studies of *public policy success* (Bovens et al, 2001; Patashnik, 2008; McConnell, 2010). These studies suggest that achieving policy success entails two major tasks. One entails craftwork: devising, adopting, and implementing programs and reforms that have a meaningful impact on the public problems and opportunities they were called into being to help tackle. The other entails political work: forming and maintaining coalitions of actors that have a stake in and persuasively propagate these programs. Success needs to be subjectively experienced and actively communicated, or else it will go unnoticed or underappreciated. At the moment, this strand is quite small and covers limited and rapidly ageing empirical ground. The proposed program empirically seeks to reinvigorate it (see Projects 2a and 2b described below).

The second strand of previous research examines *high-performing, and highly reputed public agencies* (Boin, 2001; Wright Muldrow et al, 2002; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007; Goodsell, 2011; O'Neill and Krane, 2012; Arild and Maor, 2015). Successful public organizations are designed, elaborated and adapted in such a way as to deliver effectively and efficiently on their missions and gain public legitimacy for the manner in which they do so. Work in this vein comprises studies of big service delivery agencies but also public regulators or even policy departments (Carpenter, 2001, 2010). Analytically and methodologically, this work eschews the kind of extensive, output/outcome oriented, measurement-focused research that dominates the currently popular ratings and rankings exercises on e.g. schools, universities, hospitals and a host of other public sector agencies, but which tells us little about the 'black box' of the organizational processes (decision making, culture, communication etc.) produce these outputs and outcomes. Though focused on explaining different types of indicators of success – e.g. autonomy, public reputation, safety record – these studies have in common that they tend to use intensive research strategies that generate 'thick descriptions' of organizational process and deliver much better insight into the craftwork of agency design, leadership and management. The proposed program seeks to build on these lessons, but broaden the perspective to learn more about agency success within the context of networks (see Project 3 described below).

The third strand is in the relatively young but fast-growing body of research on *networks and other non-hierarchical modes* of tackling public problems. In networks and partnerships 'no one' is exclusively in charge' (Bryson and Crosby, 2005). When formal authority and needed resources to tackle pressing public problems are distributed among a wide array of actors inside and/or outside government, the key governance challenge become to design and manage institutions and processes in which these actors are moved to engage actively and constructively to articulate common purposes, exchange information, align their actions and pool resources (Ostrom, 1990; Torfing et al, 2012). Within this broad field, there have more recently been a series of studies that aim to both assess and explain successful interactive, collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008, 2012; Agranoff, 2008, 2011; Torfing et al, 2012; Dickinson and Sullivan, 2012)). This research shows that achieving results in shared power settings requires a set of professional competencies and institutional practices that is quite different from those which are generally associated with success in conventional, top-down, government-centric forms of governance (Rhodes, 2002, 2007; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Teisman et al, 2009; Sorensen and Torfing, 2009; Williams, 2012; Jacobson et al, 2015). The proposed program seeks to identify and systematize these competences (see Project 4 described below).

A key innovative feature of this proposal is that it combines these approaches. An important key driver of our research program is to examine whether despite the different nature and context of each of the three types of public governance challenges discerned above, there are commonalities of context, design, leadership and management that produce success in each. Therefore, we will start a joint project systematizing and exchanging the currently available insights from all these strands of research (Project 1) and finish with another joint project to bring together our own findings and theorize about the joint principles of successful (meta-)governance (Project 5). Similarly, we will develop new methodological tools to assess the social mechanisms of the judgement of success through group deliberation in Project 1 (see description below), which we will then apply in Project 2-4 and evaluate in Project 5. Regardless of their specific research project within the larger program, all members of the research team will digest, discuss, critique and draw from this multidisciplinary body of knowledge.

A4 Theoretical approach

Four theoretical suppositions underpin this proposal. The *first supposition* is that the currently dominant performance measurement, 'league table' approach to evaluating governance relies on rather 'thin' conceptions of performance and legitimacy. These need to be complemented and contrasted with the findings of studies that employ methods of assessment that are able to tap into the much 'thicker', contingent and constructed ways in which people form judgments about governance arrangements such as policies, agencies, or networks (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006, 2010).

The *second supposition* is about the dimensions on which people assess the success or otherwise of public governance arrangements. We postulate that success requires a two-dimensional assessment: (a) the instrumental dimension of performance - delivering smart processes and outcomes that dominant coalitions and/or democratic accountability forums regard as desirable; (b) the affective dimension of legitimacy – being seen to deliver desirable outcomes through institutions that are valued and practices that are considered appropriate (March and Olsen, 1989). The relation between these two dimensions of success is not straightforward. There can be a-symmetries and changes over time. Moreover, there is no shared normative (and informational) basis upon which different actors in governance processes assess their performance, legitimacy and endurance (Bovens et al, 2001). Many factors potentially influence the beliefs and practices through which people form judgments about governance. Figure 1 combines these two different dimensions of success.

Figure 1. *Assessing the performance and legitimacy of policies, organizations and networks*

The *third supposition* is that the success or otherwise of governance arrangements should be understood not as a snapshot but as a film. The performance and legitimacy of a policy, organization or network are to be assessed in terms of how they endure over time. Late 20th century popular studies of corporate and governmental successes that generated much of the drive for e.g. New Public Management rested upon case studies of organizations and programs that had the character of snap shots. Later it transpired that many of these success cases had a very limited shelf life, and thus formed a fickle basis for theory-building. We need methodologies to assess and explain success that take into account the notion of endurance (e.g. in terms of robustness, resilience, adaptive capacity).

The *fourth supposition* is that successful 21st century governance rests to an important degree on astute *meta*governance: the purposeful design and management of governance arrangements. Studying metagovernance of successful policymaking processes, public agencies and collaborative networks comparatively and over time can provide us with insight in underlying principles of institutional design and process management across the three different governance challenges (Kooiman, 2003; Sorensen and Torfing, 2009).

Combined, these suppositions inform the heuristic conceptual model that underpins the proposed research, depicted in Figure 2. The three different forms of public governance (policies, agencies, networks) here get a similar position in the model. Though we recognize their differences and potential interrelationships, we do propose that public understandings of the performance and legitimacy of policies, agencies, and networks are produced through similar contextual factors and social mechanisms.
  • *Governance challenges and governance contexts* (e.g. societal upheaval, fiscal constraints, institutional features, level of support for office-holders, etc.) form the starting point for policies, agencies and networks alike

- *Metagovernance practices* (e.g. the institutional design, leadership and management institutions by coalitions of responsible stakeholders) form the conditions shaping the governance response to the challenges and contexts by policies, agencies, and networks
- *Governance processes and outputs* constitute the empirically observable or logically attributable effects of governance institutions on individual and collective outcomes
- *Socio-political construction over time of performance and legitimacy* is the continuous assessment by public, political, and professional communities, shaped by the judgements pronounced by political, legal, and professional accountability forums (such as parliaments, courts, international organizations, watchdog agencies), as well as the narratives produced by key actors in and around the relevant governance institution (e.g. in self-assessments, media framing, informal talk)
- *Governance success* is the resulting assessment of performance and legitimacy enduring over time

Figure 2. *Conceptual model for assessing and explaining governance success*
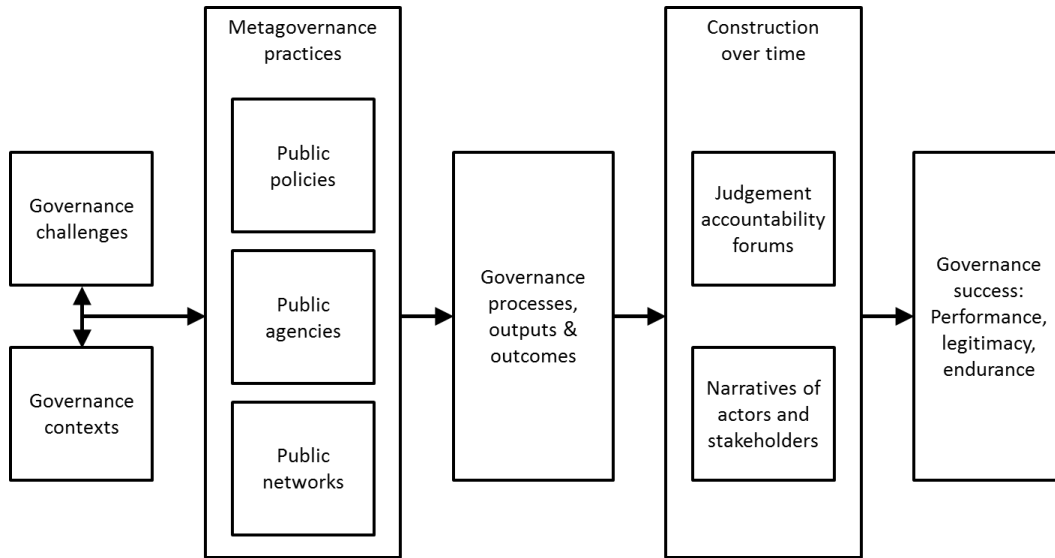
Section b: Methodology

B1 Design and methods of the projects

Figure 3 belowdepicts the overall design of the program. It consists of five projects. Project 1 will set the stage conceptually and will develop new methodological tools which can be used in further projects. Projects 2, 3 and 4 examine how success is assessed and how it can be explained with regard to different settings of governance: public policies/programs, public agencies, public networks. Project 5 compares and integrates the findings from the empirical projects, articulating theoretical and programmatic inferences in light of the agenda set in project 1. There is purposefully an overlap between the timespan of the different projects, to foster synergy and enable adjustment of activities where necessary.

Figure 3. *An overview of the research program*
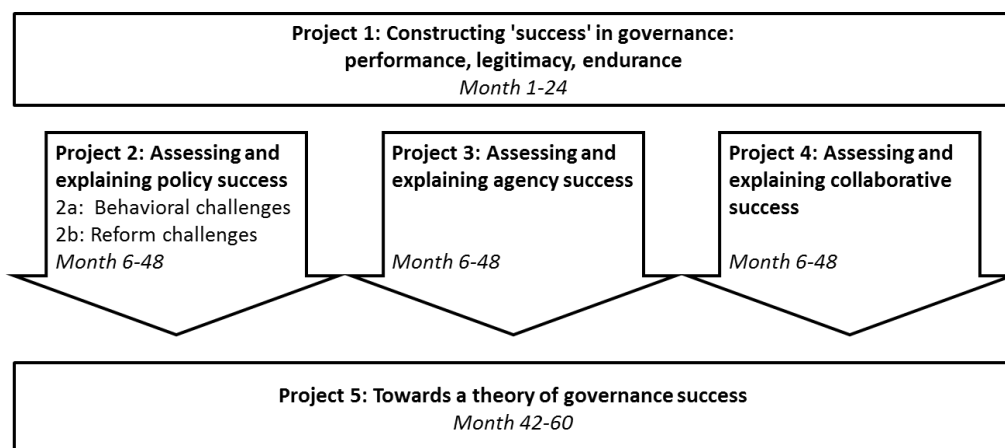
Project 1 Constructing 'success' in governance: performance, legitimacy, endurance (Month 1-24)
This project provides both the theoretical foundation for the research program as a whole, as well as an innovative methodology for assessing different types of governance arrangements. It comprises two components: (a) Collating and comparing existing theory and research of (good) governance and of policy, organizational and collaborative success to create a common footing for the research program as a whole. (b) Developing methodological tools to equip the subsequent projects to recognize and assess enduring success. Especially this methodological development in Project 1 will be helpful to other public administration research by expanding the current toolbox for assessing and understanding success.

Firstly, we will expand the horizon of the frames currently available for assessing success. We will translate definitions of success oriented on single organizations in government to concepts capturing the success of policies, agencies and collaboration as part of interconnected governance arrangements (Darin, 2006; Talbot, 2008). Furthermore, we will expand the toolset by intertwining the assessment of performance *and* legitimacy *and* endurance. The current tools are usually focused on just one of these dimensions, resulting in a rather 'thin' measurement for success (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006; 2010). To be able to measure a policy, agency or collaboration along these three dimensions, we will draw on the work of consilience to combine the different forms of data and information (King, 2011).

Secondly, we will develop new tools to capture the type of mechanisms we expect to be driving successful governance. We suspect that success cannot be reduced to an easy formula where "more X equals more Y". Instead, we anticipate that success will depend on the joint occurrence of specific conditions -leadership, information-sharing, public value orientation- and that success can be achieved through different configurations of these conditions (Kooiman, 2003; Sorensen and Torfing, 2009). Our methodology so relates to the work on fuzzy sets, but will have to advance the accompanying methodologies to capture performance and legitimacy enduring over time (Ragin, 2000). When analyzing these mechanisms, we also strive to extract general principles from specific practices in a well-structured analytical manner. We do not expect to find practices which can be copy-pasted across governance settings, we have to dig dipper to find the underlying principles which contribute to a theory of governance success (Hartley and Benington, 2006). However, we will have to formulate a structured process to extract these principles in a scientific manner.

Finally, and most excitingly in my view, we will develop new tools ourselves by learning how to trace the social construction of performance and legitimacy by communities by public, political, or professional communities. We pose that group dynamics and narratives play a large role when formulating the judgement on the success of a policy, agency, or collaboration. Understanding these social mechanisms requires insights in both group dynamics and psychology, drawing on my expertise in political psychology and elite interactions. We will conduct vignette experiments and focus group discussions among panels of citizens, public policy professionals and academic experts to examine their beliefs about what constitutes success in governance and how it can be achieved. Controlling for social background factors, it will examine in detail the effects of framing and the influence of group deliberation.

Team: Joint start with 0.5 PI, 0.6 Postdoc1, 0.8 Postdoc2, finishing with 0.8 Postdoc2

Project 2a Assessing and explaining policy success: Behavioral change challenges (Month 6-48)
This study focuses on general interest public policies (and programs) that aim at inducing behavioral change in mass populations for collective benefit. Specifically, it compares drink-driving and climate-adaptation programs in the Netherlands and Great Britain over a fifteen year period. The cases are situated in two different policy domains, with different policy traditions, different configurations of organized interests, different knowledge bases and intervention repertoires. Both involve worthy but complex and contestable ambitions to change citizen behaviour for the benefit of society as a whole. In both domains, governments have over time used different policy instruments to induce desired behaviours, including regulation, subsidies, public information campaigns and various forms of 'nudging'. The two case domains are situated in two different policy sectors, with different policy traditions, different configurations of organized interests, different knowledge bases and intervention repertoires.

Examining both policy endeavours in two countries allows us to partly control for and partly gauge the impact of jurisdictions within which each of the two policies will be studied have been selected to examine the potential impact of institutional factors, e.g., the Netherlands as a consensual polity with a Continental/Germanic administrative tradition and a proactive/consensual policy style versus Great Britain as

a majoritarian polity with an Anglo-American administrative tradition and a more reactive/adversarial policy style Howlett, 2002; Painter and Peters, 2010). Studying policy performance and reputation in both sectors across a fifteen-year time span generates insight into the degree of stability and change in policies, programs and their success over time (i.e. endurance).

Methodologically, to *assess* policy outcomes (in terms of performance, legitimacy and endurance), this study replicates the programmatic and political modes of outcome assessment as developed by Bovens et al (2001) in their comparative assessment of 24 cases (4 types of policy challenges in 6 countries each), as amended by McConnell (2010) specifically for the study of policy success. McConnell has conceptualised four levels of success and specified indicators, allowing the analyst to move beyond simple success-failure dichotomies. To *explain* the observed dynamics of program success, the project tests three hypotheses about the governance of successful attitude/behavioral change programs, building upon the findings of Bovens et al:
  - Creating and sustaining inclusive policy arenas: open, pluralistic policy arenas characterized by institutionalized participation of a broad range of stakeholders are more likely to produce governance success than closed, government-centric policy arenas;
  - Promoting a consultative style of policy design: open policy design processes that draw on dispersed expertise and are focused on the development of shared understandings and shared norms are more likely to produce governance success than top-down styles of 'deciding and imposing';
  - Versatile implementation and co-production: implementation strategies that entail purposeful combinations of different policy instruments and that draw in stakeholders and citizens as co-producers of public value are more likely to produce governance success than programs that rely on a narrow bandwidth of policy instruments and that are delivered through unilateral government initiatives

Data will be obtained from public sources, archives and semi-structured interviews. Focused comparison will be used to structure the data-gathering and policy process descriptions. The propositions will be operationalised and tested through fuzzy set QCA methodology (Ragin 2000; Blatter and Haverland, 2012).

Team: Full-time PhD-student for entire project, supervised by PI and Postdoc1

Project 2b Assessing and explaining policy success: Reform challenges (month 6-48)
Governments are continuously exhorted by observers, watchdogs and international agencies to 'reform' – open up their markets, break up public monopolies, modernize their administrative machineries, democratize their decision-making. Getting path-breaking, non-incremental reforms across the political finish line is an often daunting task. Equally daunting is the challenge to get these reforms to deliver on their promises once they are implemented. The literature is replete with studies of reform paradoxes, surprises, pitfalls and unintended consequences (Margetts et al, 2011; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). The project focuses on explaining the difference between major general interest public policy reforms that endure and become institutionalized after their initial adoption, and those that are reversed, watered-down or otherwise rendered ineffectual. This study focuses on policy endurance as measure of governance of success dependent variable, treating (aspects of) performance and reputation as potential independent variables. Specifically, it adapts to a European setting the path-breaking U.S.-based study on the sustainability of public policy reforms by Patashnik (2008).

Patashnik (2008) studied the context, content and evolution of seven so-called general-interest reforms in the U.S., i.e. 'conscious, non-incremental shift in a preexisting line of policymaking intended to produce general benefits' (Patashnik, 2008: 16). Cases studied included airline deregulation, procurement reform, acid rain emissions trading and tax reform. Focusing on the post-adoption evolution of such reforms to assess their sustainability over time, he found four patterns of reform evolution: reversal (reforms are rolled back by new government), erosion (reforms are amended or rendered impactless), entrenchment (reforms are largely maintained but remain contested, require active defending and never reach taken for granted status) and reconfiguration (reforms are institutionalized into the structure and culture of the policy sector, creating a new path dependency). The key metagovernance principles adapted from Patashnik's explanatory account that will be tested in this project entail: (a) creating an integrated, tightly coupled package of interventions; (b) dismantling existing institutional structures and erecting new ones; (c) transforming the group identities, incentives, clientele relationships and coalitional alignments of the pre-existing field interest groups; (d) inducing actors in the sector to make extensive physical or financial investments connected to the maintenance of the reform.

Methodologically, the project adopts a controlled comparison between enduring and less sustained reforms to gain a more precise insight into the social mechanisms that account for different levels of policy endurance. Cases will be selected from a purpose-built inventory of general interest policy reforms adopted in the Netherlands 1980-2000 period in four policy domains: health, housing, education, and criminal justice. The inventory will be compiled using content analysis of the annual budget statements and parliamentary debates for each of the four policy sectors. The inventory of reforms will be submitted to four panels composed of sectorial experts. Using Delphi technique, the most pertinent cases for further analysis will be selected. For each reform case in the inventory its longevity through to 2015 will be *assessed* using Patashnik's four-fold outcome typology. Subsequently pair-wise comparisons will be constructed between high and low endurance/success cases in each of the four policy sectors. For each of the selected case a descriptive process narrative will be constructed on the basis of public source documents and semi-structured interviews with policymakers, interest-groups and stakeholders. The four *explanatory* hypotheses will be operationalised and tested using fuzzy set QCA methodology (Ragin 2000; Blatter and Haverland, 2012).

Team: Full-time PhD-student for entire project, supervised by PI and Postdoc1

Project 3 Assessing and explaining agency success (month 6-48)
In the ideal world, public agencies are effective tools of government contributing to the public good and are viewed as such by their key stakeholders and the general public alike. When these two happy circumstances coincide, organizations become highly reputed; they become institutionalized, 'infused with value beyond the requirements of the task at hand' (Selznick, 1957: 17). They perform well, are seen to be performing well, and are therefore more likely to be resilient in the face of turbulence and adversity. In the real world, public agency success is highly variable. Why is it that some public agencies are so well-reputed, enjoying high degrees of trust, autonomy and stability in their governance, whereas others – even in similar settings and circumstances – fare so much less well? How are these organizations governed (designed, lead and managed)? Project 3 investigates these questions, creatively combining three hitherto distinct but analytically complementary frameworks of agency success offered by Goodsell (2011), Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) and Boin and Christensen (2008).

Analytically, project 3 integrates three landmark approaches to understanding agency success. Firstly, Goodsell (2011)'s in-depth study of six highly reputed U.S. government agencies, inducing a matrix of shared organizational attributes that allowed these organizations to develop strongly mission-driven cultures and practices, and thus to create and sustain virtuous cycles of performance and reputation. Secondly, research on so-called high-reliability organizations (HRO's): agencies that demonstrably excel at working safely in potentially lethal high-risk settings by embedding practices of mindful attention and improvisational capacity into their cultures (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). Like the organizations studied by Goodsell, HRO's are strongly focused on what is needed to accomplish their missions. They are attuned to recognizing potential mission-critical dangers, however small and obscure. They are agile and adaptive when it comes to nipping emerging disturbances in the bud. They are resilient in 'bouncing back' from adversity. HRO's also tend to have strong reputations and manage to sustain the kind of virtuous circle described above (O'Neill and Krane, 2012). Thirdly, project 3 draws on research on the role of institutional leadership in creating and protecting organizational systems and cultures that produces virtuous cycles of performance and reputation (Selznick, 1957; Terry, 1995; Boin, 2001; Boin et al, 2010). It surmises that effective institution-building leadership: (a) facilitates trial-and-error processes in the pursuit of effective practices; (b) closely monitors the process by which norms supporting these effective practice emerge; (c) ensures these norms become embedded within the organization; (d) continuously adapts the organization in view of changes in its operational and authorizing environments without compromising its core mission and identity.

Methodologically, the project comprises five 'up-close' examinations of four successful public agencies. Case selection will be grounded on assessments of agency success based on information/judgments obtained from publicly available rankings (e.g. shortlists for the Europe-wide 'public organization of the year' award inaugurated in 2015), oversight bodies, and expert informants. Over a 5-year period, archival research and observational fieldwork will be conducted in each organization. Extensive fieldwork notes will be made and qualitative content analysis of archival materials will be performed to produce 'thick descriptions' of organizational structures and processes and the meanings accorded to them by internal and external stakeholders. Interpretive analysis will be performed using the conceptual frameworks presented by the three research traditions presented above as sources of sensitizing concepts (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006). All three lines of research upon which this project builds are rooted in similar methodology. The PI has prior experience ethnographic fieldwork in public agencies ('t Hart, 2007) and enjoys high-level access in the

Dutch, Australian and Swedish public services through a distinguished record of executive education, training and consulting engagements.

Team: 0.5 PI, supported in fieldwork by 0.8 Postdoc2

Project 4 Assessing and explaining successful collaborative governance (month 6-48)
This project studies successful collaborative governance (Torfing et al, 2012), which in the literature has also been referred to as just 'governance' (Rhodes, 1997), network management (Kickert et al, 1997; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004) or collaborative public management (Agranoff, 2011). Collaborative governance has become a focal point of scholarly research during the last two decades. Its current prominence in practice is rooted in two interrelated phenomena: (a) the sheer complexity and multi-faceted nature of many social problems and public policy endeavours, such as obesity, domestic violence, climate change, urban regeneration, or crime prevention; (b) the consequent interdependence that exists between actors both within and outside the state sector that are involved in tackling these challenges.

Networks have great potential to create public value in relation to complex governance challenges ('wicked problems'), but to properly assess that value their own complexity should be taken into account (Dickinson and Sullivan, 2014), including the potentially debilitating micro-politics that may beset them (Jacobs, 2010). Careful institutional design, leadership and management of networks is necessary to make them work. Research suggests that mindful regulation of participation; shared 'rules of the game' of joint information-sharing and decision making; and trust among participants as well as in the process of collaboration itself are key factors in generating virtuous cycles of collaboration (Williams, 2012). In practice it can be difficult to secure robust participant commitment as well as top-level (senior executive and political) support for collaborative efforts. For that reason, many collaborative networks are fleeting: effective institutionalization of collaborations so that become enduring has proven elusive in many instances. Building upon these existing research findings, the central question of project 4 is why only some collaborative public problem solving networks succeed in both achieving and sustaining strong robust support among participants, authorizing politicians and external stakeholders alike.

Methodologically, the project entails a comparative examination of twelve collaborative initiatives in a nested design: six whole-of-government networks (i.e. interdepartmental and/or intergovernmental) and six whole-of-society (i.e. government, civil society and/or business sector representatives interacting) networks. Each subset will be divided equally between urban/regional development and youth/family policy domains, allowing some control of contextual factors. To *assess* collaborative performance, we apply Torfing et al's (2012) evaluation framework, which asserts that an effective collaborative governance process should: (a) provide enhanced shared understanding of policy problems and opportunities at hand; (b) generate proactive, innovative yet feasible options for action; (c) enable the making of joint decisions that go beyond the lowest common denominator; (d) ensure smooth policy implementation; (e) enable a flexible adjustment of policies and services; (f) improve the conditions for future interaction. To assess network reputation/legitimacy, we will administer surveys and conduct semi-structured interviews among participants, senior executive/politicans and external stakeholders annually for three years (see Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Torfing et al, 2012).

To ascertain network endurance, we track the survival rate of networks that began less than three years before the start of the field study. Given the 7-year scrutiny period, it is reasonable to expect variability in endurance among the n=12 population of interactive/collaborative initiatives. Finally, to *explain* differential levels of support and endurance of collaborative networks, propositions will be drawn from three key (and overlapping) integrative models of collaborative (meta)governance presented by Ansell and Gash (2008), Torfing et al (2012) and Dickinson and Sullivan (2014). The requisite case data will be collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews, and will be analysed using fuzzy set QCA methodology (Ragin, 2000; Blatter and Haverland 2012).

Team: 0.6 Postdoc1 throughout project

Project 5 Towards a theory of metagovernance success (month 42-60)
The final project synthesizes the results of studies 1-4, exposes them to both academic and practitioner vetting and discussion through a series of workshops, and extracts any underlying principles and techniques of metagovernance that are demonstrably at work across the various governance arrangements studied in projects 2-4. Project 5 will entail: (a) Three focus groups with public policy practitioners presenting the three studies' key findings and inviting feedback on how and where they can inspire reflection and learning within and outside government; (b) Consultation of an academic reference group consisting of leading experts in the public governance field on the implications of the research findings for a proposed normative theory of metagovernance; (c) Publishing a synthetic academic monograph and various on-line, wide circulation,

practitioner-oriented essays and blogs that return to the program's key puzzle and present the program's findings and lessons.

Team: First months with entire team to integrate findings, last months reserved for PI, Postdoc1, Postdoc2
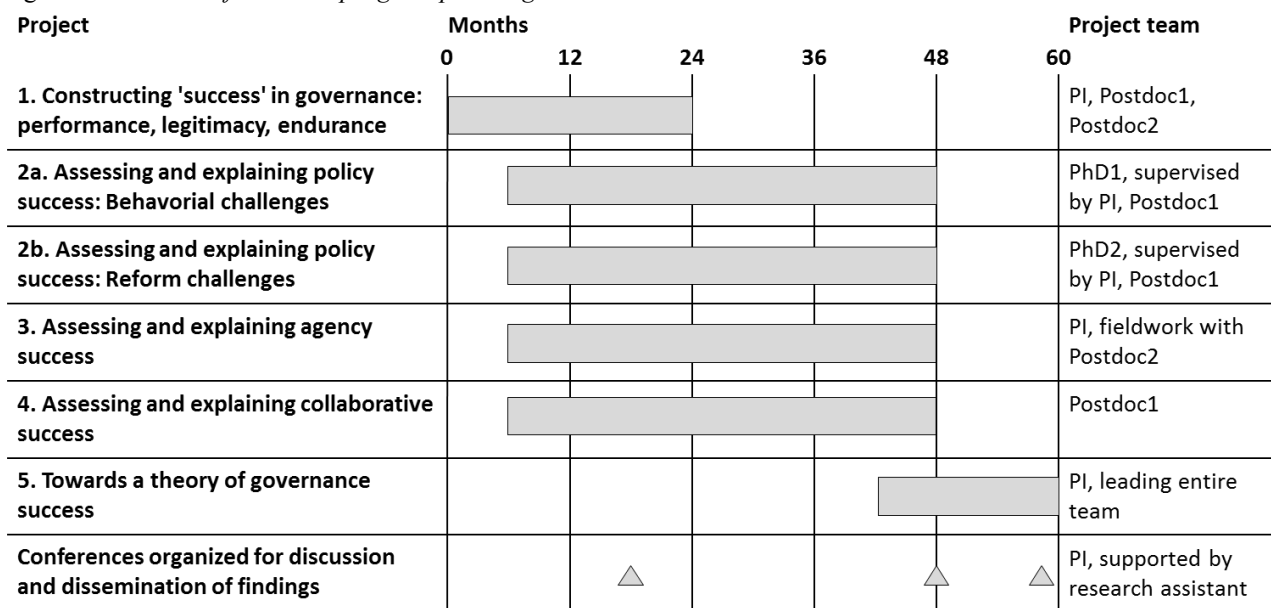
B2 Team composition and program planning
The research team consists of the PI, two postdocs, and two PhD-students. The PI will direct the program as a whole and take responsibility for all its projects. Specifically, he will lead the scene-setting project 1; supervise the projects 2a, 2b and 4; conduct project 3; and lead the integrative project 5.

The project will comprise 60 months. From month 0 to 6, the PI, Postdoc 1, and Postdoc2 will start with the scene-setting project 1. After month 6, with the conceptual groundwork prepared in the first months, Postdoc2 will continue with the methodological work. PhD students 1 and 2 then join to start their research projects on policies, while the PI and Postdoc2 start their respective projects on agency and collaborations.

Throughout the project, the PI and Postdoc1 will supervise the PhD students to support them along the way and to integrate their different research results. Postdoc2 will provide all the research projects with methodological support based on the experiments dissecting the social construction of success. The entire research team will also meet once a fortnight to ensure optimal exchange and collaboration. To test the findings collected and spread the tools for systematically studying success, the team will organize three conferences for leading international researchers at different stages in the research program.

Figure 4. *Overview of research program planning*

Project	Months						Project team
	0	12	24	36	48	60	
1. Constructing 'success' in governance: performance, legitimacy, endurance							PI, Postdoc1, Postdoc2
2a. Assessing and explaining policy success: Behavorial challenges							PhD1, supervised by PI, Postdoc1
2b. Assessing and explaining policy success: Reform challenges							PhD2, supervised by PI, Postdoc1
3. Assessing and explaining agency success							PI, fieldwork with Postdoc2
4. Assessing and explaining collaborative success							Postdoc1
5. Towards a theory of governance success							PI, leading entire team
Conferences organized for discussion and dissemination of findings							PI, supported by research assistant

B3 Impact on the scientific community
First and foremost, the academic community will benefit from our results. We will move the discussion on outcomes and success beyond simplistic 'best-practice' and 'performance indicators' snapshot accounts of successful governance, by looking at performance, legitimacy and endurance. This program will show how these different dimensions of success can be operationalized, translated to different types of governance arrangements, and how they relate with one and another as success grows or wanes.

We will provide researchers with a systematic understanding of the social mechanisms by which governance success is being assessed and the methodological tools to capture these mechanisms. The program will develop, test, and apply new instruments for tracing the social construction of performance and legitimacy by public, political, and professional communities. Specifically, further strengthening the link between public administration and psychology, these tools will help scientists to conduct group experiments and map the influence of group deliberation on the framing of governance success.

The program will provide the discipline with the foundations of a theory about metagovernance principles and practices that underpin governance success. We will synthesize existing theories and generate new

insights based on comparing insights from three stands of public management research that are not normally combined. These joint foundations should serve as a stepping stone for new researchers on governance success, if not as a focal point in a collective debate the discipline should have on how public institutions can successfully respond to the challenge of a turbulent society.

Ultimately, the ambition is to inspire other researchers to take up the systematic study of success. They may not take the same approach or arrive at the same conclusion, but the discipline of public management would be theoretically reinvigorated and practically much more relevant if we were to understand the roots of governance success just as much as the causes of its failure. Turning the discipline into a new direction is a longshot, but I do believe that it is the duty of an established scholar to open up new lines of inquiry even if other researchers are hesitant at first.

We will reach the researchers within the discipline through (a) dedicated workshops and a plenary research conference to be co-funded and organized through Utrecht University and the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences (which offers financial and organizational support to its members, including the PI); (b) convening panels/workshops and presenting work-in-progress papers at international research conferences; (c) publication of two PhD theses, international monographs and a spate of journal articles/book chapters; (d) a dedicated program website (supported by regular tweets and other social media activity) where resources developed as part of the program – e.g. inventories of policy reforms; structured case narratives; vignettes of policy, agency and collaborative performance; surveys/questionnaires and datasets – will be posted and clarified to further potential use by other researchers.

B4 Impact on practitioners
This research addresses the urgent need amongst practitioners to get practical perspectives on the way public institutions can succeed in a society characterized by connectivity, transparency, and turbulence. Next to providing practitioners with tools, we also aspire to extend their horizon by moving from a short term focus on electoral success toward enduring performance and legitimacy. Similarly, this program will not give practitioners quick-fixes, but will help them to identify the best principles in metagovernance they can employ to truly improve the functioning of government.

The connection with practitioners is firstly solidified by their involvement in the assessment of policies, agencies, and collaboration. The emphasis on the social construction of performance and legitimacy brings the research team in regular contact with the stakeholders around these institutions. Furthermore, we will organize three practitioner consultations, one at the beginning and two towards the end of the program, to check the relevance of our research plan and the usefulness of our outcomes. The sample for these meetings will include public sector professionals and think tanks within and outside of government, at national, subnational and European levels. Finally, the PI's long, extensive and international practice of executive education will provide him and other the members of the research team with manifold opportunities to engage with these individuals and institutions.

Summary of the nature and impact of the research program
Launching the systematic study of governance success will require a great deal of time, thought, and work. We will have to build on the many theories and findings already available, but also break new ground. I do believe that these investments are worth it, because of the potential gains for the discipline as a whole.
  • Move beyond simplistic 'best-practice' and 'performance indicators' snapshot accounts of successful governance by looking at performance, legitimacy and endurance of policies, agencies and networks
  • Develop a systematic understanding of the social mechanisms by which governance success is being assessed and create the methodological tools to capture these mechanisms
  • Use these insights to theorize about metagovernance principles and practices that underpin successful governance in a turbulent network society
  • Inspire other researchers to incorporate the scientific study of success in their work

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