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3   Academic Accounts of Policy Experience

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Introduction

There is no shortage of texts on policy making, policy analysis, policy processes and policy implementation (e.g., Dunn 1994; Parsons 1995; John 1998; Radin 2000). They show us how policy decisions emerge from policy-making institutions – such as policy bureaucracies – and how circumstances influence the policies that are made. They focus on the policy networks, circles, triangles and rings that constitute policy domains, and determine participants and positions. They describe the policy steps, phases, cycles, and rounds that are necessary to go from initial ideas to policy measures, and they trace how decisions are adapted when plans are implemented by executive agencies. They explore how policies affect citizens and companies. Although these texts are important for providing perspectives on policy, and for getting 'the bigger picture,' they tell us little about what happens inside policy bureaucracies, how policy plans emerge, what negotiations take place, which relations are formed, how policy categories are formed, how policymakers think and act.

Texts on 'real' policy work and on day-to-day policy experiences are scarce. This may be understandable, but it is far from satisfactory. Of course, the phenomenon of 'policy' does not equal individual policy acts, and policy is larger than the life of individual policymakers, so merely looking at what policymakers do and feel will not be enough to fully capture policy dynamics. However, policy comes from real people and human action, so it makes no sense to separate policy dynamics from acts and experiences. Therefore, this chapter will start the other way around – it will analyze how policy work is done, what acts and experiences contribute to what we see as policy, how bundles of acts and experiences make up policy dynamics, and how this might affect society. It will draw from available academic texts in order to reveal the 'smaller pictures' that can be sketched when it comes to public policy.

This is not an easy task because academic accounts of policy work are not merely or directly about policy work. People appointed to make policy can be observed and studied, but understanding *who* the relevant players are, *what*

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they do and *how* they do it, calls for conceptual constructs that do not emerge directly from daily behavior. Even the simplest of meetings, for example, can be interpreted in different ways, depending on the perspectives applied and concepts used (e.g., Alvesson 1996). Academic accounts of policy work, in other words, are also *accounts* (see chapter 2) or textual artifacts that can 'get close to,' but never mirror policy realities exactly. In order to understand policy work, we need to understand how scholars produce representations and which representations are meaningful for understanding and improving policy practices.

Understanding policy work

This chapter *distinguishes* between first-, second- and third-order accounts of policy (see table 1) and focuses on second-order accounts. *First-order* accounts start from individual policy experiences: individuals who are involved in policy describe what policy looks like. *Third-order* accounts, on the other hand, might focus on policy workers, but see them as policy 'actors' who are involved in bigger policy processes. *Second-order* accounts see policy people as agents – individuals with institutional positions and powers – and try to analyze how these agents are involved in policy practices that generate (meaningful) policy results. This chapter focuses on second-order accounts of policy work: interpretations by academics who stay close to real work, but use systematic methods to study policy practices and use more or less abstract terms, models and schemes in order to understand how policy occurs. This can be separated from *first-order* experiences, that is, direct, anecdotal accounts by the people who 'do policy' (see other chapters in this volume), as well as more abstract, *third-order* accounts by academics who offer perspectives on policy-making and bigger policy pictures (see chapters 1-2). Our focus is on *policy work, produced by policy agents in observable policy practices.*

Box 1	Multiple accounts of policy	
Level	**Focus**	**Example**
First order	Policy workers as individuals	(Autobiographical) accounts of policy making by policy people
Second order	Policy work by policy agents	Academic understandings of policy practices
Third order	Policy processes through structures and actors	Perspectives on the nature of policy and policy processes

Of course, second-order interpretations cannot be neatly separated from first order policy experiences and third-order perspectives on policy processes. Second-order accounts that present more or less detached understandings of real policy people and day-to-day policy acts are fed by actual policy experiences, but also deal with policy perspectives, especially in the finding of alternatives for 'rational' or 'functional' perspectives on policy processes (e.g., Colebatch 2006a). This in itself highlights the added value of second-order accounts. Policy administrators often feel there is a lack of rationality and that it is difficult to relate their policy behavior to problem solving. When policy administrators try to make sense of their work by applying (third-order) rational policy perspectives, second-order accounts enable us to analyze how this happens, and how the search for policy solutions is played out. When alternative perspectives are developed in order to get away from rational perspectives, such as 'institutional' or 'bureaucratic politics' perspectives (cf. Allison 1971), or 'deliberative' perspectives (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003), second-order analyses enable us to understand how such abstract perspectives relate to the real work that is done on a day-to-day basis, by real people who occupy positions in regulated or routinized policy games.

We can see this interplay between accounts in the academic analyses of iron triangles, policy subsystems, policy networks, etc. (e.g., Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Jordan 1990; Kickert et al. 1997). Although these academic accounts deviate from those by policy people, and also from rational accounts that portray policy-making as sequential and instrumental, they sketch bigger policy pictures that privilege *systemic* features. They try to conceptualize the structures and arenas that constitute policy processes, as well as institutionalized connections between policy actors that determine policy outcomes. They lack any *experiential* sensitivity, however, which enables us to understand those people with positions who are subjected to bigger forces, but also (actively) shape policy processes.

Getting this experiential sensitivity is *not* just a matter of combining perspectives with first-order experiences, of being 'in between' first- and third-order accounts; it is also a matter of the *distinctive* scholarly stances that are considered when policy work is studied. Instead of focusing on individuals who are engaged in policy processes, and the policy 'structures' or roles that are played by 'policy actors,' second-order accounts focus on policy 'agents' who are part of day-to-day policy practices, producing what is generally seen or experienced as 'policy.' Heclo's treatment of 'issue networks' is illustrative (1978: 88):

> Based largely on early studies of agricultural, water, and public works policies, the iron triangle concept is not so much wrong as it is disastrously incomplete. ... Preoccupied with trying to find the few truly powerful actors, observers tend to overlook the power and influence that arise out of the configurations through which the leading policymakers move and do business with each other.

A similar approach can be found in the empirical work that tries to show how things really work by starting with the agents that 'do policy' in order to show how policy outcomes are molded and manufactured. Scholars who focus on real work and practices may come from political science or sociology, but often have behavioral (Rose 1989), psychological (Hammond 1996; Tetlock 1985; 2005), psychoanalytic (Mitroff 1983) and ethnographic or anthropological 'biases' (e.g., Hammersley 1994; Shore and Wright 1997; Colebatch 2006b). They stress constructivist epistemologies (Estes and Edmonds 1981; Edelman 1988), strongly favor relational and argumentative outlooks (e.g., Fischer and Forester 1993) and prefer qualitative methods such as observation (see Rhodes et al. 2007). As a consequence, they focus on distinctive components of the policy phenomenon, such as 'thoughts, experiences and emotions' (Heclo 1977), 'coping mechanisms' (Lipsky 1980) or 'language, objects, and acts' (Yanow 1996) that are seldom used in systemic texts that focus on policy arenas and policy outcomes.

Three types of second order accounts

These second-order representations, however, also imply that the understandings of policy work take different shapes. When scholars get close to policy practices, there is no one clear account of policy work and policy experiences. In the first place, scholars study different sorts of policy agents, which, in addition to policy analysts, include policy contributions by political executives, policy administrators, policy managers, and policy advisers. Secondly, scholars rely on different methodologies; policy practices are studied by using surveys, interviews, documentary analysis and observation. Thirdly, different disciplinary backgrounds and vocabularies produce distinct understandings, each portraying policy work in its own distinct ways. We can identify three different approaches to the understanding of the experiential basis of policy work, each combining a certain academic stance and terminology.

Firstly, some scholars try to *personalize* policy processes by studying the agents who are expected to form and implement policies. They explore per-

sonalities, longings and the experiences of policy people, to better understand the human side of public policy. This is less about individuals than human *dispositions* that are formed through education and socialization.

Secondly, some scholars try to *contextualize* policy work, by analyzing how policy agents deal with circumstances. They show how certain policy conditions influence the work of policy officials, and how officials seek coping mechanisms to survive. The reciprocal relations between *contexts* and coping mechanisms are emphasized.

Thirdly, other scholars try to *functionalize* policy acts by seeing policy processes as webs of information and streams of interpretation, through which meaningful policy realities are enacted. They show how policy agents continuously exchange information, rework interpretations, and manufacture meaning in the face of ambiguous objectives. The informational *functions* of policy workers are stressed.

Box 2   **Three types of second order accounts**

Account	Focus	Example
1. Dispositions	Policy work as thought and behavior	Empirical analysis of traits, the attitudes and behavior of policy agents
2. Contexts	Policy work as coping with conditions	Empirical analysis of the impossibilities of policy work, and how agents cope
3. Functions	Policy work as making issues meaningful	Analysis of how policymakers interact, exchange information, and enact policies

Dispositions

The job of the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary is to 'nobble' an MP: 'The Prime Minister would like you to ask this question.' Nonetheless, the Prime Minister can confidently expect two-thirds to three-quarters of questions to be hostile. And the most awkward questions of all frequently came from the government side – from disappointed, disaffected and sour senior backbenchers who have either been overlooked or sacked from office (Lynn and Jay 1990: 405).

The first type of academic account of policy work tells us a lot about *who* engages in policy acts, and what these policy officials think, feel and experience when they make or do policy, and how this affects policy. Although these accounts start with individuals, and their values and behaviors (just like first-order accounts), these accounts represent more than individual features – they might reveal how individual thought and action are part of the *social* action.

In some cases, the social dimension of individual administrative action is accentuated by an emphasis on the moral stature of real policy administrators, e.g., in studies of administrators who are 'exemplary' (Cooper and Wright 1992). These administrators have certain traits, attitudes and behavior patterns that enable them to be remembered as exceptional policy people. In other cases, it is accentuated by an emphasis on the political sides of policy action, such as the importance of institutional craftsmanship (e.g., Terry 1996). These studies may also reveal a lot about the *'typical'* civil servant and the 'career service' and bureaucratic 'elites' to which these civil servants belong. Many elite studies show how *'elite'* features differ from country to country – not in the least because of differences in education, training and selection. They also explore important aspects of policy processes that are affected. Particular emphasis is placed upon politico-administrative relations – upon interactions between policy officials (as members of career services and elites) and political executives.

The well-known study by Aberbach et al. (1980), for example, provides an extensive cross-national overview of bureaucrats and their features, not least of all to clarify how politico-administrative interactions are structured. Aberbach et al. distinguish between various models, varying from the traditional hierarchical model, with clear distinctions between policy administrators who administer policy, and politicians who make policy, to a 'pure hybrid' in which clear dividing lines are absent. The other models are located between these extremes, and show how administrators and politicians contribute different things to policy making. In the 'facts/interests' model, administrators contribute facts and knowledge, while politicians contribute interests and values. In the 'energy/equilibrium' model, politicians 'articulate broad, diffuse interests,' whereas administrators 'mediate narrow, focused interests.' Other cross-national overviews of bureaucrats have been presented by e.g., Van Braam 1957; Dogan 1975; Van der Meer and Roborgh 1993; Page 1992. Peters' typology of politico-administrative interaction (Peters 1987) shows how politicians and administrators can be part of 'village lives.' These studies often compare countries like the US (least Weberian, most hybrid) with countries like the UK (career service), Germany and France (professional 'corps'), and the Netherlands and Denmark (village lives).

In other studies, empirical explorations are limited to certain groups of policy officials. These may involve lower-level officials who are engaged in 'everyday politics,' as opposed to 'high politics' (Page 2001), or central policy functionaries who have a certain 'professional self-image' that influences how they work (Hoppe and Jeliazkova 2006). More often, they concern top officials (Page and Wright 1999; 2007; Rhodes and Weller 2001), who might be *seen* as an 'elite' (cf. Page and Wright 1999) with a certain position vis-à-vis elected politicians. Rhodes and Weller (2001) wonder whether these top officials must be seen as 'mandarins or valets.' Page and Wright (1999) focus on 'political control,' wondering 'How can one ensure that bureaucracies are responsive to the governing party or parties?' (p. 270). The well-known BBC comedy series '*Yes, Minister*', about life at the top of a British government ministry (Lynn and Jay 1990), popularized this perspective. The attempts of the Minister of Administrative Affairs (and later, Prime Minister) Hacker to really determine policy courses and steer the ministry, and the subtle and covert attempts of his Permanent Secretary, Sir Humphrey Appleby, to align policy preferences with administrative considerations, routines, and longings have come to symbolize the tensions between conflicting policy worlds: the world of elected officials who are the innocent bystanders and victims of smooth-running policy systems, and the world of appointed officials who run these systems, backed by 'old boys networks' and certain socio-cultural antecedents. These stories show the conflicting accounts of policy worlds, while different views on policy processes are consciously mobilized by the participants. Explicit attempts by Sir Humphrey to preserve the integrity of mandarin behavior are backed by publicly stated accounts of 'proper' policy-making. This is especially visible when the minister's principal private secretary, Bernard Woolley – a civil servant – has 'explained' to him how things work.

No wonder then that most of the studies mentioned not only focus on policy behavior or administrative values, but also on these *antecedents* of policy activity. How policy officials are educated, for example, may have significant influence on policy dynamics. In the *Yes, Minister* series: the 'old boys network' that connected British top officials was reinforced by their Oxford and Cambridge educations (which the ministers did not necessarily share). Thus, the forming or reforming of individual policy behavior and values can not be detached from structural factors, such as how policy officials are selected, appointed and trained. Some studies, especially those of the UK, France and Germany (Drewry and Butcher 1991) primarily focus on these factors because these countries traditionally have distinctive, rather 'narrow' routes to policy apexes. UK class distinctions and 'Oxbridge' schooling, French elite education

(especially at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration – ENA), and German legalistic training mean that policy officials have distinctive characteristics that affect the way they perform policy.

Reforms and dispositions

Management reform (e.g., Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004) has started to change these policy landscapes. Consequently, many scholars explore policy behavior in light of changing (organizational) parameters. They investigate, for example, how 'public service motivation' is affected by management change and the 'contractualization' of managerial work (e.g., Perry, Perry and Hondeghem 2008), how (policy) managers 'pursue significance' (Denhardt 1995), or which 'competencies' are developed by civil service systems in order to improve policy behavior (Lodge and Hood 2005). In many countries, policy elites have turned into Senior Executive Services (SES), which may be subjected to improvement programs like the so-called British 'Professional Skills Program.' Although this does not automatically change bureaucratic antecedents and policy acts, it influences selection, appointment and development processes, which – in the longer run – may influence how policy occurs. From an academic point of view, this may reinforce the emphasis on policy experience – namely, on how the so-called *managerialization* of policy processes and its consequences are experienced. Managerialization constitutes the means through which the structure and culture of public services are being recast. In doing so, it seeks to introduce new orientations, remodels existing relations of power and affects how and where policy choices are made (Clarke et al. 1994: 4).

> These new paths have not, by and large, been of the civil service's own choosing, and it may not like some of the prospects that can be seen on the horizon (Drewry and Butcher 1991).

The extent to which this has actually happened that new managers with new dispositions and orientations have started to overtake, recast or reinvent policy formation, has hardly been studied, however. Rhodes and Weller (2001) conclude that 'Change is uneven. Not every country rushed to embrace the new public management and, of those that did, there are big differences in their aims, measures and outcomes ... the impact of change on senior officials over the last 20 years is overstated' (p. 230). Having studied departmental secretaries in various countries, they concluded that contemporary secretaries look a lot like their predecessors, but their roles have changed significantly.

Their monopoly of advice, for example, has ended. 'Policy contestability is the order of the day', Rhodes and Weller conclude (p. 238). Moreover, departmental secretaries have become 'managers,' although the exact meaning of management differs from country to country, and, more specifically, they have to 'manage networks' (pp. 240-241). Country differences are explained by governmental traditions. Page and Wright (1999), also stressing variation and national traditions, conclude that relations between bureaucratic and political elites show signs of a 'deinstitutionalization or personalization of political trust' (p. 277). To be able to trust that appointees as well as personal ties become more important, also in countries that have experienced substantial managerial reforms.

Contexts

> Public service workers occupy a critical position in American society. Although they are normally regarded as low-level employees, the actions of most public service workers actually constituted the services 'delivered' by government. Moreover, when taken together, the individual decisions of these workers become, or add up to, agency policy (Lipsky 1980: 3).

As well as focusing on how personal attributes affect policy work, scholars also focus on the nature of the work itself – on the conditions that policy workers face, and on how they cope. The most famous example is Lipsky's *Street-level Bureaucracy* (1980), which focuses on street-level bureaucrats, and reveals that policy is often made at the street-level, especially involving decisions about individual cases. Lipsky showed how service workers find themselves amidst complex and contradictory demands and how they develop certain *coping mechanisms*. They may categorize or actually 'stereotype' clients in order to speed up the decision-making process. The bosses of certain street-level bureaucracies have also been studied. Hargrove and Glidewell (1990), for example, showed how public managers like welfare managers or police commissioners deal with so-called 'impossible' circumstances.

Links between context and coping behavior can also be found in studies that involve national policy-making arenas; this includes, for instance, Heclo's exploration of bureaucratic and political behavior in Washington (Heclo 1977), Allison's identification of 'governmental processes' and 'bureaucratic politics' (e.g., Allison 1971), the 'messiness' of certain policy settings (Dryzek 1982), and the 'symbols, rituals and power' of crisis management ('t Hart 1993). Heclo (1977) portrays policy bureaucrats as 'people in

the machine,' with certain preferences and dispositions – for gradualism, indirection, independence, political caution, and relations – and contrasting job orientations – program bureaucrats, staff bureaucrats, reformers, and institutionalists. He then explores the working relations between various bureaucrats and political executives. He approaches these relations in terms of 'conditionally cooperative behavior' (p. 193), which 'rejects any final choice between suspicion and trust, between trying to force obedience and passively hoping for compliance.' Certain strategic resources, such as political clout, setting goals and building support, are used to 'create commitments to mutual performance' (p. 194). From a more general point of view, Dryzek (1982) stresses the importance of appropriate policy analysis, i.e., modes of analysis that match policy circumstances. He highlights what he calls a 'mode VI' analysis, or 'hermeneutic' analysis, appropriate for a 'residual category of circumstances ..., defined by a pluralistic decision process made up of a multiplicity of actors and interests which is not producing manifestly good outcomes' (p. 321).

How policy people cope

The emphasis on coping mechanisms that originated in studies of street-level bureaucrats but could also be applied to public (policy) managers, and political executives can further also be applied to specialist policy staff – policy advisors, policy analysts and policy administrators. Here, the analysis can focus on roles and behavior as well as cognition and judgment, in order to highlight processes of generating policy results. Meltsner (1972), who was one of the first to study the *behavior* of policy workers, how *they* experience 'politics,' and how they are able to cope with the politics of framing and selecting policy alternatives, *stressed* the importance of 'political feasibility' and *how* analysts might strengthen their 'political expertise.' Maley (2000) has studied the work and behavior of policy advisers, and came up with five policy roles: agenda-setting; linking ideas, interests and opportunities; mobilizing; bargaining; and 'delivering' (pp. 455-468). Edwards (2001), a former policy advisor, has shown how policy advisors can enhance their effectiveness. During various policy phases or 'stages,' different challenges had to be tackled to 'break up the policy process into clear steps in order to manage the complexities of developing policy' (p. 4).

With respect to the process of coping with policy challenges, such as ill-structured or dreadful problems, others have studied behavioral mechanisms (e.g., Hisschemöller and Hoppe 1995). Policy analysts have attempted to structure problems as much as possible, which runs the risk of over-simplify-

ing the problem. Against this background, Hisschemöller and Hoppe show the importance of 'problem structuring,' of organizing 'political participation of actors with different views on the problem, and argued problem choice' (p. 40). A comparable emphasis on 'problem definition' can be found in studies such as Rochefort and Cobb (1994), which shows how defining problems is 'intertwined with the political process throughout the activities of issue initiation, program design, and legislative enactment' (p. 56). Dealing with policy problems can also be approached from (socio)psychological angles. Adelman et al. (1975), for example, introduced their 'social judgment theory' in order to understand policy quarrels and conflicts. 'The basic thesis is that such quarrels often occur because policymakers possess different cognitive representations of the relations between variables in the environment' (Adelman et al. 1975: 138). Tetlock has studied the 'integrative complexity' of policy communication and rhetoric in order to understand the relation between complex contexts – such as international relations or crises – and the perceptions of government leaders. Communications may consist of 'simple responses, gross distinctions, rigidity, and restricted information usage, and at the other by complexity, fine distinctions, flexibility, and restricted information search and usage' (Suedfeld and Tetlock 1977: 169).

International contexts

Geuijen et al. (2008) approached it from a different angle; they studied how national (Dutch) administrators operate in international arenas, most specifically in EU policy-making (see also Geuijen and 't Hart's chapter 9). They call these administrators 'new Eurocrats,' and they traced their complicated working conditions and how they cope. Complications mainly follow from their distinctive roles in transnational networks. They possess specific expertise that is not easily accessible, their hierarchical superiors seldom pay attention to them, and they have to reach an 'international consensus' when engaged in multilateral negotiations. Geuijen et al. show how different role orientations produce different behavior at different loci. So-called *back-office coordinators* are involved in national departmental interactions, in order to establish departmental and national positions. *Bureaucrat-diplomats* are active in EU-policy processes – i.e., committees – trying to defend national interests and minimize costs in the field of veterinary policy, for example. *Street-level entrepreneurs* are problem solvers who exploit situations in order to get things done, often in issue-based networks that transgress national borders, in situations like when there is a need for improved police cooperation across nations. Policy workers establish links between policy options and implementation,

which has also been highlighted by others (McLaughlin 1987). The emphasis on Eurocrats nevertheless adds something to the more traditional emphases on ambiguous circumstances, namely the internationalization of policy work. Increasingly, policy happens in transnational policy networks.

Functions

> Briefly, I claim that the analysts who produce the information would like to produce clear and straightforward analyses or interpretations that could be used to make decisions or solve problems. By contrast, the way that the process works results in a type of information that is much less decisive than that (Feldman 1989: 2).

Feldman focused on the bureaucrat analysts who are engaged in 'problem solving and issue interpretation' and whose analyses are sometimes directly used in policy-making, in order to better understand how policy agents grapple with *ambiguous* circumstances. Although there are common perceptions regarding certain issues such as AIDS, national security, medical care, these perceptions may be poorly defined, and new information does not necessarily resolve the technical and ethical questions. Policy-making, then, is a process of interpretation through which agreement about how to view and define issues is negotiated. Mere content in this situation is not enough, which means that analysts and policymakers will have to rely on organizational *routines* in order to produce the necessary information, which includes concurrence processes, paper-writing routines, and the organization of expertise (Feldman 1989). Bureaucratic analysts are less problem solvers, than 'negotiators' (ibid.: 118-124) or 'boundary spanners' (ibid.: 125). When they contribute to policy formation, they 'negotiate agreements on a given issue,' which means they not only need to know a lot about the substance of issues, but also about positions and organizational contexts. Moreover, they also act as 'liaisons between interdependent organizations.'

These findings are echoed by other empirical studies of policy processes which show that it is not so much individuals or their coping behavior that are at stake, but how policy agents operate within webs of information and processes of interpretation. Following the interpretative turn in policy analysis, Tenbensel (2006) shows how policy workers deal with different types of knowledge. Earlier he showed how policy workers can never use clear 'evidence' to ground specific policies (2004). Weiss (1989) described problem definitions as 'packages of ideas' that include 'at least implicitly an account of

the causes and consequences of some circumstances that are deemed undesirable, and a theory about how a problem might be alleviated' (p. 97).

This emphasis on informational or interpretative processes parallels the empirical interests in organizational and *managerial behavior* (Mintzberg 1973; 1975), including the day-to-day behavior of policy managers such as federal bureau chiefs (Kaufman 1980) or high-ranking policy directors (Noordegraaf 2000; 2007). These studies show us the high-paced, lively and erratic nature of organizational environments, as well as how managerial work consists of a steady stream of contacts, interactions and information exchanges that follow a variety of institutional norms and procedures in order to produce outcomes. Mintzberg showed how managers face a continuous stream of people, texts and acts, and perform certain institutionalized, interpersonal, informational and decision-making 'roles' to make things happen. Kaufman noted that bureau chiefs engage in informational activities, inside and outside their own organizations, which are constrained by fixed rules, regulations and cycles. Becoming a federal bureau chief in American public administration is, according to Kaufman, like 'stepping in[to] a fast flowing river.'

Interpretation and institutions

All of this means that Feldman's emphasis on policy analysts – also visible in related policy and managerial observations – has two sides: an interpretative emphasis on policy issues as texts and conversations, and an institutional emphasis on routines and procedures, formed in order to enact *'appropriate'* policy behavior (cf. March and Olsen 1989). These sides have also been observed in other works as well, although here either the interpretative or the institutional outlooks may have been emphasized. Lynn (1987), for example, shows how policy work – particularly policy management – is a matter of institutionalized 'games,' played out in order to fabricate shared understandings of policy issues. 'Managing public policy is the deliberate effort of a public official with executive responsibilities to create favorable interpretations of governmental actions by influencing (a) the nature of the actions, (b) the consequences of those actions, and (c) the perceptions of those actions and their consequences by important constituencies' (p. 43). The 'daily lives of public executives,' as Lynn calls it, should not be judged by their *substantive rationality*, which entails 'sequentially choosing goals and subsequently designing actions to fulfill those goals' (p. 29) – but by their *procedural rationality*, which means 'their success in changing the character of governmental actions and in bringing about more favorable interpretations of governmental actions' (p. 31). This calls for the appropriate use of goals, resources such as time, atten-

tion and influence, and constraints. Likewise, Hall and McGinty (1997) show how policy can be seen as 'the transformation of intentions,' as a 'flexible process whereby many actors with different intentions, interests and interpretations enter into the process at different points along its course' (p. 441). Difficulties that arise during the process can be very mundane, involving such things as how to categorize responsibilities, for example, when career ladders for teachers are being devised? Certain *conventions*, like committees with chairs, make cooperation and coordination simpler, as they establish linkages, which enable participants to 'create their own practical arrangements for the furtherance of their intentions' (p. 462). 'Through attempting to see their intentions reflected in the policy process, policy actors create conditions that can become consequential at linked future sites and phases of policy activity' (p. 463).

Tenbensel (2002) also privileges institutions: 'The chief concern of policymakers ... should be to concentrate on the structures and institutions through which information is interpreted' (p. 192). By studying the role of mediating bodies in setting priorities in health care, he shows how these bodies 'interpret the public voice' (p. 174), which is essential for enhancing the rationality and legitimacy of setting priorities. Such findings are utilized in critical-interpretative research views, which – like Tenbensel – extend their analyses to spheres beyond the formal policy circles, but also alter our understanding of interpretative processes (see also Shore's ch. 11). Yanow (1996), for instance, did not analyze 'what' a policy means, or 'why' policy officials act as they do (cf. Lynn), but *how* a policy means, how acts and objects, such as buildings, enact policy realities. Policies are not made in a vacuum simply to accomplish set goals, but in environments where policy actions are read as 'expressive statements' or 'texts' by various stakeholder groups. Policy is not just about information exchanges in policy circles. It is primarily about 'meaning making,' *outside* of the usual policy circles. This is also highlighted in the *dramaturgical* approaches to policy processes in which political processes are seen as 'sequences of staged performances of conflict and conflict resolution' (Hajer 2005: 624). Settings and their design affect 'what is said, what can be said, and what can be said with influence' (p. 624). Hajer applies this perspective to participatory policy-making, which – like Yanow's observations – not only changes our understanding of how policy meanings are produced, but also *where* meaning is generated. Policy-making cannot be isolated from the public, although 'the public becomes what the setting makes it' (p. 642).

Contours of policy work

These various clusters of insights add up to a distinctive understanding of 'real life' policy practices, although they offer multiple understandings of policy people and their work. We started with exemplary administrators who bring moral integrity to policy processes, and we ended up with policy work that generates meaningful texts and acts outside policy work. Academic accounts of policy work are diverse and heterogeneous. Nevertheless, there are also overlaps and most accounts have much in common. Before we highlight the important differences, we will sketch the contours of a second-order understanding of policy work.

Policy is 'real' but does not really 'exist'

Second-order studies of policy work show that it is difficult to define and grasp policy accurately. We can study policy practices using conversations, meetings and texts, produced by policy functionaries – advisers, executives, managers, analysts, administrators – but real people and their encounters do not automatically generate policy or policy outcomes. The shapes and dynamics of policy work depend on where these people come from, how they (are forced to) think, how they deal with contingencies, and how and where meaningful outcomes are generated. Even an emphasis on individual policy agents and how they think is not an 'actual' affair, as these individuals have positions, backgrounds and forms of expertise that enable them to participate in policy processes, or even prevent them from participating, e.g., when policy analysts lack the proper political expertise.

Second-order accounts enable us to focus on 'real' things like meetings and texts, but also force us to 'see through' these real things in order to understand why they are there, how they evolve, and how collections of meetings and texts constitute policy patterns over time. This clarifies the added value that was hinted at before: day-to-day policy experiences (first order) are insufficient for truly understanding what is going on, especially over time, but bigger pictures of arenas and structures (third order) miss the actual day-to-day encounters that constitute policy practices.

Policy work is connective and transformative

In order to contribute to or 'make' policy, raw policy material such as concerns, information and proposals must be transformed into something that is recognized or perceived as 'policy.' Policy practices consist of people, texts, acts, and

objects, and how they are configured determines what new texts, acts and objects are produced. How politico-administrative relations are structured, for instance, influences how policy-making happens. Basically, this means that policy workers must enter into relations with other policy actors, which explains why policy 'sites' like meetings and texts are so important. They are sites at which some sort of 'input' is transformed into something else. Intentions, for example, are transformed into options, problems are transformed into problem definitions, and alternatives must be transformed into transferable categories. This means that relations or connections as such are insufficient. Signals, events and ideas must be translated, in order to generate some sort of policy 'outcome.' Policy cues must be picked up, (political) conditions must be taken into account, options must be negotiated, and interpretations of actions (by relevant others) should be influenced. Policy analysts, for instance, will have to present 'correct' policy options, but also move options ahead by keeping an eye on political feasibility.

How policy work happens, is 'malleable,' but constrained

Policy agents have a certain amount of leeway to act, but all of the accounts also stress the limits of policy action. Policy work is highly routinized: many parameters determine the course of interactive and interpretative processes such as the social and educational backgrounds of officials, the organizational routines of agencies, and the recognized points for discussion and choice. Various work-related mechanisms and organizational routines constrain policy work; *while* they enable policy agents to act in the face of complexity and ambiguity, they reduce behavioral options. Policy administrators cannot suddenly negotiate with members of Parliament, or contact outsiders, they cannot by-pass their superiors or come up with creative changes in paper flows. Work-related mechanisms also 'protect' administrators – e.g., street-level bureaucrats alleviating work pressures by stereotyping clients.

In short, policy work is a highly institutionalized phenomenon and for good reason: the structuring of policy processes mitigates ambiguity and facilitates the production of shared understandings. Certain rules for using resources help policy officials to change the course of governmental action. At the same time, institutional *insecurities* may increase. Managerial reform affects traditional working methods, the rise of transnational networks confuses policy mandates, and the normality of participatory processes accelerate policy exchanges with people outside policy circles. Flexibility and networks affect *why* policy is formed, *what* officials do, *where* actions occur, and *how* policy happens.

Differences

Despite these commonalities and 'overall' results of studying policy practices, there is no one definitive second-order view of policy work. The accounts differ because they are backed by different theoretical notions (and by different academic positions that legitimate such notions). This means that the notion of 'everyday processes' differs for different scholars. For some scholars, the 'everydayness' of policy formation is a matter of individual features such as values, opinions and interactions. For some, it is a matter of behavioral mechanisms that relate contexts and consequences: of coping mechanisms and roles. For others, it is a matter of interpretative acts, which enact and reproduce the policy realities of ambiguities and conventions. This implies that different scholars take different stances and find distinctive ways to show what 'really' happens when people do policy.

This does *not* mean that all three accounts offer well-rounded pictures of policy work. Different scholars find different things, even if they share stances and conceptual outlooks and 'belong' to a certain account. This is partly a matter of contingency, which depends on times and places (such as countries) so that studies may end up producing distinctive images of policy processes. In contemporary public administration, relations between politicians and administrators have changed over time because contacts between policymakers in different countries have increased and citizens often play more prominent roles in policy-making. But it is also a matter of how scholars frame and present research. Accounts that favor dispositions, for example, might emphasize individual traits, like moral integrity, but also the social formation of individual behavior, e.g., through education. Researchers might frame politico-administrative relations in terms of distinctions like energy/equilibrium, or in terms of metaphors like 'village life.' Accounts that focus on contexts and coping behaviors may highlight the roles of policy agents or the processes aimed at taming the general messiness and structuring problems. Accounts that stress the interpretative functions of policymakers may reveal how texts are made meaningful or how institutions generate meaning.

More generally, these various accounts may highlight episodic outputs (policy behavior and activities) *or* the continuing process by which they are produced and made meaningful. But even then, scholars often differ in terms of their critical inclinations. Some open up the black boxes of policy formation in order to show how things are working when policy is 'made.' They may end up showing how politico-administrative interactions work or how policy analysts get a grip on messy circumstances. Other researchers open black boxes in order to improve our understanding of policy-making and perhaps

to improve policy outcomes. In-depth analysis of the problem-defining policy behavior may, for example, help analysts to find improved problem definitions. Some researchers may attempt to alter our understanding of where relevant black boxes are. Instead of focusing on policy making and asking 'what' policymakers and others do in order to generate meaningful policy options, they may alter our understanding of where policy occurs and how it happens. This may be motivated by a search for 'just' policies.

Conclusion

Despite the differences between second-order accounts of policy work, we can see the relevance of studying policy work through outlooks that stay close to day-to-day policy practices. Although second-order accounts are situated between real, day-to-day experiences and more abstract scholarly perspectives on policy processes, they do more than combine experiences and perspectives. They focus on the nature of policy and the evolution of policy processes, also *over time*, by showing how policy becomes 'real' through 'real' texts, acts and objects that make up normal working days. The things that structure the policy worker's perceptions – earlier encounters, experiences and events, certain configurations of people, established ideas, routines and sites – such as certain scheduled meetings or paper flows – reproduce routines and procedures, but also enable policy agents to come up with new ideas, respond to new cues, and generate new outcomes. On the one hand, these structures enable the predictable interactions, which generate shared meaning, transforming ideas into commitments and proposals into authoritative policy texts. On the other hand, while structure frames action as appropriate, it does not determine it, and policy workers have to plot their own course in a contingent, contested and ambiguous world.

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