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# Policy Success, Policy Failure and Grey Areas In-Between

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ABSTRACT

Policy protagonists are keen to claim that policy is successful while opponents are more likely to frame policies as failures. The reality is that policy outcomes are often somewhere in between these extremes. An added difficulty is that policy has multiple dimensions, often succeeding in some respects but not in others, according to facts and their interpretation. This paper sets out a framework designed to capture the bundles of outcomes that indicate how successful or unsuccessful a policy has been. It reviews existing literature on policy evaluation and improvement, public value, good practice, political strategy and policy failure and success in order to identify what can be built on and gaps that need to be filled. It conceives policy as having three realms: processes, programs and politics. Policies may succeed and/or fail in each of these and along a spectrum of success, resilient success, conflicted success, precarious success and failure. It concludes by examining contradictions between different forms of success, including what is known colloquially as good politics but bad policy.

Key words: *policy success, policy failure, policy evaluation*

Analysis of public policy involves a range of actors and takes place in many forums with outcomes entering the public domain through means such as government statements, newspaper editorials, non-governmental briefings and academic articles. Yet despite the seemingly never-ending scrutiny and claims 'policy has been successful', authoritative closure on the issue of a policy's success or otherwise can be difficult to achieve. As Dye (2005 p. 332) argues:

> Does the government generally know what it is doing? Generally speaking, no … (E)ven if programs and policies are well organized, efficiently operated, adequately financed, and generally supported by major interest groups, we may still want to ask, So what? Do they work? Do these programs have any beneficial effects on society? Are the effects immediate or long range?… Unfortunately, governments have done very little to answer these more basic questions.

Of course, politics is frequently partisan, and policies framed as successful by some political actors may be framed as unsuccessful by others (Stone 2002; Fischer 2003).

Intuitively, we know that the ideal of complete success is rarely met. Some shortcomings or failings permeate virtually all policies. Some are small such as a five-year bridge building project that is a few months late or achievement of a 12 per cent budget cut instead of a target of 12.5 per cent. Others are considerable, such as a public health warning containing erroneous and potentially life-threatening information for some individuals, or train services aiming for 95 per cent punctuality but only achieving 50 per cent. The policy sciences lack an over-arching heuristic framework which would allow analysts to approach the multiple outcomes of policies in ways that move beyond the often crude, binary rhetoric of success and failure.

The purpose of this paper is to advance our understanding by building on recent work (e.g. Marsh and McConnell 2010a, 2010b; Bovens 2010) by clearly defining policy success and developing an analysis which unfolds from this definition to its polar opposite, failure, and various shades in between. It draws on a wide range of literature to illustrate why success and failure are bound inexorably with each other.

The word government is used throughout this article, whilst recognising that modern public sectors are characterised by multifaceted systems of governance, (see e.g. Bell and Hindmoor 2009; Osborne 2009). The term is useful because it captures that aspect of success which relates to the values, aims and policies of elected governments. The paper first provides a brief overview of a variety of literature on success and failure in order to identify gaps and themes to build on. Second, it shows that dividing policy into process, program and political dimensions, allows us to conceive of successful and unsuccessful outcomes in each of these realms. Third, it defines policy success on the basis that it is a matter of fact as well as of interpretation. Fourth, it details a spectrum of outcomes from success to failure. Finally, it suggests that there are several main contradictions evident in the overlap between the three different realms of policy, including what is known colloquially as good politics but bad policy.

## *Why We Need a New Approach*

Six important strands can be highlighted as the contributions to our thinking about success and failure. First, literature on policy evaluation and policy improvement is close to Lasswell's (1956, 1971) vision of a policy sciences which contributes to societal betterment. Indeed, he devotes over seven pages in *A Pre-View of Policy Sciences*, to more than 60 detailed 'criteria of policy', which are designed to provide guidance to policy scientists to 'bring about improved capability in the formation and execution of policy' (Lasswell 1971 p. 85). Criteria range from providing dependable information to all members of the decision making process, through to the need for internal appraisal to be supplemented by external appraisal. Political criteria are beyond the scope of his study on the assumption that political decisions are a given. Failure is also beyond his scope, other than a general recognition that goals might not be met.

Contemporary writings are plentiful on the role of evaluation as a process for policy refinement and learning, and on tools and techniques for achieving this (Gupta 2002; Weimer and Vining 2005; Miller and Robbins 2007). As policy analysis has developed, so too has its debates and methods. The logic is that achieving policy success resides in good policy design, evaluating the *ex ante* likely impact of proposed policies, rather than relying simply on *ex post* evaluation to produce a stamp of success or failure, or something in between that is followed by policy refinement, change or even termination. More generally, the literature on policy evaluation and improvement contains different views on success (usually implicit), taking political goals as a given and hence success resides in meeting targets and achieving outcomes (Sanderson 2002; Boyne 2003, 2004). Others are more sceptical of leaving politics out of evaluation because doing so avoids questioning societal power frameworks. They tend to assume that successful policy is one which redresses power imbalances, reduces inequalities and involves stakeholders in formulating policy goals and evaluating results (Fischer 1995; Taylor and Balloch 2005; Pawson 2006).

Second, there is the concept of public value. It originates with Mark Moore (1995) as an antidote to the assumptions pervading American discussion of government tending to be wasteful and bureaucratic. His strategic triangle framework is a surrogate for what a successful public sector looks like. Public value rests on three tests being met: (i) production of things of value to clients and stakeholders (ii) legitimacy in being able to attract resources and authority from the political authorising environment and (iii) being operationally and administratively feasible (Moore 1995 p. 71). Subsequent case studies and debate show that public value is something of a slippery concept (see Rhodes and Wanna 2007, 2008, 2009; van Gestel et al. 2008; Steenhuisen and van Eten 2008). Moore doesn't define public value and it is as contested as the term public interest. The reality of public bodies is that they need to provide many and often conflicting values. In

Moore's work, there is clear recognition that public value (as a surrogate for successful policy) does not rest on value being completely achieved, but there is no indication of how analysts may capture value shortfalls or conflicts. A new framework is needed which helps deal systematically with *degrees* of success and failure.

Third, a group of writings deal with good practice in the process of policy making and management. The field includes writings on the benefits of policy design (Schneider and Ingram 1997), deliberation and public engagement (Gutmann and Thompson 2004), incremental bargaining (Lindblom 1965), problem definition (Bardach 2009) and people skills (Mintrom 2003). The term success is virtually absent but the broad implication is clear. Good or successful process (which for example, engages stakeholders in dialogue in order to pre-empt implementation problems and cultivate policy legitimacy) results in viable and successful programs. However, the nature of what constitutes successful policy process can prove just as contested as policy improvement or public value. For example, deliberation and public engagement have been criticised as little more than an exercise in the legitimation of dominant power (Shapiro 1999; Bishop and Davies 2002).

Fourthly, writings on the political aspects of policy have implications for what constitutes political success. Programmes may assist or frustrate leaders and governments in the pursuit of their agendas and aspirations. The nature of success is almost always implicit because conventions, constitutions and realpolitik are such that programs should be (or at least be portrayed as) in the public interest, as opposed to that of a party's electoral prospects, elite interests or individual career ambitions (Machiavelli 1971; Edelman 1977; Bachrach and Baratz 1970). This conceptualisation calls attention to evaluating policies in terms of their ability to produce benefits for particular political actors or groups.

Fifth, the explicit treatment of policy success is marginal. In an early article entitled 'The Logic of "Policy" and Successful Policies', Kerr (1976) concentrated primarily on failure, perhaps understandably so, in the climate of mid-1970s political and economic turmoil. She argued that because policies can fail because they are inadequately implemented, or do not achieve their intended purpose or normative justification, they therefore can be said to succeed when they do not fail. Ingram and Mann (1980) in an edited book entitled *Why Policies Succeed or Fail* were similarly pre-occupied with failure. Stuart Nagel (1980) defined success in its editorial introduction as the achievement of goals and the maximization of benefits minus costs. Bovens, 't Hart and Peters (2001a) in their mammoth edited volume on success in governance likewise argue that success has two dimensions. The first is programmatic, 'the effectiveness, efficiency and resilience of the specific policies being evaluated' (Bovens, 't Hart and Peters 2001b p. 20). The second is political, 'the way policies and policy makers become evaluated in the political arena' (Bovens, 't Hart and Peters 2001b p. 20). Some writings mention non-failure (Bovens et al. 2001c), mixed success (O'Neill and Primus 2005) and partial success (Pollack 2007), but these are typically ad hoc terms used to describe specific cases, and are not located within a broader framework that is able to capture the diversity of outcomes produced by policies. Some case studies define a programme's success according to the value judgements of the author being the standard. Others focus on standards such as goal achievement and benefits to key sectoral interests (see for example Schwartz 2006, Hulme 2007; Gupta and Saythe 2009).

Finally, there is an extensive literature on failure, including policy fiascos (Dunleavy 1995; Bovens and 't Hart 1996), scandals (Tiffen 1999; Thompson 2000), crises (Boin et al. 2005) and disasters (Handmer and Dovers 2007; McEntire 2007). However, the debates more or less mirror those dealing with aspects of success and its surrogates. Some, particularly those writings dealing with organisational pathologies and human error (e.g. Reason 1997; Auerswald et al. 2007) and critical infrastructure breakdown tend to treat failure as an objective fact while others dealing with policy fiascos (e.g. Bovens and 't Hart 1996) focus heavily on competing constructions of goals to the point that failure is largely in the eye of the beholder. There is also little recognition of forms or degrees of failure, other than an implicit assumption (for example) that failures get worse as we move from emergencies and crises, to disasters and catastrophes.

## *Three Strands of Policy: The Basis for Succeeding and Failing*

We need to comprehend different dimensions of policy in order to grasp the ways in which success and failure may be manifest within them. Also, tensions between them help explain some of the most interesting features and dynamics of policy. These differences can be found in process, programs and politics. They can overlap, but for analytical purposes can be treated separately.

*Process* is a traditional major concern of public policy analysts such as Lasswell (1956), Lindblom (1959, 1965) and Easton (1953, 1965), concerned with understanding the means by which societies could *and* should make collective choices in the public interest. The tradition continues today in works concerned with deliberative engagement

(Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Gastil 2008), policy design (Schneider and Ingram 1997), resolving controversies (Schön and Rein 1994), solving problems (Bardach 2009) and the policy cycle (Althaus Bridgman and Davis 2007). In essence, what governments do is identify problems, examine potential policy alternatives, consult or not as the case may be, and take decisions. All such activities involve weighing the pros and cons of different choices such as who, when and how to consult and weighing the opportunities and risks of different policy solutions before taking a decision. Governments *do* process and they may succeed and/or fail in this realm.

Second, *programs* are what governments do (Rose 1984: chapter 1). They give concrete form to the generalized intentions of statements of policy. For example, health policy involves dozens of programs dealing with everything from ante-natal care through preventive medicine to death. Programs combine in different ways the basic resources and tools of government – laws, public personnel, public expenditure, tax incentives and exhortation (Rose 1984; Hood and Margetts 2007; Howlett 2010).

There is also *politics*. Some policy analysts prefer to keep politics at arms' length, because it is seen as a distraction from a rational form of policy analysis (Davidson 2005; Weimer and Vining 2005). Yet if we are to fully grasp the multi-dimensional nature of policy and what governments do, we need to recognize that programs have political repercussions. The choices of government (including timing of decisions and the symbolism of particular forms of action or inaction) have consequences for the reputation and electoral prospects of politicians and their capacity to manage political agendas. Many political analysts have examined the political repercussions of policy action and studies of political behaviour normally evaluate policies in terms of their relevance to winning votes. Governments *do* politics and they may prove successful and/or unsuccessful in this realm.

## *Defining Policy Success*

Assumptions of what constitutes success take many forms. The foundationalist/scientific tradition, associated broadly with the rationalist strand of policy evaluation (Gupta 2001; Davidson 2005) leads us towards seeing success being a fact amenable to positive identification. For example, a government can aim to build a school and do so, or introduce a new tax and achieve this immediate goal. A different tradition is constructivist or discursive, emphasising the importance of interpretation and meaning (e.g. see Edelman 1988; Stone 2002;

Fischer 2003). The corollary of such approaches is that success is in the eye of the beholder, depending on factors such as a protagonist's values, beliefs and extent to which they are affected by the policy.

The approach here is a pragmatic combination of elements of these two approaches. The more tangible aspect of policy success relates to goal achievement. Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that a policy is successful insofar as it achieves the goals that proponents set out to achieve. However, given the positive connotations of the word success, only those who regard the original goal as desirable are likely to perceive its achievement in this way. The two approaches are combined in arriving at the following definition of policy success: *A policy is successful if it achieves the goals that proponents set out to achieve and attracts no criticism of any significance and/or support is virtually universal.*

The first advantage of this definition is that it recognizes that government can and sometimes does attain the goals it seeks in each of its three realms of policy. For example, a government can succeed in putting together an agreement in order to get a key decision or legislation approved. It can put in place a program with policy instruments that produce intended outputs and outcomes. Government may also succeed in producing a policy which boosts electoral fortunes.

Second, the definition also recognizes that not everyone will perceive government's achievements as successful. An extreme example is the statement of success by an architect of the US rendition program of interrogating terrorist suspects:

> … the Rendition Program's goal was to protect America, and the rendered fighters delivered to Middle Eastern governments are now either dead or in places from which they cannot harm America. Mission accomplished, as the saying goes (Committee on Foreign Affairs 2007 p. 14).

Critics have viewed the policy instruments to achieve this (sic) success as a crime that 'violates international law' and 'involved multiple human rights violations', (Amnesty International 2008 p. 8).

Third, the definition reconciles, at least for heuristic purposes, the tension between the objective and dimensions of success. A definition that portrays success as purely a matter of interpretation will fail to capture the objective dimensions of goal attainment. Equally, a definition that portrays success purely as objective will fail to capture the subjective dimension of success. Therefore, both the objective and subjective dimensions of success need to be built into the definition rather than avoided or one included and the other excluded.

TABLE 1. Policy as Process: The Spectrum From Success to Failure

| Process Success | Resilient Success | Conflicted Success | Precarious Success | Process Failure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preserving government policy goals and instruments. | Policy goals and instruments preserved, despite minor refinements. | Preferred goals and instruments proving controversial and difficult to preserve. Some revisions needed. | Government's goals and preferred policy instruments hang in the balance. | Termination of government policy goals and instruments. |
| Conferring legitimacy on the policy. | Some challenges to legitimacy but of little or no lasting significance. | Difficult and contested issues surrounding policy legitimacy, with some potential to taint the policy in the long-term. | Serious and potentially fatal damage to policy legitimacy. | Irrecoverable damage to policy legitimacy. |
| Building a sustainable coalition. | Coalition intact, despite some signs of disagreement. | Coalition intact, although strong signs of disagreement and some potential for fragmentation. | Coalition on the brink of falling apart. | Inability to produce a sustainable coalition. |
| Symbolizing innovation and influence. | Not ground breaking in innovation or influence, but still symbolically progressive. | Neither innovative nor outmoded, leading at times to criticisms from both progressive and conservatives. | Appearance of being out of touch with viable, alternative solutions. | Symbolizing outmoded, insular or bizarre ideas, seemingly oblivious to how other jurisdictions are dealing with similar issues. |
| Opposition to process is virtually non-existent and/or support is virtually universal. | Opposition to process is stronger than anticipated, but outweighed by support. | Opposition to process and support are equally balanced. | Opposition to process outweighs small levels of support. | Opposition to process is virtually universal and/or support is virtually non-existent. |

### *The Spectrum From Policy Success to Policy Failure*

A spectrum makes it possible to differentiate intermediate categories between complete success or failure. The fivefold typology set out here does not deny the existence of difficult methodological issues which are best discussed elsewhere (see McConnell 2010).

*Success*. Government does what it sets out to do and opposition is virtually non-existent and support near universal. Many matters of low politics and bureaucratic implementation of routine non-controversial issues will fall into the category of policy success as government achieving what it sets out to do. The absence of opposition and/or the existence of universal support may be hard to come by for many higher issues but it is still possible. For example, the Dutch system of dikes and dams prevents more than half the population, living below sea level, from drowning. For pragmatic purposes, I include in the outright success category, policies with minor delays or errors that can be corrected. The remaining measures or benchmarks of success can be identified across the process, program and political dimension of policy.

Process success rests first of all on the preservation of government's policy goals and instruments. For example, amendments to a government bill may facilitate the achievement of its goals rather than acting as a barrier. Second there is attaining legitimacy through a general acceptance that the policy has been produced through means that are legal and normal procedures, such as consultation with stakeholders. Third is the marshalling of a sustainable coalition of supporting interests and not just an *ad hoc* coalition securing the initial adoption of a policy (Patashnik 2008). Fourth, success may stem from a process which encourages innovation, as in the case of Japan seeking to draw lessons from foreign experiences (see e.g. Goldfinch 2006).

Program success occurs if the measure that government adopts, including a stance of doing nothing, produces the results desired by government. Again, such outcomes can be captured in specific criteria such as implementation in a manner that produces the desired outcome. Benefiting a target group is a further criterion e.g. lowering the incidence of breast cancer in women over 60-years-old as a result of a new screening program. Satisfying criteria valued in a particular policy community is also a measure of success, for example, efficiency in public budgeting or secrecy on issues of national security.

*Political success* is the holy grail of political elites. One outcome of policies that provide significant political benefits and no problems to speak of is the enhancement of the reputation of the government, its leaders and its electoral prospects. A further criterion of no less importance is controlling the policy agenda by giving the impression of tackling a problem and marginalizing critics. For example, an urban riot can be defined as a 'manageable' law and order problem, as opposed to a 'wicked problem' involving long-term racial discrimination and urban deprivation. A final marker of political success is helping maintain broad values of government. For example, a clamp-down on welfare fraud can contribute to a broader government agenda of reducing waste in public resources.

*Resilient success*. Opposition and shortcomings make this a second best outcome. However, as long as the measure is resilient it will not fail. In this situation, the level of opposition is more than government bargained for, but is nevertheless outweighed by levels of support.

Table 2. Policy as Program: The Spectrum From Success to Failure

| Program Success | Resilient Success | Conflicted Success | Precarious Success | Program Failure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Implementation in line with objectives. | Implementation objectives broadly achieved, despite minor refinements or deviations. | Mixed results, with some successes, but accompanied by unexpected and controversial problems. | Minor progress towards implementation as intended, but beset by chronic failures, proving highly controversial and very difficult to defend. | Implementation fails to be executed in line with objectives. |
| Achievement of desired outcomes. | Outcomes broadly achieved, despite some shortfalls. | Some successes, but the partial achievement of intended outcomes is counterbalanced by unwanted results, generating substantial controversy. | Some small outcomes achieved as intended, but overwhelmed by controversial and high profile instances or failure to produce results. | Failure to achieve desired outcomes. |
| Creating benefit for a target group. | A few shortfalls and possibly some anomalous cases, but intended target group broadly benefits. | Partial benefits realised, but not as widespread or deep as intended. | Small benefits are accompanied and overshadowed by damage to the very group that was meant to benefit. Also likely to generate high profile stories of unfairness and suffering. | Damaging a particular target group. |
| Meets policy domain criteria. | Not quite the outcome desired, but close enough to lay strong claim to fulfilling the criteria. | Partial achievement of goals, but accompanied by failures to achieve, with possibility of high profile examples e.g. ongoing wastage when the criterion is efficiency. | A few minor successes, but plagued by unwanted media attention e.g. examples of wastage and possible scandal when the criterion is efficiency. | Clear inability to meet the criteria. |
| Opposition to program aims, values, and means of achieving them is virtually non-existent, and/or support is virtually universal. | Opposition to program aims, values, and means of achieving them is stronger than anticipated, but outweighed by support. | Opposition to program aims, values, and means of achieving them is equally balanced with support for same. | Opposition to program aims, values, and means of achieving them, outweighs small levels of support. | Opposition to program aims, values, and means of achieving them is virtually universal, and/or support is virtually non-existent. |

There are departures from one or more of the bundle of goals across the process, program and political realms.

Resilient process success means that government achieves its policy in broad terms notwithstanding small modifications and setbacks, for example, some opposition amendments are added to a bill. Resilient programs are survivors. Shortfalls, although not insignificant, do not undermine their core achievements. For example, a program in 90 countries to vaccinate against measles, mumps and rubella, has led to a substantial reduction in the incidence of the disease(s), despite exposing a small number of children to health risks. Insofar as political bargaining leads to compromise, politics must be prepared to settle for a second best outcome or else see their aims frustrated for a lack of agreement.

*Conflicted success* is a struggle for government. It achieves its policy making goals in some respects, but has to backtrack or make significant modifications along the way. Conflicted program successes are not what was intended. Proponents are troubled by substantial time delays, considerable target shortfalls, resource shortfalls, and communication failures. The program generates substantial controversy, galvanizing opposition parties and forcing government into a defence of core values and aims of the program, often coupled with program reviews and amendments.

Notwithstanding conflicts, political outcomes for government certainly have elements of success, even if accompanied by substantial controversy. Conflicted politics, as Lasswell (1971) recognized, is in part a product of competing values. Fischer's (1995) work indicates that to achieve political stability requires resolving value conflicts by advocates of a program backtracking and accepting a modicum of conflicted success. In sum, conflicted successes allow government partially to achieve its goals, but it gets less than it bargained for in terms of outcomes, and more that it expected in terms of opposition.

*Precarious success* operates on the edge of failure. Policies do exhibit small achievements, but departures from goals and levels of opposition outweigh small levels of support. They often amount to a pyrrhic victory for policymakers. Initially government does fulfill some of its policy making goals, but the costs of doing so become such that short-term success cannot be sustained.

Precarious program successes have some merits for proponents but outcomes fall well short of intentions and controversy is substantial, Even supporters seriously question the future of the policy. Precarious successes are often transient, en route to failure and termination. For example, the Child Support Agency in the UK, introduce in 1993, struggled, with its achievement in making 'absent fathers pay' coun-

TABLE 3. Policy as Politics: The Spectrum From Success to Failure

| Political Success | Resilient Success | Conflicted Success | Precarious Success | Political Failure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Enhancing electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders. | Favourable to electoral prospects and reputation enhancement, with only minor setbacks. | Policy obtains strong support and opposition, working for and against electoral prospects and reputation in fairly equal measure. | Despite small signs of benefit, policy proves an overall electoral and reputational liability. | Damaging to the electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders, with no redeeming political benefit. |
| Controlling policy agenda and easing the business of governing. | Despite some difficulties in agenda management, capacity to govern is unperturbed. | Policy proving controversial and taking up more political time and resources in its defence than was expected. | Clear signs that the agenda and business of government is struggling to suppress a politically difficult issue. | Policy failings are so high and persistent on the agenda, that it is damaging government's capacity to govern. |
| Sustaining the broad values and direction of government. | Some refinements needed but broad trajectory unimpeded. | Direction of government very broadly in line with goals, but clear signs that the policy has promoted some rethinking, especially behind the scenes. | Entire trajectory of government is being compromised. | Irrevocably damaging to the broad values and direction of government. |
| Opposition to political benefits for government is virtually non-existent and/or support is virtually universal. | Opposition to political benefits for government is stronger than anticipated, but outweighed by support. | Opposition to political benefits for government is equally balanced with support for same. | Opposition to political benefits for government outweighs small levels of support. | Opposition to political benefits for government is virtually universal and/or support is virtually non-existent. |

tered by scandals, controversy, mismanagement and errors on a scale unprecedented for a government agency, leading to its closure in 2008 (Harlow 2002).

Precarious political successes are a substantial liability for government, even if there are small benefits. The political benefits of hanging onto a policy exist and are small (the benefit may be saving face and avoiding an admission of failure) but the costs are greater. The Nixon administration and the final years of the Vietnam war is arguably one such example.

*Failure* is the mirror image of success: *A policy fails if it does not achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support* *is virtually non-existent*. Failures can be issues of high media interest or low-level bureaucratic concerns. They include policies that have small successes overshadowed by large scale failures.

Process failures occur when the government is defeated in its ambition to enact legislation or make a decision. It may be a consequence of the 'mobilization of bias' (Bachrach and Baratz 1970) preventing government from doing what it thinks desirable or it may be due to the lack of a sufficient coalition of interests in order to realize governmental goals.

Program failures, in essence, not only fail to accomplish what they were intended to do but can also threaten the position of politicians and parties that sponsor failed programs. The British poll tax introduced in 1989 is an example. It was a local government tax levied on a per-capita basis, only marginally related to income. It produced high rates of non-collection, severe and costly administrative problems, and generated very visible political protests. The result was a rise in political costs and a loss in revenue. It was a significant contributing cost to Conservative MPs ejecting Margaret Thatcher from Downing Street and it was abandoned by her successor (Butler, Adonis and Travers 2004).

### *Contradictions Between Different Forms of Success*

Locating policies in particular categories involves judgement rather than scientific precision (Wildavsky 1987 p. 3). Judgment is necessary because policy outcomes do not always have tidy results. Divergent outcomes may occur *within* one particular realm or there can be different outcomes *across* the process, program and political dimensions of policy. The result is that a policy can be much more successful in one realm than in another. Indeed, there is often a trade-off for policymakers between three realms of policy which at times sit uneasily alongside each other. Striving for success in one realm can mean sacrificing, intentionally or through lack of foresight, success in another. Such trade-offs and tensions are at the heart of the dynamics of public policy. Here I identity three key contradictions.

*Successful Process vs. Unsuccessful Programs*. A key concern of policymakers is to get decisions taken and legislation passed, using executive powers to steer the policymaking process towards such goals. These are process successes because government gets the policy it wants, in a legitimate manner and with the support of a coalition of interests. However, success at the process stage is no guarantee of success at the program stage. Policymaking without sufficient checks and balances is prone to producing flawed policies because goals and/or instruments have not been refined in order to produce workable policies through incremental bargaining (Lindblom 1965; Braybrooke and Lindblom 1970), deliberative engagement (Carson and Martin 1999; Gutmann and Thompson 2004) partisanship and plurality (Crick 1962; Stoker 2006) and careful policy design (Schneider and Ingram 1997). To paraphrase, government may win the battle (process) and lose the war (program).

*Successful Politics vs. Unsuccessful Programs.* A particular program may tilt towards the failure end of the spectrum, but produce successful political outcomes. Why would such outcomes occur? The answer lies in recognizing that political success sometimes necessitates programs that leave much to be desired in terms of tackling policy problems.

If we think about the three criteria for political success, this point is easier to make. One criterion is enhancing government or leaders' reputation/electoral prospects at the expense of programs. For example, the Anglo-French agreement to build the supersonic Concorde jet helped improve relations between Britain and France at a time in the 1960s when relations were otherwise strained, but after the Concorde became airborne it was not an economic success and airlines abandoned its use (Hall 1982).

The second criterion is easing the business of governing through the agenda management of wicked issues (Rittel and Webber 1973; Head 2008). They are complex problems such as poverty and drug abuse with multiple causes and no clear solutions. Pragmatically, it is often easier for governments to deal with symptoms rather than tackle underlying social causes. Such policies have a strong symbolic or even placebo element (e.g. Stringer and Richardson 1979). They demonstrate that government is trying to deal with the problem and responding to popular concerns can become the definition of success, whether or not the response effectively engages with a wicked problem.

Maintaining governance and policy trajectories often requires compromising of programs. A plausible argument could be put forward that the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in the US, proved far more successful for the Bush administration as evidence of its commitment to fight a War or Terror than in enhancing US security, because it created a super-agency which has done little to disturb long-established policy sub-systems (May, Sapotichne and Workman 2008).

*Successful Programs vs. Unsuccessful Politics.* Programs which produce the results desired by policy makers do not always result in political success. Well run programs can backfire on political desires. Efficiency drives, for example, can be executed successfully and desired outcomes achieved, but encroach on politics, thwarting leadership and/or electoral ambitions. Successful programs may even rebound on government agendas because of unintended consequences of an excess of success. The example of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy is a case in point. It was so successful by the mid-1980s in achieving the aim of self-sufficiency that it generated infamous 'butter mountains' and 'wine lakes'.

## *Conclusion*

When analysts assess the success or otherwise of a particular policy, they can invoke different criteria that lead to different conclusions. Career policy analysts may be more concerned with program design and program implementation issues. Political parties may be concerned with such issues but are also likely to enter into political realms. The world of policy analysis has lacked a framework that allows analysts to capture the diversity of outcomes from success to failure, in each of these three realms.

This paper has brought the three strands of policy analysis together. First, in recognizing that success and failure are not mutually exclusive, the article moves beyond the polarized portrayal of outcomes as success or failure. Second, it recognizes that there may be differences in success and failure in terms of processes, programs and policies. Third and finally, the framework allows for meaningful cross-sectoral and cross-policy comparison.

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