When Policy Learning meets Policy Styles

Claire A. Dunlop, University of Exeter, UK c.a.dunlop@exeter.ac.uk

Claudio M. Radaelli, University College London (UCL), UK c.radaelli@ucl.ac.uk

Introduction

In this chapter we examine the classic four dimensions of style through a new perspective; that is policy learning[1]. We draw on policy learning theory to shed light on the dynamic dimensions of anticipation, reaction, consensus and imposition that characterise the policy styles view of problem solving and relationships with policy actors. We find that for each of these dimensions there is a particular types or mode of policy learning. By this we mean a mode that seems particularly suited to that dimension. However other modes of learning can also be empirically found to operate within the four dimensions. They may not be the most efficient but they have a role to play in empirical configurations.

The literature on policy learning is vast. It covers models of transfer and diffusion of policies, how governments and other actors learn how to change policies to improve on their political position or on the substance of public policy, and how information and knowledge determine policy outcomes (Freeman, 2006; Gilardi, 2010; Grin and Loeber, 2007; Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013). Here it is not appropriate to review the literature. Suffice it to say that we do not make any normative assumptions about policy learning – under certain conditions constellations of policy actors learn the wrong lesson, or lessons that are not acceptable from the point of view of standards of good governance. The differences between good and bad learning (so to speak) is unnecessary for our discussion.

Nor do we need to assume that our unit of analysis is the country – although the original formulation of the concept of policy style was based on countries (albeit with the qualifications already introduced by Richardson et al., 1982), policy learning can be examined both as characteristic of a given country or at the level of a policy domain or indeed issue. Our examples will therefore come from countries and sectors. We will also offer examples from

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[1] Though Howlett and Ramesh (1993) authored an article linking policy styles, instruments and learning, conceptually their interest was in reconceiving instruments in terms of learning as opposed to exploring the possible nature of policy styles/learning encounters.

the international dimensions, using the European Union (EU) as institution where the style is not stable, given that the variability in policy competences and decision-making procedures inside this organization.

One contribution of policy learning theory that we will use consistently is the four-fold typology of modes of learning (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013). In all modes there is learning, but the mechanisms differ. The research questions that motivate our work are therefore: what is the learning mode that matches each of the four dimensions of style, and what are these good for?

Types of learning

The policy learning literature reveals four different learning processes, or modes, which recur empirically: epistemic, reflexive, bargaining, and hierarchical. Built on a review of the learning literature, this typology (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013) is anchored to two variables: the certification of actors and the type of policy problem at hand, more precisely its tractability or level of uncertainty. When tractability is high (that means that uncertainty is low), elected politicians and bureaucracies can define the pay-offs associated with different courses of action. At the opposite, low tractability (high uncertainty) leads to reliance on epistemic communities, experts, and technical policy instruments. But, this variable is not limited to actors: it also refers to the institutional setting of learning because highly tractable problems lend themselves quite naturally to standard operating procedures, technical fora or delegation to independent regulatory agencies.

The second dimension of variation across the literature is about who, in a given policy sector during a certain period, enjoys social certification and the distribution of certification among actors. The level of social certification can be equal among the participants to a given constellation of actors. At the opposite, there are settings where some actors benefit from higher level of social certification than others. Examples are independent central banks, elected politicians deploying governmental authority, and non-governmental organizations that have

high popularity in a given political system. Social certification can also direct towards specific institutional solutions, like a parliamentary committee or an inquiry. Taken together, levels of issue tractability and actor certification provide the axes for four types of policy learning to vary (see Figure 1).

By combining the social certification of actors and the tractability of the problem we find four modes of learning: hierarchical (for relatively known problems and strong certification of certain actors); epistemic (when experts and actors with professional-technical knowledge are certified to provide solutions to problems characterised by high levels of uncertainty); bargaining (when actors are relatively equal but problems are dealt with by known technologies and relatively low levels of uncertainty); and reflexive (when relatively equal actors exploit communicative rationality collectively to explore solutions under conditions of uncertainty).
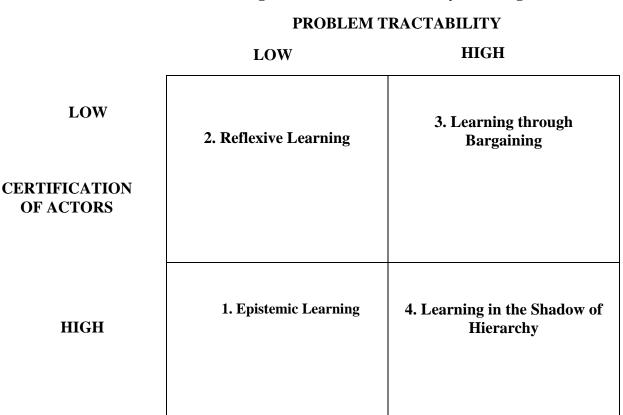
Figure 1: Four Modes of Policy Learning

PROBLEM TRACTABILITY

	LOW	HIGH
LOW CERTIFICATION OF ACTORS	**2. Reflexive Learning**	**3. Learning through Bargaining**
HIGH	**1. Epistemic Learning**	**4. Learning in the Shadow of Hierarchy**

Source: adapted from Figure 1 (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013)

When learning meets anticipation

In his latest thinking on styles, Richardson (2018a, 2018b) is downbeat about the prospects for the anticipatory style which he argues has been eclipsed by reactive (and often frenetic) and impositionary trends emerging in what he calls the move from governance to government. Yet, looking at anticipation through a learning lens, provides some room for cautious optimism. Specifically, we see two learning modes where anticipation happens: epistemic and reflexive.

When anticipatory styles of policy-making prevail in a country or, more likely, an issue, the most obvious affinity is with epistemic learning. In the original formulation, the national archetype was post-war Sweden where policy as marked by a belief in the utility of science (Richardson et al, 1982: 2) and policy-makers celebrated innovation and sought novelty. In its most ideal type, this is the world of blue skies thinking which, on the ground, finds its expression in policy tools such as foresight analysis, scenario planning and randomised control trials (RCTs) (John, 2016). The central goal of these is to reduce uncertainty.

Since the 1990s, foresight programmes (and in some places units) have sprung up across OECD country governments (for a review see Cassingena Harper, 2013; Wilsdon, 2014). Two factors motivate the rise in futures thinking – the need to link innovation with government industrial strategy (especially in the 1990s and 2000s) and, more recently, as a visible response to being caught by surprise by the 2008 financial crisis. Those who seek some linear translation from expertise to policy outcomes, will of course be disappointed. None of these foresight initiatives has resulted in a *dirigiste* allocation of resources or attention in a recommended direction. Yet, the evaluation records a variety of wins in: identifying priorities; reviewing policy in a given area (the birds eye view); making decisions more robust; and, laying the groundwork for consensus (Cassingena Harper, 2013).

While the ingredients for anticipatory governance through epistemic learning do exist, the fundamental idea that problems can be anticipated has always come under heavy fire. In their celebrated critique, Lindblom and Cohen (1979) are clear that scientific instruments – especially those of the social sciences – are simply not up to the job of dealing with let alone predicting policy problems. Certainly, there is a good deal of evidence to show that the lack of synchronicity between scientific discovery and policy imperatives means that even when

answers do appear, they often tend to be addressing 'yesterday's problems tomorrow'. More recently, Taleb's (2007) 'black swan' events suggest our ability to predict will always be partial and some policy areas – most obviously foreign policy – remain stubbornly resistant to evidence-based policy-making and expertise (Tetlock, 2005). Even more crushingly, behavioural psychology demonstrates humans conceive of the future in stories as opposed to probabilities (Kahneman, 2011).

Nonetheless, scientists often model the future accurately. Gaining and keeping the attention of high level decision-makers remains a more fundamental challenge than the reality of cognitive heuristics or occurrence of random paradigm-shifting events. Consider the foundational case studies for Peter M. Haas's epistemic communities framework. In these two cases, international scientific communities successfully informed global policy leading to action to halt emissions of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) to preserve the stratospheric ozone layer (1992) and action to 'save' the Mediterranean from further pollution (1990). In both cases, international organisations were used as bridgeheads to teach policy-makers about the likely devastating consequences of inaction.

Of course, the contrast with today's climate scientists' efforts to gain traction for their policy proposals is stark, and reminds us that policy-makers must be ready to learn what has been anticipated. And yet, the very existence of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for more than three decades demonstrates anticipatory mechanisms endure even though epistemic learning may not (yet) be fully coupled (for more on the IPCC see Bolin, 2007; Hulme and Mahony, 2010). Following Richardson et al (1982: 2, original emphasis): 'this is not to say that the 'match' between *normative* values relating to the policy process and *actual behaviour* will always be close'.

The second learning mode that sits naturally with anticipation is reflexive. In this world of dialogue, anticipatory governance is underpinned by learning from citizens and their representatives about the scope of social norms on an issue. Where these lessons are generated a functional way, the prize is enhanced social legitimacy in the policy-process.

Anticipating the social zeitgeist requires that policy debates are consciously convened using experimental techniques or institutions. Deliberative tools such as consensus conferences, participatory budgeting and citizen juries are among some of the most common ways to enable iterative communication processes where what is learned and the possible ends to which those lessons are put are entirely open. The aim here is to generate lessons about the normative

desirability of some policy ideas and to uncover views that would otherwise surprise decision-makers further down the line. To ensure reflection is truly anticipatory, these tools must be used 'upstream' in the policy cycle – when ideas are prototypes and policies unframed (Wilsdon and Willis, 2004). Such early interactions are rare however; though the idea of the upstream part of the policy process is conceptually plausible, empirically it is hard to conceive of a problem that receives policy-maker attention but remains politically unframed.

The EU – itself an experimental political project – has been the site of some examples of this form of anticipatory governance. For example, in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the European Commission and European Parliament convened a reflexive policy debate on food standards and genetic modification (GM) technologies. In response to the fast pace of technological development in the USA – from laboratory to field in just over a decade – and the pressure to accept GM imports, it was European citizens, environmentalists and animal welfare experts who were given a voice by the EU institutions – through specially convened inquiries, working groups, parliamentary evidence sessions and conferences. Their input was decisive and the result was an effective moratorium on GM production (though not consumption) in the EU (Dunlop, 2000)[2].

Public engagement has a darker side of course. Where consultations fall short of genuinely plural dialogue (and they often do) the result is a de-coupling of the public from deliberative technologies (Blanc and Ottimofiore, 2016). While the GM debate was being successfully convened in Brussels, at the member state level in the UK, the New Labour government – interested in attracting big pharma investment and taking a more scientifically 'rational' approach to GM – commissioned a national conversation called 'GM Nation'. This deliberative exercise has become an exemplar of how not to convene a reflexive conversation. Though it did illuminate contingency and challenged decision-makers' illusions of control, poorly drafted objectives, failure to engage with a wide range of citizens, inaccessible stimulus material for the discussion exercises and lack of clarity about the use of the findings in the policy-making process are some of the headline problems reported by the officially accredited but independent evaluators of the debate (Horlick-Jones et al, 2006). This reminds us that to generate functional lessons reflexive anticipation requires engagement to be deep, broad and open-ended.

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[2] In 2015, the EU approved an 'o*pt-out law'* that allows individual member states to restrict or prohibit imported genetically modified (GM) crops – even if they have been approved by the bloc as a whole (for a comprehensive account see Davison and Ammann, 2017).

The EU's story of learning through anticipation has however led to a more permanent and hierarchical institutional development whose logic is one of reaction. The GM dialogue and other similar cases – for example, milk aids, hormone growth promoters, antibiotics in meat – led to the extension of an experimental legal concept: the precautionary principle. With its roots in the 1970s German environmental movement, in the late 1990s the European Commission argued that where scientific risk assessment could not demonstrate no harm 'preventive action should be taken … environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source and that the polluter should pay' the principle has come to inform much EU policy and its application in case law has institutionalised it (European Commission, 2000). Thus, the lessons reaped in one policy-making style can ultimately result in institutions more suited to another.

When learning meets consensus

When illustrating the case of Britain, Richardson (2018a) refers to 'consensual bargaining' as essentially a power-sharing solution where government and pressure groups are equal partners in the policy process. But he also acknowledges that societies may seek consensus as style originating from deep normative values – one example being Germany (Richardson, 2018a; Richardson et al., 1982). Here, we already see the two possible connections between a consensual style and policy learning – one based on bargaining and the other on reflexivity.

Even within a single country, consensus varies across arenas. Consider the following arenas: partisan/electoral, technocratic, corporatist, multi-level and deliberative. Arguably, consensus is less likely to be achieved in the partisan/electoral arena, which is by definition competitive. The technocratic arena provides consensus via insulation from broader pressures – thus epistemic learning has a role to play, but the scope conditions for the legitimacy and democratic usage of this consensus are limited (see the analysis of scope conditions in Dunlop and Radaelli, 2020). The corporatist and multi-level arenas are suitable for consensus via bargaining. But, we should not take for granted that multi-level arenas are necessarily consensual. To illustrate, Börzel (1999) contrasted the co-operative attitudes prevalent in German Länder with institutional culture of 'competitive regionalism' in Spain. Deliberative arenas exist in local and domestic policy. They are also empirically important for domains characterised by 'governance' rather than 'government', that is multi-level, networked, poly-centric, transnational and trans-governmental settings.

In terms learning, we will allocate more space to the discussion of reflexivity – because this is the most powerful consensual style, and then make some shorter remarks on bargaining. Deliberative-participatory arenas, also known as directly-deliberative polyarchies (Cohen and Sabel, 2002) and experimentalist governance (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2008) are congenial to the type of consensus supported by reflexivity.

Deliberative arenas have been observed in policy sectors characterised by uncertainty. The EU has been identified as one of the institutional settings that provides for the emergence of these reflexive, learning-oriented, problem-solving arenas (Sabel and Zeitlin 2008; see also Sabel 1994 on learning as foundational principle for institutional architectures). The intellectual enterprise of Elinor Ostrom also speaks about similar issues, when she refers to 'action arenas' (Ostrom, 2005: 13) and 'action situations' (Ostrom, 2005: 32). Ostrom and her collaborators have shown how actors can find solution to common-pool resource problems by self-designing rules – tellingly, Ostrom refers to rules as 'tools' to cope with problems (Ostrom, 2005: 219). She also challenges the view that 'organization itself requires *central direction*' (Ostrom, 2005: 237, emphasis in original) – a key signal that the core mechanism is governance and not government.

This is the key point where we enter learning: organization via central direction requires that (at a minimum) the 'solution' to the problem at hand be known. But in the arenas studied by Ostrom, Sabel, Zeitlin and their colleagues the centre of the political system does not possess this solution. Consensus and effective problem-solving can only be generated using interactions among the network participants to find where solutions emerge. They often emerge locally, not at the centre. Reflexive learning becomes the process of (a) identifying the local solutions (b) validating them via peer review and other types of policy conversation among relatively equal participants; and (c) setting the conditions for the diffusion of the solution to the whole of the network. Importantly, Ostrom argues that this pathway to consensus via self-organization and reflection needs a model of the human being different from the 'rational egoist'. Individuals must be able 'to communicate and come to know and potentially trust one another' (Ostrom, 2005: 238). This is why we mentioned communicative rationality earlier on. Communication and trust are therefore essential to creating consensus via reflexivity.

As shown by Sabel and Zeitlin with the analysis of technical, politicised policy domains like financial regulation, macro-economic coordination, employment and energy, this does not mean that we assume away strategy and purpose-oriented intentions. Even in hard policy

choices like financial regulation and macro-economic policy in the EU, uncertainty and polyarchic conditions of governance lead actors to push beyond the limits of centralised hierarchical governance and explore the territory of reflexive learning (Zeitlin, 2016). Zeitlin and Vanhercke (2018) talk explicitly about reflexive learning in a telling example of how the EU macro-economic policy coordination architecture was geared during the years towards addressing issues of social policy. In this way, the so-called European Semester of the EU was able to widen and take into account social and employment issues in various ways, including intensified social monitoring and the inclusion of social actors in the decision-making process.

An attractive property of deliberations reached in a reflexive mode is that they stick over time. Being based on a re-thinking of the preferences that motivate behaviour, these deliberations should not present excessive compliance problems at the stage of implementation.

One common problem in public policy is that consensus is not a taken-for-granted entity. Think of a life-cycle of a regulation. There may be consensus on putting a given issue on the policy agenda, and therefore demand for a regulatory intervention. However it may be difficult to find consensus on an exact formulation of a regulation of draft law – especially but not exclusively in the presence of coalition governments. Parliamentary consensus has to be built via negotiations and careful calibration of modifications to the original intentions of the government, unless the government commands a very safe majority in the assembly. Finally, the whole process of implementation hinges on the consensus of different actors, including of course those affected by the regulation, the system of courts, and the attitude of inspectors and enforcement officers in general. Thus, when we think about reflexivity bringing about consensus, we may have in mind a specific stage of policy process, but not necessarily all the stages. If the normative foundations are sufficiently strong across society, we would expect a dialogic, reflexive attitude to permeate the different stages of arenas of the policy process.

Apart from reflexivity, the other important mode of learning to achieve consensus in open, pluralistic arenas (therefore beyond the insulated technical arenas) is via bargaining. This is what Richardson has in mind when talking about 'consensual bargaining' and the classic case of governments bargaining with pressure groups. How can bargaining be related to learning? The conceptual reference is Lindblom's partisan mutual adjustment (Lindblom, 1959, 1965). Learning is not intentionally sought by bargaining actors. It is however an important by-product of negotiations. By exchanging, an actor involved in a negotiation learns about the preferences of the others. Collectively, the actors that bargain learn how to compose controversies and find

compromises. The 'solution' in bargaining is not given ex ante. It is achieved via a learning process. This consensus is arguably less robust than the one achieved by reflexivity, because it is open to defection later on, unless proper monitoring and sanctioning devices are put in place. A classic solution to the problem of defection is to lock-in the outcome of a negotiation in an institutional choice. Going back to what we said about the life-cycle of laws and regulation, it is perfectly possible to have reflexivity generating consensus in a stage, such as agenda-setting, and bargaining in enforcement and implementation.

When learning meets reaction

Empirically, reaction is certainly more frequent than anticipation (Richardson et al. 1982; Richardson 2018). As societies, Richardson (2018a: 12) notes, we prefer to invest in coping with existing, concrete, present and tangible problems (even tragedies) than in preventing future crises and harm.

Even before the policy styles literature emerged in the 1980s, reaction was noted in the context of what Hayward (1974) called the 'humdrum' (as opposed to 'heroic') approach to public policy. For Hayward, who was studying economic planning, the humdrum approach is a continuous process of mutual adjustment among a relatively large set of policy-makers who are autonomous one from the others yet interdependent. Hayward was explicitly referring to Lindblom's theory of incrementalism, contrasting Lindblomian partisan mutual adjustment to 'heroic' comprehensive economic planning ideas. Partisan mutual adjustment in the context of reaction provides a channel for learning incrementally from the different preferences and solutions put on the table by a diverse constellation of interests. It applies to both decision-making and (perhaps even more so) to implementation as evolutionary political process where adaptation leads to the discovery of what is appropriate in different contexts of enforcement and compliance (Richardson et al., 1982: 2).

In reactive mode, the key to learning via bargaining is the presence of well-established constellations of interest groups in dense interaction with public managers. The core policy instrument to support this interaction is consultation – and for larger policy responses the instrument of public inquiries. On the one hand, consultation increases the risk of capture. On the other, it brings to the attention of policy-makers important information on why certain policy solutions may or may not work. Thus, under certain conditions it avoids mistakes and policy blunders (Richardson, 2018a).

Two important conditions make bargaining a channel for learning how to respond. One is the relatively stable, shared set of beliefs inside policy communities. In fact, the literature of the 1980s distinguished sector-level policy communities from issue networks and other type of policy networks on the basis of shared policy beliefs and stable participants (van Waarden, 1992). Within this set of beliefs and policy norms, bargaining is considered superior to hierarchical direction because there is normative support for negotiation, give-and-take, package deals, delayed compensation, and log-rolling. These beliefs are stable if the policy community is somewhat insulated from the external environment – hence the observable implication is one of fragmentation of policy processes sector by sector. The second condition is the absence or marginalisation of elected politicians. Since politicians seek consensus and avoid conflict – Richardson and colleagues reasoned (1982:10), they are happy to let insulated policy communities to solve conflict by 'private government' (Richardson et al., 1982:10). Policy problems become bureaucratised and informed by the logic of standard operating procedure, distant from the electoral arena and the high-profile political agenda where ministers and party leaders compete for the attention of public opinion.

This was for a long period a model used to describe 'governance' as opposed to the hierarchical power of 'government'. It seemed to work well not only in consensual societies such as the Netherlands and Sweden, where the politics of accommodation was a primary norm of political life. But even in countries with strong hierarchical institutions like Britain the model of 'governance' was standing up as a realistic alternative to the interpretation of British politics as direction and hierarchy from the top – this being the so-called Westminster model of 'government' (Richardson 2018a).

Although it is difficult to pin down the golden age of 'governance' and this era may vary depending on the basket of countries we look at, the more recent literature, whilst confirming the empirical predominance of response over anticipation, has pointed to a resurgence of government, or, in other words, the dominant role of state authority in the policy process (Capano et al. 2015; Richardson 2018a). Research on democratic political systems points to hierarchy as increasingly fundamental mode of learning in policy responses. This goes hand in hand with the observation of limitations to pressure group influence even in corporatist countries such as Sweden and Switzerland (evidence and literature cited in Richardson, 2018a; see also Streeck and Schmitter, 1985). According to Richardson, the British policy style typifies rather well this switch from bargaining to hierarchy – or from bottom-up consensual styles to to-down imposition. Richardson (2018a:4) notes that imposition was always a

characteristic of the EU's regulatory style (detailed rules, court procedures to adjudicate disputes) although we observe that over time the EU has moved towards framework legislation, facilitated coordination and better regulation approaches that seem less heroic that Richardson assumes (Radaelli 2018).

Be that as it may for the EU, for the UK (and perhaps other countries with the same conditions of ideational change and policy deficits) the drivers of change are two-fold. First, there has been an ideational turn towards austerity which started in Britain during the Thatcher years. When expenditure reduction rather than policy improvement becomes the main goal, the whole set of ideas about what policy should be about change. An implication is that Treasury becomes pivotal in all policy processes. The room for deliberations, consensus, high levels of consultation and mutual learning is constrained. The logic of austerity with its disciplinary/constraining norms trickles down in policy communities, changing their room for manoeuvre. Policy instruments such as consultation change from open inquiries and deliberation about what should be done to how to implement decisions taken at the top (although consultation as carrier of learning may have fallen short of expectations even in the past, see the sobering remarks on tax policy in the UK and Italy in Radaelli, 1997: 120; 128-130).

The other driver is the spread and public visibility of policy deficits. This is not directly linked to austerity. The policy reform turn is caused by the desire of government to correct the (perceived and/objective) failures of policies left to 'private government' for so long. In the UK, Richardson (2018a) observes, the government has taken a leadership role in imposing top-down hierarchical reforms to sectors such as education and public health. This has outraged previously protected interests, alienating important pressure group constituencies. But the government has been able to exercise its authority to impose changes even in the presence of strong pressure group objections and strikes.

In terms of power, the two changes have altered the relationship between ministers and the civil service, with public managers losing their influence on policy decisions to ministers, their personal advisers and think tanks. The high level of the civil service has somewhat lost its role in policy initiation, turning to the role of carrier of ministerial ideas or agent of elected politicians (Richardson 2018a:44). Consequently, civil servants have now less room to bargain and strike deals with pressure groups – which are in any case antagonised by ministerial direct intervention. The recent process of Brexit has confirmed the marginalization (compared to the

past) of the high civil service and pressure groups that in the past would have been considered fundamental in learning about policy solutions (Dunlop et al., 2020).

Is this change from governance to government productive of high quality learning? Richardson sheds doubts on whether this learning via hierarchy can ever be functional. He observes that the frequent intervention of ministers with new ideas about how to tackle policy deficits and failures has turned into frenetic, pop-up policy making. For him, the British government turn is arguably a policy illness he calls 'reformitis' (Richardson, 2018a: 38). Consultation, as mentioned, has reduced its potential to bring about enlighten and deliberation. Too much powering reduces the room for policy puzzling (van Nispen and Scholten, 2016, cited by Richardson, 2018b).

The presence of crises like 9/11, migrations, financial instability, and the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be handled by pop-up policies with short time-horizon and high likelihood of reversal. Specialist political appointees are not familiar with the granular management of policy sectors required by orderly policy-making processes of decision and implementation. More 'political' policies are not necessarily 'better' policies (Richardson, 2018a: 57). Dealing with Brexit as Europeanization in reverse gear (Radaelli and Salter, 2019) and Covid-19 are processes too complicated and technical to be left in the hands of those affected by reformitis – perhaps the pendulum is ready to swing back to more governance (Richardson, 2018b: 231).

When learning meets imposition

The previous observation about the governance-to-government turn takes us in the territory of imposition. Far from being hollowed out by governance and policy-making by consensual intermediation of interest groups (Rhodes, 1997), the state has endured and its institutions have begun to re-activate themselves as the central actors in policy-making.

When imposition meets belief updates we encounter learning in the shadow of hierarchy. Such contexts are marked, not by a plurality of actors bargaining or deliberating but rather, by hierarchical mechanisms strong enough to force knowledge use. What are these mechanisms? Hierarchy is rooted in institutions' formal structures, rules of the game and norms – which shape the production, content and utilisation of knowledge (Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett, 2007; March and Olsen, 1984). As we have established, for some, hierarchy has nothing to do with learning and, certainly, where authority is underpinned by little more than credible threats

this cannot be learning. However, individual bureaucrats, government departments and courts rely on institutional norms. It is these rules – formal and informal – that enable public actors to learn what to do, when and the role they are supposed to play. In this sense, the shadow of hierarchy *is* a learning mode.

Take the example of an oversight body like the EU's Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB). Though it lacks the power of any formal means with which to sanction individual Directorate Generals, the RSB evaluates the quality of impact assessments (IA) and can instruct a DG to revise the document. Thus, by acting as a learning platform, the RSB pulls DGs toward compliance and ensures learning is locked in to the very early stages of EU policy development (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2016, 2019). The courts similarly demonstrate how lessons can be pushed through hierarchical means. Taking the example of IA once more, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) increasingly uses IA as *obiter dicta* – material which are non-binding but are nonetheless mentioned in rulings as helpful in establishing the original rationale for regulations (Alemanno, 2011, 2016).

For some, thinking about the possibilities that arise where learning meeting imposition may still appear to be contradictory. To see the logic it helps to turn to cases where hierarchy has crumbled. The above-mentioned Brexit process in the UK is instructive. Here, ministerial divisions and the breakdown of collective responsibility in the Cabinet after the 2017 General Election fatally undermined the norms of information sharing and coordination across Whitehall (Owen et al, 2018). Policy by imposition could still take place, but it lacked any rule-based structures that ordered the learning processes between actors.

Beyond hierarchy, imposition also intersects with epistemic learning. The affinity here revolves around the enforcement power of epistemic authority. Experts, particularly when they take the form of consolidated epistemic communities, possess highly specialised and rare goods – a technical understanding of how knowledge can help deliver (or not) policy goals. To this end, epistemic actors can become 'special policy framers' (Dunlop, 2016), able to narrow down policy choices and options open to decision-makers simply by dint of their monopoly on complex knowledge. That said, their power to impose is enhanced when epistemic communities are institutionalised within the bureaucracy. Haas's study *Saving the Mediterranean* (1990) demonstrates the extreme level of framing experts can have where they have bureaucratic power. Here, a long-standing and international expert group of scientists and environmentalists used their authoritative knowledge about pollution in the Mediterranean not

only to get decision-makers' attention by framing the problem as urgent and but also impressing upon them that it was solvable. They established a position within the UN's Environmental Programme (UNEP) and used that position to frame policy preferences about the course of action to be taken and succeeded in initiating international policy coordination on the issue.
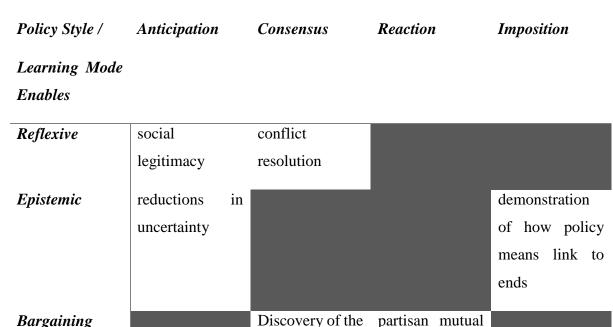
We can also think of the power of particular scientific methods becoming institutionalised in the bureaucracy. Recalling the earlier case of IA, techniques of cost-benefit analysis (CBA) associated with *ex ante* policy appraisal have become mandatory for certain classes of regulation in the United States (USA) leading Sunstein to call it the 'cost-benefit state' (1996). Its institutionalisation is such that, CBA has become a lightning rod for criticism by scholars and activists concerned that the quantitative technique closes off policy options that favour human and environmental protection (Ackerman and Heinzerling, 2002; McGarity, 1998).

Conclusions

What's been achieved? Fundamentally, examining the four dimensions of policy styles through the lens of policy learning reveals nuances in policy styles that have otherwise remained hidden. In table 1 we summarize our work by associating policy styles to learning modes. In each individual cell we see what a given learning mode enables a constellation of actors to do. Some cells are blank meaning that we cannot think of any association between that style and that learning mode. Reflexivity does not seem plausible with imposition and reaction. However, it can bring wide social legitimacy to policies made in anticipation. It also allows conflict resolution in a consensual style. Epistemic learning allows actors to reduce uncertainty via the provision of knowledge and expertise. Political actors cannot calculate the pay-offs of alternative courses of action and produce policies in an anticipatory style when uncertainty is high – hence the enabling function of epistemic learning. Science, experts and expertise can also support hierarchical styles – they perfect the technology of hierarchy and the monitorability of policies by connecting means to ends. Learning when bargaining puts the constellation of actors where deals, bargains and the composition of different preferences can take place in a consensual style. When the style is 'reaction', learning in bargain processes arrives at a solution that represents partisan mutual adjustment. Hierarchical learning as a natural match with a style of imposition, but can also assist the style of reaction when central control is key.

One final caveat: the appetite and ability to learn is not pre-determined by some national or sectoral policy style. Rather, particular modes of learning are likely to surface under particular contextual conditions. So, for example, imposition need not be policy actors exercising their will to power. When we think in terms of learning, we see organisational repertoires becoming the automatic brain in policy-making. Moreover, we may also see the scientists become authoritative actors narrowing policy-makers' options. Conceptually, we have the option to increase the level of granularity further still – by breaking down the learning modes further (see Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013) we can expose more about the nature of anticipation, consensus, reaction and imposition.

Table 1   Associating Policy Styles and Learning Modes

Policy Style / Learning Mode Enables	*Anticipation*	*Consensus*	*Reaction*	*Imposition*
Reflexive	social legitimacy	conflict resolution		
Epistemic	reductions in uncertainty			demonstration of how policy means link to ends
Bargaining		Discovery of the deal that composes preferences	partisan mutual adjustment	
Hierarchy			central control	rules-based order

Source: authors 2020

Acknowledgements

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