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Forum

Why policies succeed or fail: the importance of 'policy consonance'

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Abstract
This article takes stock of the literature on policy success and policy failure. The huge amount of studies on the subject does not provide a clear and agreed answer to the question: what determines the success or failure of a policy?

The paper attempts to answer this question by introducing the analytical scheme of the 'policy pentagram'. The proposed framework conceives of public policies as consisting of five basic components: 1) policy goals; 2) policy instruments; 3) the organizational structure in charge of implementation; 4) the recipients of the policy; 5) policy communication.

For a policy to be successful, there must be 'consonance' between its five components. Consonance does not indicate generic compatibility or the absence of contradictory elements: it indicates synergy and a high degree of complementarity between policy components, which thus end up mutually reinforcing each other.

To show the practical usefulness of the policy pentagram framework, a concrete example is given: the experience of the Bologna breast milk bank.

Keywords
policy success, policy failure, consonance, policy design, policy strategy, policy making

1.Introduction

There is essentially one question that policy makers ask policy scholars: what do we have to do for our policies to succeed? The question can also be declined to the negative: why do many policies fail?

This question is evidently of paramount importance in the field of policy studies. This is confirmed by the fact that the contributions on policy failure and policy success are innumerable. Many of the 'founding fathers' of the discipline dealt specifically with the analysis of policies that did not produce the desired outcomes. Over the decades, the topic has continued to be crucial within the discipline, and in recent times seems to be attracting renewed interest.

However, this impressive body of literature does not provide unambiguous and widely accepted indications as to the key factors that determine the success or failure of public policies. What, in the end, is the crucial ingredient that leads a public program to success? What, conversely, is the lethal mistake that must not be made if a policy fiasco is to be avoided?

This article tries to address these questions, proposing a parsimonious analytical framework which brings together strands of literature that have so far had little dialogue with each other. Central to the framework presented here is the concept of 'consonance' between the elements of the 'policy pentagram', which will be illustrated in the following sections.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 is devoted to an essential literature review on the topics of policy failure and policy success. In section 3, the concept of 'policy consonance' is defined and the five components of the 'policy pentagram' are presented. Section 4 provides a practical application of the policy pentagram. The concluding section aims to discuss the limitations and future perspectives of the proposed analytical framework.

2. The literature on policy success and policy failure

Factors leading to policy failure

Since the seminal contributions of authors such as Selznick (1949) or Pressman & Wildavsky (1973), a rich strand of policy studies has focused on the failure of public programs (Kerr, 1976; Hall, 1982; McConnell, 2010a; Howlett, 2012; King & Crewe, 2013; Howlett et al., 2015; McConnell, 2015; Bovens et al., 2001; Schuck, 2014; Leong & Howlett, 2022).

In most cases, unsuccessful policies are called 'policy failures' (Bovens et al., 2001; McConnell, 2010a; Howlett, 2012; McConnell, 2015) but also 'policy disasters' (Hall, 1982; Dunleavy, 1995; Gray & 't Hart, 1998), 'policy blunders' (King & Crewe, 2013) and 'policy fiascos' (Bovens & 't Hart, 1996; Oppermann & Spencer, 2016), among other terms. Bringing together a huge number of concrete experiences (in various countries, at various times, at various levels of government), this strand of literature focuses on the dynamics and factors that determine the failure of public programs.

Policies can fail for a myriad of reasons, including: the policy goals are ambiguous and contradictory (Selznick, 1949; Matland, 1995); the objectives of the policies are evil in themselves, normatively not justifiable and immoral, and therefore not acceptable (Kerr, 1976; Leong & Howlett, 2022); the public programs are approved, but then lack the necessary political and social support (Matland, 1995; McConnell, 2010b); the policies are based on policy frames and problem diagnoses that turn out to be fallacious (Bovens & 't Hart, 1995); there is no good matching between goals and policy instruments, with the latter proving unsuitable for achieving the desired objectives (Salamon, 2002; McConnell, 2010b); the policy measures have

unforeseen, perverse and undesirable effects (Merton, 1949); there is a lack of resources – both material and immaterial – to implement fully the policies adopted (Kerr, 1976); implementation is slowed down and boycotted by the resistance of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) and more generally by all those who have no interest in the implementation of the program (Selznick, 1949; Bardach, 1977); the policy makers underestimate the peculiarities of the context in which public policies are to be implemented (Linder & Peters, 1989; Matland, 1995); there is a lack of policy leadership (Milward, 1980; Roberts, 1992). And the list could go on and on. It can take only one of the factors listed above to determine the unsatisfactory outcome of a policy. But, typically, it is the interaction of more than one factor that amplifies the failure of a public policy and turns it into a complete disaster (Perrow, 1984).

The key factors associated with policy success

More recently, a strand of studies focusing not so much on the failure, but on the success, of public policies has also taken shape (McConnell, 2010b; Marsh & McConnell, 2010; Compton & 't Hart, 2019; Compton et al., 2019; Luetjens et al., 2019; de la Porte et al., 2022; Lindquist et al., 2022). Scholars focusing on policy success have tried to reverse the perspective. They started from policy experiences considered successful and tried to go to the source of this success. Again, multiple factors that may contribute to the success of a policy were outlined.

Luetjens et al. (2019), analyzing many cases of successful public policy in Australia and New Zealand, identify six 'emerging patterns' that lead to success: 1) problems must be well defined and broadly acknowledged from the outset; 2) ample time must be allowed for policies to 'mature' (policy solutions need to be debated and developed over a reasonable period); 3) strong support is needed from policy entrepreneurs; 4) policy responses are considered appropriate by government and presented at the right time; 5) there is bipartisan and broad stakeholder support; and 6) constant attention is paid to the various stages of the implementation process.

In their analysis of successful policies in the Nordic countries, de la Porte et al. (2022) identify four 'enablers of success': 1) inclusive policymaking, aiming at building a broad consensus; 2) an anticipatory approach, taking a long-term perspective; 3) policy narratives that make policies legitimate on the basis of widely shared values; 4) lesson-drawing and coupling with pre-existing programs.

Engaging in the same kind of analytical exercise, but with reference to the Canadian experience, Lindquist et al. (2022) identify the following factors as crucial: policy leadership; independent legal authority and fiscal capacity on the part of the government; skillful administrative professionalism and government capacity; broad popular support; and the concomitance of contingent and fortuitous elements.

These (and other) scientific contributions on the topic each propose a different list of 'determinants' of policy success. These factors are manifold and must be combined for policies to have a better chance of success. Despite the differences between the individual lists, some 'factors' recur more than others: 1) the need for inclusive processes that build broad coalitions to support policy (Compton et al., 2019; Luetjens et al., 2019; de la Porte et al., 2022; Lindquist et al., 2022); 2) a step-by-step approach, based on incremental solutions, policy learning and a slow pace of change (Compton et al., 2019; Luetjens et al., 2019; de la Porte et al., 2022); 3) the crucial role played by policy entrepreneurs (Luetjens et al., 2019; Lindquist et al., 2022).

What is meant by policy success

This paper adopts the conceptualization proposed by McConnell (2010a; 2010b) – taken up and further developed by other authors (including Newman, 2014; Goyal, 2021; Leong & Howlett, 2022; Lindquist et al., 2022) – according to which, policy success can be disaggregated into three dimensions: programmatic, process and political success. The *programmatic* dimension is essentially about achieving goals, producing desired outcomes and creating benefits for the target group. The process dimension pertains to conferring legitimacy in the formation of choices, preserving policy goals and instruments and building a sustainable coalition. The *political* dimension is related to achieving high levels of social, political and administrative support. Since success in one of these three dimensions of policy does not always go hand in hand with success in another (McConnell, 2010b; Goyal, 2021), it must be concluded that the overall success of a policy comes from achieving and maintaining over time high levels of programmatic, process and political efficacy (Lindquist et al., 2022).

Such conceptualization suggests thinking not in binary terms (a policy program is either a success or a failure), but in terms of a continuum (McConnell, 2010a; 2010b; 2015): most public programs in fact turn out to be neither a complete success nor a total failure. Between the two extremes of the continuum, there are many 'grey areas' (McConnell, 2010a) in which success is partial or not recognized as such by all (Lindquist et al., 2022).

This last aspect deserves special attention, as it raises the important methodological and epistemological issue concerning 'success by whom' (Marsh & McConnell, 2010). Public programs can indeed be evaluated on the basis of objective indicators, but the judgment with respect to the overall success of a policy always has an inevitable subjective component (Newman, 2014). As McConnell puts it, '*success is in the eye of the beholder*' (McConnell, 2010a, 351). Evaluation regarding the success or failure of a public program is fatally influenced by contextual, cultural and political factors (Bovens et al., 2001). In short, we are well aware that evaluation regarding the success of a policy may always be contested to some degree (Marsh & McConnell, 2010).

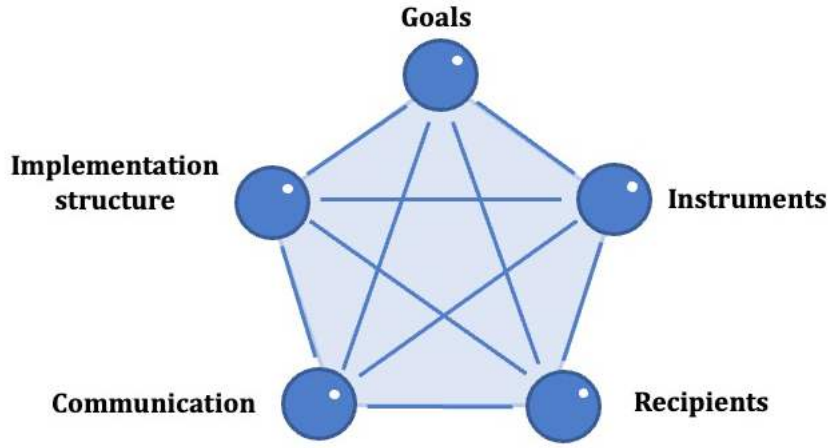
3. The conceptual framework: the 'policy pentagram'

The above-mentioned literature does not seem to provide a clear answer to the following questions: what determines the success or failure of a policy? What do policies considered successful have in common with each other?

This article tries to reason about such questions – crucial for all policymakers – by applying the concept of 'consonance' to public policy. This involves the adoption of a new conceptual framework. This framework conceives of public policies as consisting of five components:

policy goals;
policy instruments;
the organizational structure in charge of implementation;
the recipients of the policy;
policy communication.

Figure 1 – The 'policy pentagram'



Source: the Author

Policy consonance

The argument made in this article is simple: the success and failure of a policy depends on the degree of consonance between its five components. A high degree of consonance leads to policy success, while a low degree of consonance results in policy failure.

The framework presented here is largely inspired by management studies, and in particular by the concepts of 'business idea' and 'service management systems' introduced by Richard Normann (1977; 2001). The business idea is defined by Normann (1977, p. 25) as the '*degree of consonance between a market segment, the product that the company has on offer, and the company's internal organization*'. Central to Normann's conceptualization is the concept of 'consonance'. "*The company's structure*," Normann (1977, p. 16) argues, "*can be seen as a number of interdependent subsystems […]. We are going to describe relations between subsystems in terms of their degree of consonance or fit. If subsystems support one another's functions, we say that there is fit between them; if not, there is misfit*'.

Concepts and models borrowed from managerial theories – focusing on business companies aiming to gain an advantage over competitors and dominate the market – cannot be translated literally into the field of public policy. They must necessarily be adapted.

We propose to use the expression 'policy consonance' to indicate the degree of fit and complementarity between different components of a policy. In policy studies, similar concepts have already been proposed (Howlett & Rayner, 2006; 2013; Kern & Howlett, 2009; Rogge & Reichardt, 2016; Migone et al., 2023): 'coherence', 'consistency', 'congruence', 'alignment', and others. The concept of 'policy consonance' therefore doesn't come out of the blue. As conceived by Normann, consonance is more than a generic compatibility and affinity: it indicates synergy and a high degree of complementarity between the elements, which thus end up being mutually reinforcing. There is consonance when the pieces of a mosaic fit together perfectly and complement each other.

The five components

Policy goals

Policy goals constitute the objectives that policy makers aim to achieve. As confirmed by empirical research, however, the analysis of policy objectives can prove slippery. Indeed, it cannot be taken for granted that policies have clear, unambiguous objectives that perfectly match those officially stated. In fact, policy programs may have multiple, ambiguous, conflicting objectives (Selznick, 1949; Matland, 1995). Policymakers may declare policy objectives that they do not really intend to pursue (Gustafsson, 1983), policy objectives may change over time (Migone et al., 2023), or policy makers may have an interest in not publicly stating their real goals while declaring others (Edelman, 1964). Thus, there are various reasons why policy goals may be ambiguous, and why officially stated goals may not coincide with actual goals.

This consideration regarding the ambiguity of policy goals does not limit the usefulness of the analytical framework presented here. The policy pentagram scheme lends itself to application from the perspective of policy makers as well as from the perspective of the policy analyst or policy recipients. Each will attribute to the policy program the goals they deem appropriate, assessing accordingly the consonance between these goals and the other components of the policy pentagram. As noted above, policy success is a subjective assessment: a program may be considered a success from the perspective of the individual policy maker (who fully achieves his or her tacit goals), but a failure in the eyes of a policy analyst (who assesses the achievement of officially stated goals). And vice versa.

Policy instruments

Policy instruments are the means – both substantive and procedural, as Howlett (2000; 2011) puts it – through which policy makers intend to pursue policy goals. Much has already been written about policy instruments (Hood, 1983; Doern & Phidd, 1983; Schneider & Ingram, 1990; Vedung, 1998; Salamon, 2002; Howlett, 2011; Capano & Howlett, 2020). It is rare for a public program to include only a single instrument; more frequently, decision makers assemble 'instrument mixes' that include instruments of a different nature (Howlett & Rayner, 2007; Kern & Howlett, 2009).

Implementation structure

The implementation structure is the network of actors in charge of implementing policy measures. Studies on policy implementation attach great importance to the 'organizational structure' in charge of implementing public programs (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Bardach, 1977; Hjern & Porter, 1981; Lipsky, 1980). Policies can fail because the 'implementers' do not have the resources, capabilities or will to implement fully the planned policy measures. The dimensions of politics and agency are critical to understanding the implementation process, but the organizational and institutional arrangements also play an important role (Sager & Gofen, 2022). The analysis of the implementation structure therefore also includes the institutional setting and the specific organizational design within which the implementation process takes place. In the simplest cases, the implementers all belong to the same public agency. More frequently, the implementation of a public program requires the collaboration of multiple public and private actors (Hjern & Porter, 1981).

Policy recipients

Interactions between policy instruments, types of target, and compliance by policy takers is a topic still largely under-examined in the literature (Howlett, 2018; Capano & Howlett, 2020).

Many policy makers tend to consider the recipients of public programs as passive subjects, as if citizens have to abide supinely by the authoritative decisions of lawmakers, and can only express their approval (or dissent) towards adopted policies at election time. This is a naive, distorted picture of the policy-making process. Citizens – at least in most policies – are not passive recipients (Alford, 2009). On the contrary, policy recipients are actors who must be activated, convinced and motivated (Profeti & Toth, 2025). Most policies require – to be successful and to achieve policy goals – the participation, cooperation and support of policy recipients (Ostrom & Ostrom, 1977; Whitaker, 1980; Alford, 2009). As has been widely argued (Osborne et al., 2016), policy making is involving – increasingly – processes of co-design and co-production, with the active involvement of users at all stages of the policy process. For this reason, the success of policies depends on the degree of compliance by policy recipients. And to obtain their effective compliance, the target population must be engaged, motivated and supported.

In conceptualizing the recipients of a policy, it is useful to distinguish between primary (or direct) recipients, ultimate (or indirect) recipients and beneficiaries (Capano & Toth, 2023). These categories sometimes coincide, but sometimes do not. Primary recipients are those to whom the policy measure is directly addressed and on whose activation the achievement of the objective depends. Ultimate (or indirect) recipients are those whose behavior the policy ultimately wants to influence. Let's take an example: a policy initiative that incentivizes employees to cycle to work by providing a reward to the respective company. In a case such as this, the policy maker's assumption is that the primary recipients (the company's management) have an interest in acting to influence the behavior of their subordinates (the ultimate recipients). The entire community (including primary and ultimate recipients) will benefit from the policy.

Within the policy pentagram, consonance must be assessed with respect to both primary and ultimate recipients, as the success of a policy program descends from its ability to activate both categories.

Policy communication

Many policies do not have the desired effect simply because the target audience is not aware of them, or because the measures taken by policy makers are misunderstood and miscommunicated. Policy communication can be understood as the way in which policy makers publicly present the content and purpose of a policy package. To emulate Normann, one could talk about the 'image' of the policy package. Image '*may be a good or bad representation of reality, but whatever it may be it is always significant because it guides behaviour*' (Normann, 2001, p. 149).

How policies are communicated is an obviously crucial, yet still largely unexplored, issue in policy studies (Spitzer, 1993; Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010). Policy scholars have traditionally paid much more attention to 'problem framing' (i.e., how policy problems are interpreted and represented) (Schön & Rein, 1994; Bacchi, 2009) than to 'policy communication' (the public presentation and justification of policy measures actually adopted).

Partial exceptions in this regard are those contributions on crisis management that attach great importance to 'meaning making' (Boin et al., 2005; Ansell et al., 2010; Boin et al., 2021), i.e., the ability to provide a credible narrative of the situation and communicate it effectively to the public. Of course, meaning making does not apply only in crisis situations. All policy measures require some narrative, public justification, and political rhetoric to make them legitimate and appropriate in the eyes of the policy recipients and the public. Just like marketable goods and services, public policies also need a marketing component, as nudge studies have pointed out well (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Sunstein, 2014; John, 2018). We are not, therefore, talking only about 'policy narratives' (Jones & McBeth, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2011) or 'policy argu-

ments' (Majone, 1989 Dunn, 2017). Policy communication may use 'policy narratives' and usually incorporates some form of 'policy argument', but it is a broader concept.

In Normann's conceptualization, a company's communication strategy is conceived as dual: in addition to external image, great importance is also attached to 'internal marketing' (Berry et al., 1976; Normann, 2001). This distinction also applies to public programs. Alongside external communication (aimed at the public and policy recipients), there is also 'internal' communication, aimed specifically at the public administration and the actors that make up the implementation structure. To achieve a high degree of policy success, both external and internal communication will need to be 'consonant' with the other four components of the policy pentagram.

4. The framework in action: the case of the Bologna breast milk bank

To show the practical usefulness of the policy pentagram framework, a concrete example is given: the experience of the breast milk bank in Bologna (Italy).

Let's start with the policy problem. Scientific literature agrees that human milk increases the chance of survival of premature infants by aiding their growth and development (Arslanoglu et al., 2010; Haiden & Ziegler, 2016; Moro et al., 2019). Often, however, the mothers of premature infants are unable to provide milk in sufficient quantity (Kim & Unger, 2010; Haiden & Ziegler, 2016).

The policy solution recommended by WHO and UNICEF (1979), and adopted in many countries around the world (Haiden & Ziegler, 2016; Weaver et al., 2019), is the 'breast milk bank'. The objective of milk banks is to select, collect, process and distribute breast milk from donor mothers, to be used for breastfeeding infants hospitalized in neonatal intensive care units. About 40 local milk banks currently operate in Italy.

The Bologna milk bank is the result of a public-private partnership between a public hospital (the Sant'Orsola Polyclinic, one of Italy's largest hospitals), a private company (Granarolo, Italy's largest dairy group) and a non-profit voluntary association. Breast milk is periodically collected by volunteers directly from the donor mothers' homes. Once collected, the breast milk is taken to a special laboratory within the Granarolo company's production facility. Here the milk is pasteurized and stored in special refrigerators, waiting to be taken to the neonatal intensive care units that request it. About a decade after its establishment, the Bologna milk bank is proving a success: the volume of milk collected makes it possible to meet the needs not only of the Sant'Orsola Polyclinic, but also of other regional hospitals. This success is due to a high degree of consonance between the five elements of the 'policy pentagram'.

First, there is alignment between policy *goals* and policy *instruments*. The families of the beneficiary infants pay no cost for the milk received, in accordance with the universalist aims of the Italian National Health Service (Toth, 2016; Toth, 2021). The 'milk bank' model relies on volunteer lactating mothers. Beyond ethical and moral considerations, the voluntary donation model is considered to provide superior guarantees – in terms of the safety of the collected milk – compared with other models in which women give up their milk in exchange for an economic reward (Gribble, 2013; Haiden & Ziegler, 2016). In the milk bank model, donor women receive only intrinsic and intangible rewards, i.e. the knowledge that they are helping infants in need. When a baby bottle of milk is delivered to a hospitalized baby, the donor mother receives a text message: a detail with great symbolic significance.

Second, the Bologna milk bank relies on an '*implementation structure*' perfectly functional in terms of the policy goals and policy instruments. The Sant'Orsola Polyclinic is responsible for

identifying premature infants who are most in need of donated breast milk. The collection, processing and delivery activities are carried out, at no cost to the public health service, by the Granarolo company. The latter – unlike the public hospital – has the expertise and instrumentation to process and store fresh milk. The Granarolo company bears the costs of running the laboratory, the staff processing the milk, the van transporting the baby bottles and some public communication initiatives. The dairy company carries out these activities 'pro bono', motivated by the desire to have a positive impact on its community and to increase its social reputation. The service of collecting and distributing milk bottles is carried out by volunteers. The non-profit association takes care – free of charge – of 'recruiting' donor mothers and promoting awareness-raising and support activities for both donor mothers and the families of the premature babies. The hospital staff is thus relieved of many tasks which are carried out by the association's volunteers. The actors involved thus end up contributing to the program by each pursuing their own mission: the public hospital treats premature infants free of charge; the private company gains social reputation by serving the community; the volunteers provide support to the families of particularly vulnerable infants.

Thirdly, we turn to the *policy recipients*. Hospitalized premature infants constitute the beneficiaries of the program. The milk bank, to be successful, requires the activation and full cooperation of the donor mothers (who constitute the 'primary recipients' of the program). As it is intended for premature and vulnerable infants, the breast milk distributed by the bank must meet high safety standards. Therefore, the selection of healthy and reliable donors is essential for the program's success (Arslanoglu et al., 2010). Selected donor mothers undergo an initial blood test and are asked to adhere to strict lifestyle and dietary requirements (no drugs, no smoking, a limited amount of alcohol and caffeine consumption, etc.). Adherence to the project therefore requires strong motivation and continuous commitment on the part of the donor mothers. This is why it is important that mothers freely decide to join the program, without coercion or financial pressure. The consonance between policy instruments and the target population can also be seen in the fact that the formula adopted in Bologna strives to limit the costs and inconveniences for donors. The latter can extract milk while remaining at home. The equipment needed to extract and store the milk is provided free of charge by the dairy company. The examinations that donor mothers must undergo are totally free of charge for them. The mothers therefore do not have to bear any costs and this is clearly an incentive to join the project.

Finally, we come to *communication*. The Bologna milk bank project is publicized on the promoters' websites. Posters and information material concerning the initiative are placed in public health facilities. The initiative is also presented to pregnant women participating in pre-natal courses organized by the local health authority. Institutional communication emphasizes the solidaristic and voluntary purpose of the project, aimed at treating and supporting particularly vulnerable new-born babies. Institutional communication tools are complemented by direct and informal communication (which proves very effective in 'persuading' donor mothers). Many women learn about the project through word of mouth: mothers who have donated milk in the past convince other lactating mothers to do the same. The fact that the entire process is supervised by the medical team at the Sant'Orsola Polyclinic (a hospital considered to be of excellence at national level) is a guarantee for both the donors and the beneficiary babies. The public image of the program and the way it is communicated are therefore highly congruent with the altruistic motivations of the donor mothers and the program's aims.

It is not intended to argue here that the Bologna breast milk bank experience, as described, is a 'perfect' public program. It is, more simply, a local program that is achieving its goals, thanks to good policy design and a high degree of consonance between policy components.

5.Concluding discussion

We started with the question: what factors determine the success or failure of a policy? The answer given in this article is simple: success or failure depends on the degree of 'consonance' between the essential components of each policy (goals, instruments, implementation structure, policy recipients and communication). The author of this article is well aware that he is not reinventing policy studies, nor does he believe he has found the Holy Grail. More modestly, this article – openly inspired by the work of Richard Normann – attempts to assemble elements already present in previous studies (some dimensions have already been extensively analyzed, while others are under-explored), adapting and reorganizing them into a different conceptualization. The present article limits itself to the presentation of a provisional framework, with the intention of making a modest contribution to the debate on a topic (the determinants of success and failure of public policies) that is evidently crucial, but still controversial.

An agenda for future research

The framework presented here opens up multiple avenues for future research, on both the empirical and theoretical levels.

On the practical application front, it is evident that the analytical scheme proposed in this article needs to be empirically tested. Practical applications of the analytical scheme may provide useful feedback on how to improve the 'policy pentagram'. It may be that, in addition to the five already identified, there are other components to be included in the scheme, or that the components need to be defined differently than in Section 3. The policy pentagram is, in short, only a first formulation, open to criticism and suggestions, to be further refined.

On the theoretical reflection front, some exciting scenarios open up. We see at least four challenges ahead.

The first challenge concerns the relationship between the policy pentagram and the most established theoretical approaches to policy process research, such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the Multiple Streams Framework, the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, etc. The framework proposed here – as pointed out in the previous sections – is inspired by managerial studies and starts from assumptions different from those of many policy theories. Future research may investigate how to combine the policy pentagram with the most established theories of the policy process: is the framework proposed here complementary, orthogonal or alternative to them?

The second challenge concerns the transfer of policies from one context to another, stemming from Normann's clarification regarding the non-replicability of business ideas. Indeed, Normann believes that every business idea is unique and non-replicable. To be successful, it is not enough to copy *sic et simpliciter* the 'recipe for success' of some other company. The business idea works in relation to a precise temporal and geographical context. The same can be said of public policies. As confirmed by the case of the breast milk bank, policies are also largely context-specific (Linder & Peters, 1989; Matland, 1995; Gofen et al., 2023) and the policy formula that works in one context may not work in other settings. This builds an interesting bridge to research on lesson drawing and policy transfer.

A third challenge concerns policy change and relates to a further attribute of the business idea: according to Normann, consonance between the components of the business idea is necessarily dynamic. The business idea must evolve continuously, so as not to lose alignment between elements (the market, technology, workforce, etc.) that are constantly changing. This characteristic can also be attributed to public policies. When a 'policy formula' is successful, it is difficult to assume that it will be successful forever. To remain successful over time, policies must be able to evolve. It will then be interesting to understand to what extent the policy pentagram framework can contribute to research on policy change.

The fourth challenge concerns the link with studies on policy success and policy failure. Research on policy success attaches great importance to factors such as policy leadership, political-administrative capabilities and contingent and fortuitous elements. These factors, evidently very relevant in determining the success of a public program, do not find a place among the components of the policy pentagram as presented in the previous sections. Future research may explore to what extent, and in which ways, the 'determinants' of policy success identified in the existing literature affect the consonance between the five components of the policy pentagram.

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