P06 / Defining and Measuring the Impact of “Digital Transformation” on Policymaking

Topic : POLICY FORMULATION, ADMINISTRATION AND POLICYMAKERS

Chair : Amanda Clarke (School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University)

Second Chair : Jonathan Craft (University of Toronto)

Third Chair : Evert Lindquist (School of Public Administration)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Digital technologies are framed both as disruptive forces straining traditional governance approaches, and as powerful tools that will bolster policy capacity to address fast moving, complex policy challenges. In response significant budgetary and organizational resources are now directed to the goal of “digital transformation” in governments across the globe. However, the concept of “digital transformation” remains nebulous. In particular, with the bulk of research on digital era governance focused on public management reforms and service delivery, the implications of digital disruption for policy formulation and government policy capacity are little understood. Researchers have not systematically compared how new digital policy instruments and approaches, such as design thinking, big data analytics, and machine learning are being integrated into today’s policy processes, nor how digital policy instrument selection and constituencies vary across administrations, by policy sector, and over time.

Moreover, despite global enthusiasm for digital governance, it is unclear to what extent governments are willing and able to “transform” how they design policy, and how advances (or setbacks) in digital policy capacity could be measured in support of robust cross-country comparisons. Is “digital transformation” more smoke than fire, merely editing the policy process at the margins? Alternatively, if the policy process is indeed transforming in the digital age, what does this transformation consist of, how does it compare across different administrations, and what does it imply for the policy capacity of today’s governments?

This panel probes these empirical gaps in order to add rigour to the discussions of digital transformation that increasingly punctuate today’s public sector renewal agendas. Adopting a comparative lens, papers will respond to the following questions: “To what extent and in what ways are specific digital technologies and the broader digital context of governing affecting today’s policy processes?” and “How can digital policy capacity be measured and compared across jurisdictions and over time?” The panel will confront current enthusiasm for digital era governance with established literatures on policy design and policy capacity, while offering comparative perspectives and evaluative frameworks that governments can use to drive and monitor progress as they work to integrate digital tools and approaches into their policy work.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Around the globe digital technologies are shifting citizens’ expectations, generating novel data and analytical techniques, and opening up new opportunities for governments to address fast moving and complex policy challenges. Significant budgetary and organizational resources are being directed to the goal of “digital transformation” in governments. However, the types, processes, and practices of “digital transformation” remain unclear, as do their implications for policy processes and outcomes.

Researchers have not systematically compared how new digital policy approaches and instruments such as design thinking, big data analytics, and machine learning are being integrated into today’s policy processes. From policy formulation to service delivery there remain significant questions as to the effects of technological disruption on policy processes and outcomes. For example, there has to date been little systematic study of how digital policy objectives or instruments are selected and implemented either as standalone initiatives or in conjunction with existing policies, or the degree and type of potential variation across administrations, policy sectors, and over time. Despite global enthusiasm for digital governance, it is unclear to what extent governments are willing and able to “transform” how they design and implement policy, and how advances (or setbacks) in digital era policymaking can be measured in support of robust cross-country comparisons. Is “digital transformation” more rhetoric than reality, merely editing the policy process at the margins? Alternatively, if the policy process is indeed transforming in the digital age, what does this transformation consist of, how does it compare across different administrations and sectors, and

what does it imply for the policy practices and capacity of today’s policymakers?

This panel probes these empirical gaps in order to add rigour to the discussions of digital transformation that increasingly animate today’s public policy and governance landscapes. We welcome comparative, theoretically rich and methodologically diverse papers that will engage with the following questions: To what extent and in what ways are specific digital technologies and the broader digital context of governing affecting today’s policy processes? And how can digital policy capacity be measured and compared across jurisdictions and over time? We are particularly interested in papers that bring forth empirical data to critically scrutinize the rhetoric of “transformation” typically at play in discussions of digital era governance.

The panel will integrate current enthusiasm for digital era governance with established literatures on policy process theory, policy work and policy capacity, and better leverage comparative perspectives and evaluative frameworks that governments can use to drive and monitor progress as they work to integrate digital tools and approaches into their policy work.

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Session 1

Friday, June 28th 10:30 to 12:30 (MB 1.437)

Discussants

Jonathan Craft (University of Toronto)

Citizen and Stakeholder Engagement in the Digital Era: What Progress Has Been Made?

Evert Lindquist (School of Public Administration)

Artificial Intelligence and Job Losses: Alternative Estimation, Policy Implications and Evidence from Singapore

Eduardo Araral (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

Big data and grassroots anti-corruption: How can the Internet+ monitoring platform enhance governance in local China?

Hanyu Xiao (The Education University of Hong Kong)

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Session 2

Friday, June 28th 14:00 to 16:00 (MB 1.437)

Discussants
Adam Wellstead (Michigan Technological University)

Digital regulation: Transforming policy frameworks, implementation and delivery systems.
Christopher Walker (Griffith University)

Organizing digitalization: The case of the German federal government
Thurid Hustedt (Hertie School)

Die Hard With (Policy) A Vengeance? Implementation Effects and Digital Era Policy Design
Jonathan Craft (University of Toronto)
Amanda Clarke (School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University)

The Digital Turn in Policy Capacity Building
Amanda Clarke (School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University)
Jonathan Craft (University of Toronto)