

Chapter 12 Policy Learning and Transfer: can it be ‘evidence based’?

Key themes of this chapter:

- Policy learning describes acquiring new policy-relevant knowledge and skills.
- It sounds like a ‘rational’, ‘evidence based’, and technical process, but it is just as political as other ways to exercise power to address bounded rationality.
- Policy transfer describes the import and export of policy. It can range from taking broad inspiration to importing a policy programme as a full package.
- Learning and transfer can be driven by (a) routine searches for evidence, dialogue, consensus-seeking and bargaining, but also (b) coercion, compliance, and a perceived need to keep up with international norms.
- The potential for ‘evidence-based’ transfer seems limited, so how can we produce more feasible models for learning?

Policy learning is a vague but useful term to describe acquiring new knowledge to inform policy and policymaking. Knowledge can be based on information regarding a current policy problem, lessons from the past, or the experience of others. Policy transfer is also a broad term to describe the sharing of policy ideas from one place to another (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). Further, transfer is not the only term to describe the exchange of policies and ideas. Lesson-drawing brings together the study of learning from the past as well as other countries (Rose, 1993), policy diffusion describes the spread of solutions among, for example, US states (Walker, 1969), and policy convergence refers to the factors causing similarities in policy across countries (Bennett, 1991a).

Learning and transfer are political, not technical or objective, processes (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018; Witting, 2017). In that context, the literature presents a fascinating dilemma. First, taken at face value, both activities seem desirable. Innovation, learning and transfer seem crucial to evidence-informed global policy change (Page, 2018: viii). Why wouldn’t we want to learn from experience and, when appropriate, learn lessons from other actors? Why would policymakers keep making the same mistakes instead of learning from them? Why would a government try to reinvent the wheel when another government has shown how to do it?

Second, however, since the study of policy learning and transfer is about the power to produce particular forms of knowledge use, we need to ask questions such as: who is in charge, from whom do they learn, what rules do they follow, and is this process voluntary? Policy actors learn under the condition of *bounded* rather than *comprehensive* rationality, which means exercising power to decide how to understand a complex world in simple ways (Chapters 3 and 4). They have to act despite uncertainty (Nair and Howlett, 2017). They learn through the lens of their beliefs and compete with other actors to tell the most effective stories with key lessons (Chapter 10). This competition to ‘learn’

can cause and exacerbate a sense of policy failure (Newman and Bird, 2017) or make it difficult to know if policy change results from the use of new data (Moyson et al, 2017: 165).

Similarly, policy transfer involves agenda setting, to narrate the success of one government and pressure others to follow their lead. Transfer *might* follow a thoughtful ‘process of learning’ or be ‘the result of mimicry or good timing’ (Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013: 484). Overall, a focus on policy learning and transfer provides a *lens through which to understand the policy process*, not a way to pinpoint the things that policymakers learn or the policies they import (Page, 2018; Stone, 2004: 549; James and Lodge, 2003; Evans and Davies, 1999).

Third, we might still want policymakers to learn from each other and transfer policy success! We can recognise that the process is political and messy but still seek ways to do it effectively. Therefore, we need to know exactly what policy learning and transfer are, and what studies of the process tell us, to know how to respond. Political science insights are crucial to the identification of sophisticated learning techniques that go beyond too-simple calls for ‘evidence based’ learning and transfer (see Chapter 13). We need to understand the political choices associated with learning to address the dilemmas and trade-offs associated with ‘evidence-informed’ policy.

Therefore, this chapter first describes the ways in which policy studies have made sense of the concept of policy learning. Second, it highlights the key questions associated with transfer. Does policy convergence follow the deliberate transfer of policy from one country to another? Is the transfer of policy voluntary? Which actors are involved? How much policy is transferred? How do we explain variations in levels of transfer? Third, it explores potential responses to the politics of learning and transfer: how can governments use knowledge, learn, and transfer policy in a way that would satisfy enthusiasts of ‘evidence based policymaking’ (EBPM)?

Policy learning: what does it mean? What are the main types?

Policy actors use the research process for many different purposes, from short-term problem-solving and long-term enlightenment, to putting off decisions or using evidence cynically to support an existing policy (see Weiss, 1979 and Chapter 2 on evaluation). Similarly, policy learning is a highly political process akin to the ways in which actors exercise power to address bounded rationality (Chapters 3 and 4). They combine cognition and emotion (to produce heuristics) to understand, for example: their environment, how to exercise power to secure their political and policy aims, the nature of policy problems, and how to import policy lessons (Witting, 2017; Meseguer, 2005; Weyland, 2005).

We should therefore reject the temptation to equate policy learning with a simplistic process that we might associate incorrectly with teachers transmitting facts to children. Nor should we assume that adults simply change their beliefs when faced with new evidence, akin to the quotation often attributed to John Maynard Keynes: ‘when the facts change, I change my mind’. Indeed, contrast this quotation with Hall’s (1993) account of Keynesian economics (Chapter 11) in which people mostly oversee limited policy change by interpreting new facts through the lens of their existing knowledge and

beliefs. Consequently, profound change results more from experts being ignored or replaced; changing people, not changing their minds.

Policy learning describes many types of political activity. Most people use the phrase loosely and instrumentally: we learn how to change our behaviour, and respond more effectively, to solve a problem or achieve an aim. It can describe many forms of instrumental learning, including to: adapt to a complex policymaking system or environment, use knowledge for policy, reduce uncertainty, encourage policy transfer, and learn about the most effective ways to learn (Dunlop et al, 2018: 1; Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013). Consequently, Bennett and Howlett's (1992) review of classic studies (updated systematically by Goyal and Howlett, 2018) reflects this wide range of possibilities, describing the ways in which governments or coalitions:

- react to social and environmental pressures (Heclo, 1974)
- develop better policymaking functions (Etheredge, 1981)
- draw lessons from the experience of other governments (Rose, 1991)
- adapt to the success or failure of policy (Hall, 1993)
- use 'trial-and-error' learning to make incremental changes (May, 1992: 333)
- use knowledge to update their beliefs (Box 12.1; Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013; 2018).

Therefore, when we explore policy learning, we need to seek clarity on our object of study, asking questions such as: *who* learns, *what* do they learn, *how* do they learn, and what is the impact of learning on policy change (Moyson et al, 2017: 166; Moyson and Scholten, 2018)? For example, learning takes place at three levels:

1. *Micro*, as the ways in which individuals deliberate and act,
2. *Meso*, as the organisational rules devoted to processing information, and
3. *Macro*, as the learning that takes place in political systems, such as when governments draw lessons from each other (Moyson et al, 2017: 163-4).

These levels are *analytically* separable but connected in practice. *Individuals* combine cognition and emotion to process information. However, they do it collectively, in: (a) *organisations*, with norms of behaviour and modes of socialisation that influence their motive and ability to learn, and (b) *systems*, in which many groups of actors cooperate and compete to establish the rules of evidence gathering and analysis, or (c) *environments* that constrain or facilitate their action (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2017). In other words, policy actors do not simply learn by *receiving* clear information; they *generate* learning by engaging – individually and collectively – with many sources and forms of information (Freeman, 2006: 379). Boxes 12.1 and 12.2 show how to explore this process when informed by the ACF (Chapter 10) and IAD (Chapter 7).

Box 12.1 Individual and collective learning: lessons from the ACF

The ACF describes the combination of individual and collective processes well (Moyson, 2017: 321-2). It first describes two ways in which actors process new information

(Sabatier, 1987). Sabatier (1998: 104) describes policy-oriented learning as, ‘relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioral intentions which result from experience and/or new information’. This type of learning often resembles Weiss’ (1979) classic description of the ‘enlightenment’ function of evidence that takes place over the long term (chapter 2). However, actors also learn through the lens of their beliefs and engage in ‘selective perception and partisan analysis’ (Sabatier, 1998: 104). They ‘learn’ more from the information they can add to their existing knowledge and beliefs, while challenging information can take far longer to make an impact.

Second, the ACF describes learning *within coalitions* of actors who have some reason to trust each other enough to cooperate. For example, they share the same beliefs, have cooperated in the past, or follow authoritative actors (Ingold et al, 2017). Learning has three components:

1. Individuals use new information to inform and adjust their beliefs.
2. Members of coalitions interact and either reinforce or challenge each other’s views.
3. In some cases, internal conflict prompts a turnover of coalition members, which alters the knowledge and beliefs of the coalition (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier, 1993b: 41).

In most cases, learning follows the routine monitoring of implementation, in which new information does not challenge each coalition’s position. In rare cases, new information prompts ‘shocks’ that are *internal* (when members lose confidence in the coalition’s beliefs or strategies) or *external* (when another coalition exploits events to alter its position in the subsystem).

Finally, the ACF describes learning *across* coalition. In low salience issues, coalition A may adapt to the beliefs of coalition B when B’s views become ‘too important to ignore’ (1993b: 43). Or, scientists can become respected brokers between relatively moderate positions (Ingold and Gschwend, 2014). In high salience issues, coalitions romanticise their own cause and demonise their opponents (Sabatier et al, 1987). Learning is a political process, ‘not a disinterested search for “truth”’ (1993b: 45; Sabatier, 1988: 151). In some cases, there are commonly accepted ways to measure policy performance. In others, it is a battle of ideas, to frame issues, interpret experience, and challenge the status of an opponent’s knowledge.

Learning may also have a cooperative or competitive purpose, from acquiring new knowledge and skills to solve a policy problem, with the help of an ‘informed, vigilant democratic public’, to enhancing knowledge on how to defeat our opponents in debate and dominate the policy process (Dunlop et al, 2018: 6; Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018: 256). We can update beliefs to ‘make policy more efficient, legitimate, democratic’, or ‘win consensus, to promote one’s strategy, to humiliate the opposition – without necessarily improving on efficiency or effectiveness’ (2018: 256). In that context, Dunlop and Radaelli (2013; 2018) draw on a major review of policy learning to describe four different categories, which relate partly to (a) general levels of knowledge and uncertainty about a

policy problem or its solution, and (b) the power and status of specific actors such as policymakers and experts:

1. *Learning epistemically*. In this scenario, there is high uncertainty, and there exists an ‘authoritative body of knowledge and experts who are willing and able to interact with policy-makers and take a proper role in the policy process’. This learning is the closest to teaching and ‘evidence-based policy-making’. It requires the scientific and ‘soft’ skills of researchers and the willingness and ability of policymakers to acquire new knowledge (2018: 259).
2. *Learning from reflection*. Uncertainty is high, but we cannot rely on expert authority, or ‘there is a predisposition to listen to what the others have to say and to re-consider one’s preferences’. Learning is closer to open dialogue in which people use deliberative techniques to (a) combine their diverse forms of knowledge and (b) encourage cooperation by agreeing on the social norms that guide their dialogue (2018: 260).
3. *Learning as by-product of bargaining*. There is low uncertainty because policy actors have ‘a repertoire of solutions, algorithms, or ways of doing things’. Many ‘interdependent’ actors – including ‘decision-makers, interest groups and civil society organisations’ - focus on how to bargain effectively (2018: 261). They learn (a) each other’s preferences, (b) which strategies work best, and (c) the cost of disagreement. In its ideal form, when power is not concentrated in a small number of actors, this form of bargaining is like Lindblom’s ‘partisan mutual adjustment’ (Box 4.2). It represents a highly defensible alternative to simply learning from experts (2018: 261).
4. *Learning in hierarchies*. Uncertainty is low and the authority of some actors is high. Subordinate actors learn that they are subject to the ‘shadow of hierarchy’, in which rules and norms appear to limit their options. Powerful actors learn about the levels of compliance they can achieve, or likely adherence to international norms (2018: 263).

Since there are many different categories, there are also many factors that can facilitate or hinder learning. Facilitators include: the routine consultation of experts (epistemic); the conditions for open, non-hierarchical, and transparent dialogue in which individuals are willing to change their minds (reflexive); mutual adjustment, by making trade-offs among a large bundle of issues, agreeing on the venues and procedures for negotiation, and engaging in many negotiations (bargaining); and, trust in a clearly defined authority (hierarchy). Hindrances include: unproductive debates among experts (epistemic); the ability to stifle dissent and unwillingness to compromise (reflexive); one-shot negotiations in which there is limited trust (bargaining); and, too many ‘veto players’ or ‘joint-decision traps’ (2018: 263-6; Radaelli and Dunlop, 2013; Tsebelis, 2002; Scharpf, 1998).

In other words, although learning sounds positive, it can be ‘dysfunctional’: actors may be dogmatic, and coalitions subject to ‘groupthink’; reflection may be unproductive; and, bargaining or hierarchy may focus on learning how to win arguments more than solve problems (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018: 265-6; Dunlop, 2017a; 2017b). Further,

Dunlop and Radaelli's (2018) four categories show us what can happen when people have very different ideas about the meaning and purpose of policy learning. The classic example relates to our theme of 'the politics of evidence based policymaking' (Cairney, 2016): scientific experts will soon become disheartened if they assume that the process is epistemic and it is actually the by-product of bargaining (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2016).

Dunlop (2017c) uses a case study – EU policy on the supply of growth hormones to cattle - to describe this potential 'irony of epistemic learning' (see also Dunlop, 2014). First, a period of epistemic learning allowed scientists to teach policymakers the key facts on a newly emerging policy issue. The scientists, trusted to assess risk, engaged in the usual processes associated with scientific work: gathering evidence to reduce uncertainty, but always expressing the need to produce continuous research to address inevitable uncertainty. The 'Lamming' committee of experts commissioned and analysed scientific evidence systematically before reporting (a) that the use of 'naturally occurring' hormones in livestock was low risk for human consumers if administered according to regulations and guidance, but (b) it wanted more time to analyse the carcinogenic effects of two 'synthetic compounds' (2017c: 224). Second, a period of bargaining changed the context. EU officials in DG Agriculture responded to European Parliament concerns, fuelled by campaigning from consumer groups, which focused on uncertainty and worst-case scenarios. Officials suspended the committee's deliberations before it was due to report and banned the use of growth hormones.

The irony is two-fold. First, it results from the combination of processes:

1. Scientists, operating in epistemic mode, described low risk but some uncertainty (in a scientific context where expressing uncertainty is routine good practice).
2. Policymakers, operating in bargaining mode, used this sense of uncertainty to reject scientific advice (in a political context where uncertainty can be damaging or used against you).

The second irony is that scientists were there to help policymakers learn about the evidence, but were themselves unable to learn about how to communicate and form wider networks within a political system characterised by periods of bargaining. Overall, the moral is that we should not assume that 'policy learning' describes an apolitical process in which the most knowledgeable researchers are the most powerful participants. Rather, actors are learning how to make policy and get what they want, and new knowledge is one of many key factors relevant to that process.

Box 12.2 The mechanisms, products, and facilitators of policy learning

Heikkila and Gerlak (2013) describe the *mechanisms* of individual and collective learning:

1. *Acquisition*. Actors acquire information from a range of sources including direct experience, observation, expert networks, and deliberation forums.
2. *Translation*. They interpret new information to create policy-relevant knowledge.
3. *Dissemination*. Individuals share knowledge within groups, such as by telling stories of what they learned and how it affects the aims of group (2013: 488-91).

Second, they identify *products* of policy learning:

1. *Cognitive change*, in which actors in a group exhibit ‘new or strengthened ideas, beliefs, or values’ about how to define and try to solve a policy problem.
2. *Behavioural change*, including new rules or strategies. As in studies of new institutionalism (Chapter 5), these rules are formal and written down or informal and communicated in different ways (2013: 491-2).

Third, they identify key factors that influence these mechanisms and products:

1. *The rules of collective action*. Organisations can facilitate a relatively decentralised and open dialogue to encourage information to come from many sources, or centralised and rule bound interaction to reduce the costs of coordination and dissemination. They can create actors as sources of authority or ‘knowledge brokers’ to facilitate information exchange among actors with different ways of thinking.
2. *Social dynamics*, such as levels of trust or conflict among actors sharing information, a common language, and the shared rules or norms to which they refer during cooperation. For example, groups with high trust and a shared commitment to respectful criticism may facilitate effective learning.
3. *Technology*, to gather and store information
4. *External factors*, including the sources of competition, political pressure, or crisis that prompt actors to learn more or less urgently (2013: 496-500).

In each mechanism, all actors need to address bounded rationality. Individuals use cognitive or institutional shortcuts to acquire information selectively, draw on heuristics and mental frames to interpret new information, and need to describe what they learned in terms of priorities and beliefs of the wider group (2013: 488-91). Consequently, we should not assume that learning produces new and improved policy or policymaking (2013: 492). Nor should we assume that cognitive change is primarily responsible for policy change, compared to factors ‘including the resources of policy actors, the rules governing policy processes, and the political and economic climate’ (2013: 493-4).

Approaches to the study of policy transfer

Policy transfer could describe the (a) *processes* of policy learning that contribute to the sharing of policy from one government to another, and/or (b) the *products* of that process, such as the import and export of policy. For example, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 5; 1996: 344) use transfer as an umbrella term to describe:

‘the process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system’.

Their definition's lack of parsimony reflects a diverse literature containing a family of concepts that overlap but ask different questions (Dussauge-Laguna, 2012a: 317; Heichel et al, 2005; Benson and Jordan, 2011). Approaches include lesson-drawing, diffusion, and convergence studies.

Lesson-drawing

Rose (1991: 4; 1993; 2005) asks: 'Under what circumstances and to what extent would a programme now in effect elsewhere also work here'? He describes policymakers seeking to (a) learn from their own experiences, and (b) take lessons from successful countries before calculating what it would require to import that success. Rose produces a series of questions about the nature and extent of lesson-drawing, such as: from where are countries most likely to learn; how much of a policy programme is imported; and, how easy will it be to adapt the programme, given the importing country's social, economic and political conditions? Programmes 'are the stuff of public policy; they are concrete measures for doing such things as delivering hospital care' (2005: 17). Further, a 'lesson' is 'much more than a politician's prescription of goals'. It also denotes 'the laws, appropriations and personnel and organizational requirements needed for a programme to be put into effect' (2005: 22).

Policy diffusion

The diffusion literature began as a study of policy innovation and emulation within the United States, before spreading to international studies (Busch and Jörgens, 2005). Walker (1969: 881-7) defines innovation as 'policy which is new to the states adopting it' and suggests it is most likely within:

- The 'larger, wealthier, more industrialized states'
- States with high competition between candidates (producing a demand for new ideas) and turnover (most innovation takes place at the beginning of a new administration)
- States with the most extensive policy and research staffs
- Urban states with more 'cosmopolitan' populations more tolerant of change, or experiencing more planning and infrastructure-based problems that require innovation.
- Berry and Berry (2018: 269) also identify 'problem severity' as a key impetus.

Walker also offers several reasons for others to follow their lead:

- The policy may be viewed as successful (and/ or popular among the public or a political party - Berry and Berry 2018: 269-70)
- The federal government may encourage (or states may feel obliged to follow) policy uniformity and national norms
- Interest groups promote best practice from the innovating states
- States have close policy ties because they are close in another way; they have something in common, like a shared geography, ideology, or understanding of the policy problem.
- Boundedly rational policymakers use learning from other states as a short cut

- The innovation in one state may have a knock-on effect ('spillover') obliging other states to follow or lose out, because they compete with each other economically (see also Grey, 1973: 1182; Berry and Berry, 2007: 225–6; compare with Chapter 6 on the 'Dye–Sharkansky–Hofferbert' approach).

In some cases, policies are 'virtually copied' (Walker, 1969: 881; 898). Further, diffusion increases as the ability to communicate increases (Berry and Berry, 2007: 232). However, differences in policy conditions across different states, combined with varying degrees of willingness to follow the leader, creates diffusion of different magnitudes and speed (Eyestone, 1977: 441). Further, problems with implementation can lead to 'disinnovations' (1977: 445).

Box 12.3 Examples of widespread policy convergence, diffusion, or transfer

- The privatization of 8500 state-owned enterprises took place in over 80 countries from 1980–92 (Kikeri, Nellis and Shirley, 1992).
 - The broad principles of 'new public management' - the application of private sector business methods to the public sector - were just as widespread (Hood, 1995: 94; OECD, 1995; Ormond and Löffler, 1998), albeit with several variants (Common, 1998: 442; James, 2001).
 - Now, scholars wonder if modern reforms are 'post NPM' (Ramia and Carney, 2010; Lodge and Gill, 2011) or in keeping with 'public value' or 'new public governance' (O'Flynn, 2007; Osborne, 2006; Goldfinch and Wallis, 2010).
 - Policies to address money laundering were adopted by 170 countries in 20 years (Sharman, 2008).
 - Over 140 countries have a 'national environmental strategy' (Busch and Jörgens, 2005: 868).
 - Most countries have central banks and have introduced reforms to make them legally independent (Marcussen, 2005: 903).
 - The World Health Organizations' Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) has been signed by 181 countries (90% of the world's population), 'which makes it the most widely embraced treaty in UN history' (WHO, 2018).
 - There have been many attempts to emulate the success of California's 'Silicon Valley' (Giest, 2017)
 - Governments can also learn what no to do (Stone, 2017). For example, many learned from the UK's mistakes when tackling BSE in cows (Stone, 1999: 52)
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Policy convergence

Policy convergence describes a movement towards policy similarities among different countries. Bennett's (1991a: 216) review suggests that previous studies of 'societal convergence' sought to explain broad similarities with reference to worldwide industrialization, akin to the study of 'globalization' (Chapter 6) which produces common policy problems and some pressures to converge. In this scenario, countries with similar policy problems *could* address them in similar ways without knowledge of each other and without transfer (Holzinger and Knill, 2005: 786; Hoberg, 2001: 127). However, Bennett

(1991a: 217) argues that we should examine the political processes involved rather than imagine a ‘black box’ between global forces at one end and outcomes at the other. Rather, identify the decisions of policymakers when they weigh up external constraints to converge *and* domestic pressures to diverge or stay different (Hoberg, 2001: 127). Bennett (1991a: 231) identifies four main causes of convergence:

- *Emulation*, in which the model adopted by one country ‘serves as a blueprint that pushes a general idea on to the political agenda’ of another (1991a: 221–2);
- *Exchange*, of ideas between international policy networks (1991a: 224);
- *Interdependence* and the transnational nature of many policies. It prompts governments to search for ways to cooperate and ‘mitigate the unintended external consequences of domestic policy’. Such harmonization may be facilitated by supra-national organizations such as the EU (1991a: 226);
- *Penetration*, in which the actions of one or more countries (or organizations) puts pressure on others to follow (see also Holzinger and Knill, 2005; Heichel et al, 2005).

Policy transfer: who does it?

Most actors involved in transfer are the regular participants in domestic policy processes, including, ‘elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/ civil servants [and] pressure groups’ (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 345; compare with McCann and Ward, 2012: 326–7). Further actors include:

1. *Supranational organisations.*

They include the European Union (EU), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Bank and United Nations (UN), and specific actors such as the European Commission and the World Health Organization (Benson and Jordan, 2011: 369).

2. *Entrepreneurs.*

‘Policy entrepreneur’ describes actors who sell policies (Chapter 11). NGOs (non-governmental organizations) such as think tanks or philanthropic organisations promote best practice internationally (Stone, 2000; 2010). Consultants use their experience in one country to sell that policy to another (O’Neill, 2000: 63; Common, 1998: 440; Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 345), often backed by an exporting country or supranational institution (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 10).

3. *International policy networks.*

An ‘epistemic community’ is an international ‘network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area’ (Haas, 1992: 3; see also Holzinger and Knill, 2005: 784; Rose, 1991: 6; Campbell, 2002: 25). Epistemic communities contain actors with shared beliefs and a ‘common policy enterprise’. They operate like domestic policy networks connected through international professional organizations

(Bennett, 1991a: 224), with members of networks promoting shared ideas within their own countries (such as the ‘carbon capture’ community - Stephens et al, 2011). Other examples of networks include the ‘Windsor conference’ that brings together labour and social policy civil servants from ‘Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and the USA’ (Legrand, 2012a: 523).

4. *Multinational or transnational corporations.*

MNCs ‘hold a trump card’ because they can ‘threaten to take their business elsewhere’ if governments do not minimize their regulations on companies (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 348). However, the effect of their demands on individual countries varies considerably (see Chapter 6 on globalisation; Bennett, 1991a: 228–9).

5. *Other countries.*

Policy transfer often follows pressure from other countries, directly (through encouragement or coercion) or indirectly (by establishing new norms, inspiring others to follow, or causing unintended consequences for another country). Holzinger and Knill (2005: 785) suggest that the innovating country benefits from emulation because it reduces transactions costs when dealing with others (like the adoption of a common currency).

In some cases, there are systematic leaders. The US provides ideas *and* the main source of influence behind coercive forms of policy transfer (see below). Sweden has long been a beacon for the social democratic state, and ‘Nordic welfare states’ provide wider lessons (Blum, 2014: 358). Germany has a history of effective inflation control, and Japan has become known for innovation in a range of areas (Rose, 1993: 107–8). Further, the decision to transfer once can establish a longer-term borrowing and lending relationship. For example, Japan borrowed Germany’s police system because it had already borrowed related aspects in law and local government (Page, 2000: 6; Westney, 1987).

However, while countries like Canada and the UK tend to borrow from the US they also lend some policies in return (Dolowitz et al, 1999; Hoberg, 1991; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 10). Relationships between other countries also demonstrate phases or issue-specific patterns. While Germany exported unemployment policies to Sweden and the UK in the early twentieth century, Sweden exported data protection laws to many countries from the 1970s (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 352) and the UK was one of the frontrunners in privatization from the 1980s. While New Zealand initially borrowed aspects of ‘new public management’ it then became a beacon for lending (Armstrong 1998; Common, 1998).

To some extent, this variation reflects new possibilities to share experience beyond a country’s immediate border. Rose (1993: 98–102) links it to ‘propinquity’ (closeness) which could refer to one or more similarities in geography, policy conditions, ideology, or problem definition (1993: 99–102; see Blum, 2014: 373 on Germany and Austria). Physical constraints to transfer have diminished, while the rapid growth of technology, communication, mobility and external pressure prompt more transfer ‘across diverse countries’ (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 7).

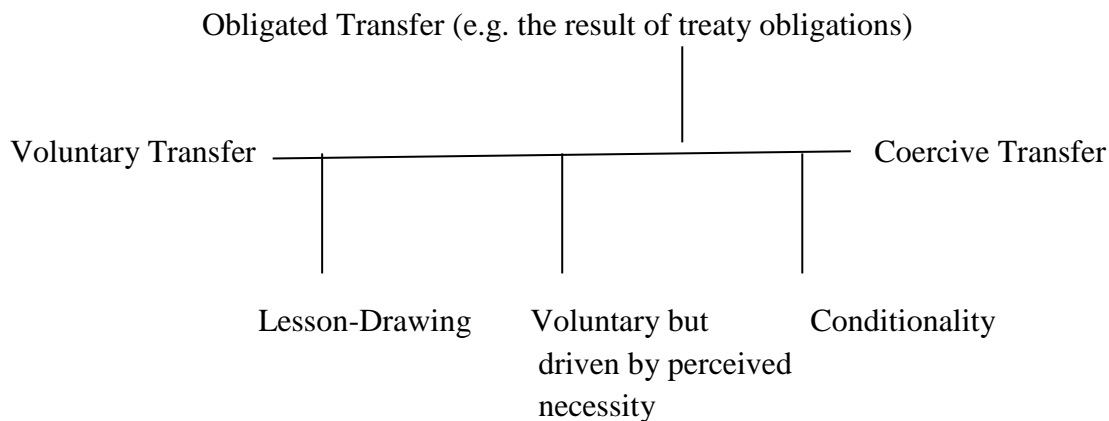
6. Subnational governments.

Multi-level governance (Chapter 8) and ‘multi-disciplinary’ studies suggest that the international export and import of policy can take place at local and regional government levels (McCann and Ward, 2012: 327; Benson and Jordan, 2011: 369). MLG may encourage more innovation as regions compete with each other and have more scope to try out new ideas (Hooghe and Marks, 2003). It may produce more emulation as regions follow best practice, or the success of policies adopted by devolved governments puts pressure on the national government to follow (or vice versa). MLG may increase the demand for transfer since it introduces new audiences for ideas and new ways for epistemic communities or entrepreneurs to venue-shop. However, interdependence combined with uncooperative intergovernmental relations, may also undermine innovation, particularly when devolved government policy would undermine a national position (Keating and Cairney, 2012). Or, subnational to subnational transfer can be more ‘accidental’ and haphazard than based on ‘rational’ systematic learning from best practice (Dolowitz et al, 2012).

Why transfer? Is it voluntary?

Who decides if an importing country should transfer policy: the country itself or external agents? In many cases the answer is ‘both’ and the process contains a mix of voluntary and coercive elements. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 13) produce a policy transfer continuum (Figure 12.1) to describe such possibilities.

Figure 12.1 The Dolowitz and Marsh Policy Transfer Continuum



Source: modified from Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 13).

At one end of the spectrum is voluntary transfer, which Dolowitz and Marsh (1996: 346) associate with lesson-drawing. Transfer may occur when policymakers express dissatisfaction with domestic policy (1996: 347; Rose, 1993: 5) and ‘look abroad’ to see how others have addressed similar problems (Bennett, 1991a: 200). Or, they look abroad for evidence to legitimize their existing policies. In each case, there is no external pressure to examine policy change and minimal temptation to mimic another government to deal with bounded rationality (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 22; Berry and Berry, 2007: 225).

At the other end of the spectrum is direct coercive transfer. It refers to the influence exerted by an organization, or national or supranational government, to make another government adopt a policy. For Dolowitz and Marsh (1996: 348; 2000: 10–11) direct imposition is rare. Indeed, extreme examples such as regime change seem to be off the scale entirely (compare with Holzinger and Knill, 2005: 781). Rather, in most cases there is some degree of (limited) choice within the importing country. Coercion may describe setting the *agenda* for transfer and the *adverse consequences* if the importing country does not import policy. The most significant example is conditionality: when ‘developing’ or low income countries seek emergency loans from the International Monetary Fund or World Bank they are almost obliged to accept certain conditions, such as to make ‘good governance’ reforms (Chapter 8). New public management-style reforms and a reduction of the role of the state in the economy are also ‘encouraged’ (Biersteker, 1990; Hopkins, Powell, Roy and Gilbert, 1997). In turn, countries like the US influence the ‘deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation’ agenda of the IMF or World Bank (Stone, 2017: 59; Wade, 2002).

While ‘obligated transfer’ may seem more coercive than conditionality, the original decision to become subject to treaties is often voluntary, while many countries have the ability to influence international policies. Supranational organizations, created by governments to deal with interdependence, prompts governments to cooperate (Bennett, 1991a: 226). Similarly, while Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 15) point out that the Court of Justice can ‘force member states to comply with European policy’, they ask: ‘since individual nations voluntarily joined the Union, can any act of the EU be considered coercive in terms of policy transfer?’ Of course, the willingness and ability of member states to resist coercion can vary dramatically, to include the UK’s decision to leave the EU (Brexit) and Greece’s relative powerlessness during its economic crisis (Chapter 8).

The third main category – indirect coercive transfer – refers to voluntary transfer in which the importing country perceives the need to change. The policy agenda is driven elsewhere and there are consequences to non-emulation, but the push for change comes from the importing country. For Dolowitz and Marsh (1996: 348–9) it refers mostly to externalities, or the (often unintended) effects of the actions of one agent on another (Chapter 7). For example, countries react to a range of external pressures including *norms* (when countries adopt the same behaviour and expect others to follow suit), *embarrassment* (a feeling of being left behind) and *economics* (when countries react to the decisions made in competitor countries). Small states, sharing a border with larger states, are affected disproportionately (Hoberg, 1991). For example, Canada responds continuously to economic and regulatory decisions made in the US (as its main market for many goods and services), while its attention to the US media and reliance on US expertise act as further sources of emulation (1991: 110). These effects can be seen in sub-national authorities, such as when UK government decisions prompt Scottish and Welsh government responses (Cairney, 2008; Keating and Cairney, 2012; Keating et al, 2012; Cairney et al, 2019b).

Coercive transfer: how is it manifest and demonstrated?

There is considerable debate regarding the means and strength of coercive transfer (Benson and Jordan, 2011: 370). For example, the use of conditionality to coerce developing countries can be an example of material or ideational power (Box 3.1).

Hegemonic project
– the pursuit of
dominance in terms
of the way we think
about and address
policy problems.

Cammack (2004) argues that the World Bank's putative aims to reduce world poverty mask its main goal of capitalist **hegemony** (linked strongly to US attempts to dominate world politics - Wade, 2006). Wade (2002) argues that, while the US may seek to influence directly the economic policies of other countries through the World Bank and IMF, its use of free-market ideas as part of a wider **hegemonic project** may be as important (and there are many ideas out there, competing for attention – Dassaue-Laguna, 2012: 318). Stone (2004: 554) presents a similar discussion of knowledge and the dissemination of 'best practice' by the World Bank (see also Hwang and Song, 2019). Hopkins et al. (1997: 513) also question the assumption of direct and strong coercion, suggesting instead that the importing country would not otherwise have reformed without being bribed, induced or rewarded (see also Meseguer, 2003: 24). Holzinger and Knill (2005: 781) caution against the assumption of high levels of coercion; there is a difference between a government being *resistant* to or *uninterested* in a policy transfer.

Stone (2004: 554) suggests that since economic sanctions or inducements are often ineffective, it is difficult to identify *successful* coercion, particularly during implementation. While some countries must make certain *choices*, enforcement is less clear. There is some evidence of the 'dismal' implementation of agreements linked to conditionality (Meseguer, 2003: 24), particularly when there is no sense of 'ownership' of policy in the importing country (Hopkins et al., 1997: 512) or there are problems with the 'transmission' of key ideas (Stone, 2017: 60).

Similarly, studies debate the role of the European Union, since member state approval is key to many EU obligations, making them 'semi-coercive' (Bulmer et al, 2007: 15 in Benson and Jordan, 2011: 370). The European Commission also has weak powers to implement in many policy areas. It may oblige the adoption of: very broad laws that leave a lot of discretion in the implementation (Duina, 1997; Mastenbroek, 2005; Falkner et al, 2004); or, administrative reforms that do not endure (Stone, 2017: 66).

What is transferred? What makes policy transfer distinctive?

Page's (2018: vii) reflection on the literature suggests that, "what either looked like, or was claimed to be, a policy 'borrowed' from another was, in fact, more significantly shaped by a range of other political and organizational constraints such that it was hard to identify what, precisely, was borrowed over and above terminology or the germ of an idea". Policy transfer can range from the long-term decision to import completely the substantive aims and institutions associated with a major policy change, to the quick decision to pursue a vague idea (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 350). Consequently, we need evidence of one government studying another and a way to show that it translated into concrete results. In other words, to measure the levels of transfer in much the same way

that we measure policy change (Chapter 2). For example, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996: 349–50) identify seven measures: ‘policy goals, structure and content; policy instruments or administrative techniques; institutions; ideology; ideas; attitudes and concepts; and negative lessons’ (compare with Rose, 2005: 22; Bennett, 1991a).

We can use such measures to identify variations in borrowing. Rose (1993: 30–2) provides five main categories along a continuum. At one end is complete *duplication*, possible within political systems with ‘close similarity of institutions and laws’, and possible to detect in the identical wording in legislation. More likely strategies are: *adaptation*, when an importing country tailors the imported policy to domestic circumstances; making a *hybrid* policy from the exporting and importing region; or, creating *synthesis* by extracting aspects of one or more exporting programmes (such as when new democracies borrow elements of electoral systems and legislative models – Norris, 1997). Or, policymakers use lessons from others as *inspiration*, as the ‘transfer of policy knowledge but not a transfer of policy practice’ (Stone, 2004: 549). Other categories may be relevant, such as the use of information to package decisions already made (Dolowitz, 2003: 103). Or, the same programme may be repackaged by a government with a different ideological position (such as ‘Patient Choice’ in England and Wales or the adoption of ‘Reaganite’ ideas by a left-wing New Zealand government – Cairney, 2009a; Clancy, 1996).

Such variations reflect the fact that policy transfer is a political process embedded in domestic policymaking. For example, Page (2000: 4) draws on agenda setting concepts to describe the supply of ideas: ‘the perception of how the policy operated in the exporter jurisdiction might be crucially shaped by the observer from outside who seeks to import it’. The demand for ideas is also dependant on the power dynamics described in several policy theories (Box 12.4). Punctuated equilibrium theory (Chapter 9) identifies positive and negative feedback, in which there is disproportionately low or high attention to new ideas. Multiple streams analysis (Chapter 11) suggests that major policy transfer will not take place unless during a window of opportunity. The advocacy coalition framework (Chapter 10) suggests that the pressure to change policy comes from competition between domestic coalitions rather than coercion from another country.

Box 12.4 The policy transfer window

Chapter 11 describes (a) the profound effect of ideas, but (b) their conditional acceptance within political communities. We may treat ideas as ‘viruses’ but also consider the role of the ‘host’ and the ability of policymakers to resist ‘infection’. Our focus moves from the power of ideas themselves to their successful promotion and *receptivity* to them. Major policy change may only occur when established ideas – as paradigms, belief systems, monopolies or institutions – are challenged. In some cases, change follows an event. Policy failure may prompt a shift in power when existing policymakers or experts fall out of favour. ‘Shocks’ may prompt dominant advocacy coalitions to revisit their beliefs or allow other coalitions to exploit the opportunity to gain more favour within subsystems. An established policy monopoly may break down completely when pressure participants, dissatisfied with current policy ideas in one venue, attract external attention from powerful actors more willing to consider radically new solutions. Or, institutional

change may be gradual, as policymakers reinterpret policy problems and challenge current solutions. These discussions suggest that quick and radical policy transfers based on new ideas are unusual.

The ‘policy transfer window’ represents one way to combine a focus on policy transfer and the adoption of ideas within political systems at a particular time (Cairney, 2012a: 269-71; see also Dussauge-Laguna, 2012b: 573; 581). It is based on Kingdon’s (1984) identification of the role of *problems* (how is the policy problem defined?), *policies* (which feasible solutions are available?) and *politics* (how receptive are policymakers to these solutions?) In Kingdon’s model, although multiple streams come together to produce change, policymaker receptivity seems to be the most important factor. In the policy transfer window, we consider the power of an external actor to oblige importing governments to consider particular solutions. The window of opportunity now depends on the ability of external actors to set the agenda, the applicability of their ideas, and a combination of: (a) the level of domestic actor receptivity to those ideas and (b) their ability to resist transfer. The window may still open rarely and with unpredictable results, but the process is not influenced solely by domestic actors (Cairney et al., 2012).

Yet, most of these theories of framing and idea-adoption developed from studies of the US, which tends to innovate rather than emulate and is less subject to pressure than most other countries (although pressure is apparent at subnational levels) (Stone, 2017: 57). What happens if we shift our attention to countries more subject to external influence? Direct or indirect coercion is a stronger influence on the supply of and demand for new ideas. Levels of ‘positive feedback’, ‘receptivity’ and coalition competition may be less important than the pressure exerted from outside the system. External activity is a key factor in the supply and demand for new ideas. This external dynamic makes the study of policy transfer more than simply the study of domestic policy processes (compare with James and Lodge, 2003; Evans and Davies, 1999; Holzinger and Knill, 2005: 775).

What does ‘successful’ policy transfer mean?

Rose (1993: 132) describes factors that enhance the successful completion of transfer:

1. The policy is not unique or dependent on inimitable organizations.
2. There are few resource constraints to implement policy.
3. The policy is simple with a clear cause-and-effect.
4. There is adequate information available about what the policy is and how it works.
5. The new policy does not mark a radical departure from the importer’s original policy.

This list relates strongly to the factors central to policy implementation (Chapter 2). Two of the top-down conditions for successful implementation are that: there is an understanding of clear and consistent policy objectives; and, the policy will work as intended when implemented. Additionally, in the case of transfer, the importer must ask if the original policy worked as intended because of the wider political system, values or administrative arrangements in the exporting country (Dolowitz, 2003: 106; Page, 2000: 10; Massey, 2010). We therefore have two separate but related elements: *transfer success*

and *implementation success*. For Dolowitz and Marsh (2000: 17) transfer success refers to the extent to which a policy was adapted properly. In turn, failure can relate to one, or a combination, of three factors:

1. Uninformed transfer – when the borrowing country has incomplete information about the crucial elements that made the policy a success in the lending country;
2. Incomplete transfer – when those elements are not transferred;
3. Inappropriate transfer – when not enough attention is paid to adapting to the differences in policy conditions, structures and aims of the lending country.

To demonstrate, let us compare an example of unsuccessful and successful transfer. Dolowitz's (2003) case study of the Child Support Agency in the UK identifies adaptation problems caused by different aims. In the UK the driver was to raise revenue (focusing on a small number of absent parents) but policy in the US was geared towards wider coverage regardless of ability to pay (see also Sharman, 2010). It compares badly to Dolowitz and Marsh's (2000: 16) claim that the transfer of the US Earned Income Tax Credit to the UK (Working Families Tax Credit) 'falls as close to the purely rational end of the continuum as policy is ever likely to', since the UK government had the time and resources to study the issue well.

Yet, there are three key qualifications. First, much of our earlier discussion suggests that it is difficult to think of transfer in terms of a successful exporter or motivated importer of a specific programme (Stone, 2017: 55; compare with Evans and Barakat, 2012). Rather, governments often take broad inspiration or translate policy into something different. This process prompts us to focus less on transfer as the export of a well-packaged product and more on the ways in which importing policymakers make sense of policy in local contexts (Stone, 2017: 64-5). Our understanding shifts from 'transferred' to 'translated' (Freeman, 2009; Stone, 2012; Park et al, 2014), 'transformed', or 'mutated' (McCann and Ward, 2012: 326-7; 2013: 10). Second, transfer success does not mean that the policy will be an *implementation success*. As Chapter 2 suggests, it depends on wider issues of implementation, such as compliance, support from interest groups, political will, and the effects of wider socio-economic factors. Third, wider evaluations of *policy success* also incorporate political assessments, including: was the process legitimate and straightforward, and did the policy transfer improve the popularity of government (McConnell, 2010; Compton and 't Hart, 2019)?

How to encourage 'evidence-based' policy learning and transfer

Cairney (2018c; 2019a) explains why policymakers might not pay attention to 'evidence' in ways that scientists might expect. Although many scientists express a fear that they have entered an age of 'post truth politics' in which people do not trust evidence or experts (Jasanoff and Simmet, 2017), it is more useful to identify the ever-present features of policymaking systems that influence evidence use.

1. *Policymakers have different ideas about what counts as good evidence*

Few policymakers use the criteria developed by some scientists to describe a hierarchy of scientific evidence. For some, at the top of this hierarchy is the systematic review of

randomised control trials, because RCTs often provide a way to isolate and measure the effect of a policy intervention (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006; Dunlop, 2014: 213). Other forms of knowledge – derived from scientific expertise, practitioner experience, and service user feedback – are nearer the bottom (Oliver et al, 2014a; 2014b; Oliver and Pearce, 2017; Parkhurst, 2017; Cairney, 2016c). Most policymakers, and many academics, prefer a wider range of information sources (Nutley et al, 2013). They combine their own experience with information that may include peer reviewed scientific evidence, the ‘grey’ literature (not-peer-reviewed by academics), public opinion data, and feedback from consultation (Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Lomas and Brown, 2009; Nilsson et al, 2008; Davidson, 2017). Further, there are many policymakers spread across many levels and types of government, causing the same evidence to have different impacts in different parts of government (Cairney, 2016a).

2. *Policymakers have to ignore almost all evidence*

Many scientists describe their hopes for EBPM in a way that is reminiscent of ‘comprehensive’ rationality (Cairney and Oliver, 2017). Yet, comprehensive is an *ideal-type*, used to describe what cannot happen (Chapter 4). Instead, policymakers must use heuristics to prioritise evidence and free up time to make choices (Cairney and Kwiatkowski, 2017). In that context, a call for EBPM is naïve (Botterill and Hindmoor 2012) or a way to prioritise scientific evidence and curtail debate (Boswell, 2018), rather than a realistic description of policymaking.

3. *Policymakers do not control the policy process (in the way that a policy cycle suggests)*

Many scientists like the idea of the policy cycle because it offers a simple and appealing model, giving clear advice on how to engage at each stage (Oliver et al, 2014b). However, the cycle provides misleading practical advice: researchers will generally not find an orderly process with a clearly defined debate on problem definition, a single moment of authoritative choice, and a clear chance to use scientific evidence to evaluate policy (Chapter 2). Rather, they will engage with a complex policymaking system of which policymakers have limited knowledge and even less control (Chapter 6).

All three reasons are relevant to policy leaning and transfer (Cairney, 2018d). Policymakers will draw on an eclectic mix of sources to generate evidence of another government’s policy success. This generation of lessons is political: actors exercise power to define policy problems and therefore determine the policy-relevance of evidence to produce and evaluate solutions. Bounded rationality suggests that policymakers may import policy solutions without knowing if, and why, they were successful. Further, policy transfer is not separate from the policy process; evidence of international experience competes with many other sources of ideas.

Therefore, it is difficult to imagine how to understand policy transfer as a ‘rationalist’ project (Marsh and Evans, 2012: 589) even if some governments describe it as such (Legrand, 2012b). Instead, the literature reminds us that policy learning and transfer are not ‘evidence based’ and may not even be voluntary. For example, complete

policy duplication can be: (a) based on the key scientific principles, such as the need for ‘fidelity’ to specific models backed by ‘gold standard’ evidence of effectiveness provided by RCTs (Cairney, 2017b), or (b) caused by coercion, hierarchy, or unreflective mimicry (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018; see). Epistemic forms of learning may often seem desirable, but prove to be less realistic than bargaining and no more defensible than reflexive (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018: 261). Drawing evidence from the experience of others can be useful, but only as part of a wider process in which they learn from their own experience in their own context.

Box 12.5 Richard Rose’s ‘Ten steps in lesson-drawing’

1. Learn Rose’s language of lesson-drawing, including what ‘programme’ and ‘lesson’ mean.
2. ‘Catch the attention of policymakers’.
3. Do some preliminary work to identify ‘where to look for lessons’.
4. ‘Learn by going abroad’.
5. Produce a model to describe how and why a programme works.
6. ‘Turn the model into a lesson fitting your own national context’.
7. ‘Decide whether the lesson should be adopted’.
8. ‘Decide whether the lesson can be applied’.
9. Simplify the lesson and its application to increase its chance of success.
10. Evaluate the success of your lesson-drawing process

Source: adapted from Rose (2005)

Therefore, if we look for advice on lesson drawing – such as in Rose’s 10 steps in Box 12.5 – we need to ask more questions to inform ‘how to do it’ guides. They relate strongly to the three reasons not to expect EBPM: (1) the evidence for success (2) the story policymakers tell, and (3) how conducive to comparison are the policymaking systems of each government.

What is the evidence for success, and from where does it come?

In general, policy actors debate what counts as good evidence, draw on an eclectic mix of evidence sources, and use evidence to support their beliefs about the value of a policy choice. The transfer process may exacerbate these issues in several ways. First, the exporting government and supporters of its policy have an incentive to declare that there is evidence of their success (Cairney, 2019d). Therefore, importing governments should rely on a combination of sources, including government-commissioned but relatively independent evaluations, and independent scientific reviews subject to peer review. These evaluations should consider relative success, using direct or counterfactual comparisons to ask if another solution would have been more successful.

Second, it is not clear how long to wait to declare success. We may be identifying ‘Good practice’ based on positive experience, ‘Promising approaches’ but unsystematic findings, ‘Research-based’ or ‘sound theory informed by a growing body of empirical research’, or ‘Evidence-based’, when ‘the programme or practice has been rigorously

evaluated and has consistently been shown to work’ (Perkins 2010, in Nutley et al, 2013: 9)

Third, the research methods we use to generate evidence relate strongly to our beliefs about the best way to deliberate, govern and ‘scale up’ policy success (see Cairney, 2017b; 2018d; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Cairney, Russell and St Denny, 2017). Consider two very different approaches. First, we could identify the same basic model of success and transfer it uniformly across the national population. Centralisation and hierarchy would be conducive to the roll out of uniform policy interventions, driven by evidence from RCTs. It might also help avoid a ‘postcode lottery’ of service provision. Second, we could tell a richly descriptive story about a model and invite local policymakers and stakeholders to deliberate and adapt policy to their circumstances. The routine delegation of policy to local communities, service users, and practitioners would be conducive to sharing evidence personally via storytelling. It would not satisfy advocates of a ‘hierarchy’ of evidence. However, it would allow governments to be pragmatic about limited central control and recognise a local democratic mandate. Within these two extremes are compromise models, such as the ‘improvement method’ to combine local delegation with national training to encourage the systematic use of evidence.

What story do policymakers tell about the problem they are trying to solve, the solutions they produced, and why?

We need to know more about the agenda setting process (Chapter 9) that led policymakers to narrow their range of choices, and the ways in which new policy instruments reinforced or contradicted existing policies. This step is crucial to comparability, since the exporting/importing government may have very different ways to (a) understand issues as problems, (b) identify feasible solutions, and (c) determine what policy success looks like. As Box 12.4 suggests, a window of opportunity for policy transfer opens only for technically *and politically* feasible solutions.

Was the policy introduced in a comparable policymaking system?

Issues of comparability often relate to factors such as the size and type of *political* systems. For example, it may be relatively easy for two US states to share lessons since their overall federal context is similar, but difficult for Scotland and a US state to share lessons since they are part of different national and supranational arrangements. However, the focus on this book is the need to conceptualise and compare *policymaking* systems. For example, we can use the constituent parts of policymaking environments to think systematically about elements of comparability:

- *Actors*. Compare the spread of policymakers and influencers across many venues: which levels or types of government are responsible for this policy?
- *Institutions*. Compare the formal and informal rules of those venues: which rules matter?
- *Networks*. Compare the relationships between policymakers and influencers: what role do these networks play in making and delivering this policy?

- *Ideas*. Compare the paradigms within which new solutions are considered: do policymakers in the exporting and importing governments have the same fundamental beliefs about the nature of a problem and its feasible solution?
- *Socioeconomic context and events*. Compare the drivers for policy change: are both governments responding to crisis or routine events? Do they share similar reference points, including economic performance or social attitudes and behaviour?

The overall sense that we get from these questions is that evidence is an important element in the learning process, but one of many factors to consider. Policy transfer may be evidence *informed* but it is difficult to see how evidence alone would be the deciding factor in policy transfer.

Conclusion

Policy learning sounds like a ‘rational’ and technical process in which actors acquire new policy-relevant knowledge and skills. However, it describes a collection of political processes in which actors exercise power to learn how to get what they want. The process is akin to the ways in which actors address bounded rationality (Chapter 4). They use cognitive shortcuts to filter information and exercise power, to: (a) reduce uncertainty by translating evidence, and (b) reduce ambiguity by influencing how other actors use this knowledge to interpret policy problems. Learning is an individual and collective process: cognitive shortcuts matter, but so do the rules and systems in which actors interact (Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013). Consequently, we can think of learning in terms of very different categories, as driven by expertise, dialogue, bargaining, or hierarchy (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013; 2018).

This wide-ranging definition of policy learning informs the study of policy transfer. The search for new knowledge, from the experience of other governments, is part of a highly political learning process. Policy transfer describes the international exchange of ideas, which can prompt governments to import a policy intervention or programme entirely or, more likely, take broad inspiration or adapt lessons to local contexts. Key drivers can include routine searches for evidence, coercion, or a perceived need to keep up with the norms set by other governments and international organisations. We could focus on *supply*, as the ways in which actors try to ensure the widespread diffusion of policy solutions, or *demand*, as the ways in which actors become more or less receptive to new ideas and transform them into programmes specific to their political systems.

We can add insights from learning and transfer to existing theories of policymaking. Implementation failure can derive from misunderstandings of international policy evidence. The external pressure to act may further exacerbate bounded rationality, and emulation may produce non-incremental policy change. A focus on coercion may inform formerly-US-centric models of policy change – including punctuated equilibrium, multiple streams, and the advocacy coalition framework - which initially ignored the kinds of political constraints that are more likely to be experienced outside the US.

These insights also help warn us against the assumption that policymaking, learning, and transfer can be ‘evidence-based’. Rather, scientific evidence is one of many sources of information for policymakers, and information is one of many factors crucial to explanation. To know how evidence-informed policy and policymaking are, we need to know more about the shortcuts to action that policymakers use, and the complex policymaking environment in which they operate. Only in that context can we produce a realistic ‘how to do it’ guide which encourages us to be pragmatic about the highly political ways in which governments ‘learn’ from another.