The Cogs of Policy Learning: Mechanisms, Triggers and Hindrances

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Paper's Motivation & Plan

Can we advance a mechanistic framework of policy learning?

Specifically, what are the *mechanisms for learning*?

We outline:

(1) Model of learning varieties

(2) Realist approach to mechanisms

(3) Mechanisms that generate learning

(4) Triggers and constraints

Defining Policy Learning

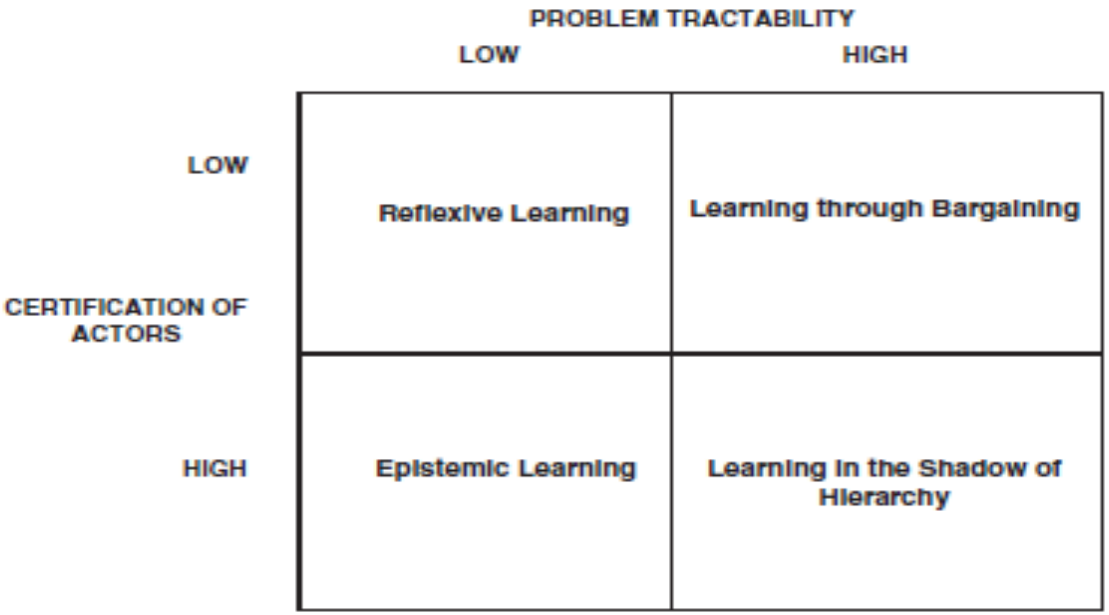
Learning as updating of beliefs about public policy based on lived experiences, analysis or social interaction

Mechanisms need to capture this process of knowledge acquisition and belief updating

Specifically, mechanisms underpinning four ideal types of learning: epistemic, reflexive, bargaining and hierarchy

Varieties of Learning (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2013)

Figure 1: Mapping the Four Genera of the Policy Learning Literature



Realist Approach to Mechanisms

Mechanisms act on the individual – *homo discentis* – at micro, meso and macro levels of interaction

Realist view: mechanisms generate an outcome in a given time or space context

Mechanisms may result in dysfunctional learning forms

Mechanisms' triggers and hindrances exist in structures and agency

Learning as …	Epistemic	Reflexive	Bargaining	Hierarchical
Predominant actors …	experts	citizens	interests	courts
Logic guiding action …	cognition	appropriateness	consequence	habit
Mechanism …	teaching	dialogue	exchange	compliance
What is learned?	cause-effect relationships policy-relevance of science	norms learning how to learn (deutero)	composition of preferences costs of cooperation	scope of rules significance and rigidity of rules
What is it good for?	uncertainty reduction links between policy means and ends	upholding legitimacy conflict resolution	exposing Pareto frontier intelligence of democracy	monitoring sanctioning

Learning as	Epistemic	Reflexive	Bargaining	Hierarchical
Mechanism …	teaching	dialogue	exchange	compliance
Triggered by …	open attitude to science cooperative institutional structure	willingness to move position convened deliberative spaces	low barriers to contract and preference aggregation repeated interactions	suitable political culture trust in institutions
Hindered by …	scientific scepticism low policy capacity	incommensurable beliefs absence of deliberative tradition	winners and losers are always the same options for defection are cheap	JDT veto players availability of solutions at top
Pathologies as …	teaching the wrong lesson mobilisation of counter-epicomms	de-coupling between deliberative for and public choice domination	different endowments of resources limited options for radical innovation	blocked learning limited adaptation to environment

Conclusions

Next steps ….

- Distinguishing mechanisms at different levels
- Impact on design architectures
- Empirical exploration and counter-examples
- Temporal dimension and sequencing

Treating learning as a dependent variable is just the start

- Learning as independent – mechanisms linking learning with change