P130 / Why Policies Succeed or Fail: Institutional Capacity, Organizational Change and Human Capabilities

Topic : Policy Design, Formulation & Instruments

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Ambitious public policies often produce uneven implementation outcomes. Governments may adopt comparable policy objectives, allocate substantial resources and announce similar reforms, yet differ significantly in their capacity to translate policy commitments into sustained administrative practices and measurable public outcomes. Explaining this variation remains a central challenge in public policy research.

Existing scholarship highlights the importance of policy design, administrative capacity, institutional arrangements and implementation structures (Brenton et al., 2023; Sager & Gofen, 2022). Recent research further demonstrates that policy implementation depends on the alignment between institutional capacities, policy integration and organizational responses (Capano & Lepori, 2024; Vince et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024). Studies on organizational learning and change also emphasize the importance of adaptive capabilities, employee commitment and professional competencies in enabling public organizations to respond effectively to policy demands (Anand & Brix, 2022; Edelmann et al., 2023; Pircher Verdorfer & van Ginkel, 2024).

Building on these developments, this panel examines how institutional capacity, organizational change and human capabilities interact in shaping policy implementation outcomes. Rather than treating these dimensions as independent determinants, it investigates their complementarities, tensions and context-dependent effects.

The panel addresses four interconnected research questions:

1. Under what institutional and political conditions do administrative capacity, coordination and accountability facilitate effective policy implementation?
2. How do leadership, organizational learning and adaptive change mechanisms translate institutional mandates into operational practices?
3. To what extent do professional, analytical, digital and adaptive competencies strengthen implementation, and under what conditions are these capabilities constrained?
4. How do institutional, organizational and human capabilities interact to influence policy effectiveness, equity, sustainability and institutional resilience?

Policy implementation outcomes may be assessed through multiple dimensions, including implementation effectiveness, service delivery quality, equity of access and outcomes, policy sustainability, and institutional adaptability. Contributions are encouraged to identify context-appropriate indicators and explain how these dimensions are operationalized and evaluated.

The panel advances three analytical propositions. First, institutional coordination, policy coherence and accountability can strengthen implementation when supported by adequate resources and enabling governance arrangements. Second, organizational learning, leadership and adaptive change can mediate the relationship between institutional capacity and implementation performance. Third, human capabilities generate greater value when organizational structures, incentives and decision-making authority enable their effective deployment.

These relationships may vary across political systems, administrative traditions, policy sectors and levels of governance. The panel therefore welcomes contributions that test, refine or challenge these propositions.

Contributions may address education, climate and energy, digital government, labour-market reform, public administration, health, industrial transformation and social policy. Comparative and single-case studies from all world regions are welcome, provided they identify clear implementation mechanisms and offer theoretically grounded empirical evidence.

The panel welcomes theoretically informed empirical contributions employing qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods approaches, including comparative case studies, process tracing, survey-based research and institutional analysis. Submissions should demonstrate a clear analytical connection between implementation mechanisms and observable policy outcomes.

Priority will be given to contributions that offer clear theoretical advancement, robust empirical evidence and

transferable insights into the institutional, organizational and human conditions shaping policy implementation across different governance contexts.

Ultimately, the panel seeks to advance comparative public policy scholarship by explaining not only whether policies succeed or fail, but also how institutional, organizational and human capabilities combine to produce implementation effectiveness, adaptation and sustainable public outcomes.

References

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Why do public policies with similar ambitions produce different implementation outcomes? This panel invites theoretically informed and empirically grounded papers investigating how institutional capacity, organizational change and human capabilities interact in the implementation of public policy across countries, governance systems and sectors.

We welcome contributions from public policy, public administration, political science, organization and management studies, education, labour studies and related fields. Submissions may examine climate and energy transitions, education and skills, digital government, public-sector reform, industrial development, health, social policy or other domains where implementation depends on multiple actors and capabilities.

Of particular interest are studies that explain mechanisms rather than merely describe policy goals or reform initiatives. Relevant questions include: How do coordination and accountability arrangements shape implementation? When do leadership, organizational learning and resource allocation mediate the effects of policy mandates? Under what conditions do workforce skills, professional expertise and adaptive competencies enable change? How do institutional constraints, competing incentives, political contexts and sectoral differences alter these relationships? Why do implementation trajectories diverge, and what explains adaptation or failure over time? How can implementation effectiveness, service delivery quality, equity, sustainability and institutional adaptability be assessed?

We encourage comparative research, process tracing, qualitative case studies, quantitative analysis, mixed-method designs, policy evaluation and theoretically rigorous conceptual work. Studies from all regions are welcome, including cross-national and cross-sector comparisons. Single-case papers are equally welcome when they identify a mechanism or test a proposition with broader analytical relevance.

Submission Requirements

Paper proposals should clearly specify the policy problem and implementation outcome under investigation; situate the argument in relevant scholarship; identify an explanatory mechanism, proposition or theoretical tension; and explain how the evidence and research design support the claims made. Authors should distinguish policy adoption, implementation processes and observable outcomes, and address plausible

alternative explanations and contextual limits where feasible. Submissions should demonstrate a clear theoretical contribution and provide empirically or analytically supported insights that extend beyond the immediate case.

The panel seeks a focused interdisciplinary dialogue that advances understanding of when institutional, organizational and human capabilities reinforce one another, when they conflict, and why public policies succeed, stall or fail.