

# The Dynamics of Policy Change: Policy Succession\*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the policy model assumed by most writers on policy analysis neglects the implications of the fact that most "new" policies in contemporary Western political systems are in fact replacing old policies, and that this is increasingly likely to be the case. Similarly, the recent interest in "policy termination" is partly misplaced since it fails to follow through adequately the implications of the fact that most policy terminations lead to policy succession. Accordingly, there is a need to study and analyse the processes involved in policy succession. This paper places policy succession in the context of policy change, sketches a model which describes the distinctive features of the policy succession process, outlines the various kinds of policy succession which occur, and draws out some implications for policy makers resulting from the increasing importance of policy succession.

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## Policy Making as Policy Succession

For all that moveth doth in Change delight.  
Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*

Much of the language of policy analysis and the study of policy making has a distinctly pristine air about it. We speak of creation, birth and innovation as though policies frequently came new into the world. In reality, new policies are rarely written on a

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tabula rasa, but rather on a well-occupied or even crowded tablet of existing laws, organizations and clients. Thus, most policy making is actually policy succession: the replacement of an existing policy, program or organization by another. The concentration of policy analysis on dramatic creation or termination events in public policy may therefore direct attention away from the more common and important phenomenon of policy succession.

There are three good reasons for expecting policy succession to be an increasingly common feature of policy formulation in contemporary Western political systems. The first relates to the phenomenon, noted by a number of commentators, of the increased crowding of the policy space (see e.g. Heidenheimer et al., 1975: 220). In other words, over the years governments have gradually expanded their activity in particular fields of policy so that there are relatively few completely new activities in which they could become involved. For example, even though the United States is in the throes of a sustained political battle over the creation of a system of national health insurance, in many ways this system will build upon existing programs of national health insurance for the elderly, or subsidized care for the indigent, or provision of medical care for groups such as veterans [1]. Thus, Heidenheimer et al. (1975) note of income maintenance policies in Western countries that, "The frontiers of policy development no longer stretch toward the horizon allowing unimpeded expansion with cheap resources; they are now internal frontiers of integration, harmonization and trade-offs." Even where there are remaining interstices in the policy space which could be filled, it may make sense to deal with them simultaneously with altering existing related policies and programs.

Secondly, but related to the first point, existing policies themselves may create conditions requiring changes in policies or programs. The problem to be tackled by a "new" policy proposal may not be the absence of policy in an area but problems resulting from existing policies or unforeseen adverse consequences arising from the interaction of different programs. Policy may be its own cause (Wildavsky, 1979). For example, the areas of income maintenance and taxation are both quite well populated with policies. However, the individual programs and their interaction have established conditions calling for substantial policy succession. In particular, the "poverty trap" results from the interaction of tax and income maintenance provisions (see e.g. Sandford, 1977: 161-162). There are points on the earned income scale where the imposition of tax and the withdrawal of means-tested benefits would result in a loss of disposable income for individuals earning additional gross income [2]. Such a situation is clearly nonsensical and has been the object of several attempts at policy succession in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Thus, as May and Wildavsky (1978: 13) point out, "Past policies become an important (and sometimes the most important) part of the environment to which future policies must adapt."

Thirdly, policy succession should be expected to become an even more common feature of the policy process as a consequence of the relationship between the rate of sustainable economic growth and the financial implications of existing policy

commitments. Rose and Peters (1978) point out that because the costs of public policy represent a greater proportion of the national product than they did twenty-five years ago, a much higher rate of growth of the national product would be required to sustain the historical rates of growth of public policy without cutting into the real take-home pay of citizens. Thus, even in the absence of the crowding of a particular policy space, the latitude for avoiding the problems of policy termination or policy succession by instituting a new program without cutting the old is considerably reduced. As a Swedish academic and politician has written, we face a "pre-planned society" in which current politicians have little latitude except to try to pay for the commitments made by their predecessors (Tarschys, 1977). The alternative is to undertake the difficult task of terminating or replacing these commitments.

If the concept of policy birth is decreasingly appropriate unless we allude to the genealogy of the policy then so too are recent rumors of policy death much exaggerated. Interest has recently been taken in the policy analysis literature in the concept of "policy termination" (Bothun and Comer, 1979; Behn, 1978; Brewer, 1978; DeLeon, 1978a; Bardach, 1976; Biller, 1976). This literature has noted the relative infrequency of policy termination, and indeed justifies the interest in the topic by its infrequency and the need to specify the conditions of successful termination. However, the writers on policy termination have been obliged to note that terminated policies are often succeeded by replacement policies (Bothun and Comer, 1979; Brewer, 1978; Bardach, 1976). One writer even discusses termination in terms of "adjustment", and notes that "... termination signals a beginning as much as it does an end" (Brewer, 1978: 338; DeLeon, 1978b). To emphasize policy termination in such situations is rather like talking about the death of the caterpillar without mentioning the birth of the butterfly. What is required is a framework for analyzing the process by which an existing program or organization, in whole or in part, is replaced by, or merged into a new program or organization.

### Policy Succession as an Outcome of the Policy Cycle

'Begin at the beginning,' the King said, gravely,  
'and go on till you come to the end; then stop.'  
Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Although one of the advantages of the process or cycle model of policy as an analytical framework is that it does stress the dynamics of policy, writers on policy analysis appear reluctant to follow through the implications of going all the way round the cycle, i.e. explaining what happens after the evaluation and the implications of previous trips round the cycle for the next trip. The literature on policy evaluation is by now very extensive, but tends to concentrate on evaluation rather than on developments after the evaluation [3]. There is a natural tendency, for purposes of exposition, to treat the policy process in a linear form. However, the danger with this

sequence of a policy arrow ending in termination or non-termination is that it may fail to explore other possible outcomes of the policy process and the implications of the cyclical nature of the policy process.

Even those authors stressing the extent to which new policies are built on old policies have failed fully to explore the policy succession process. This weakness is particularly apparent in the writing of those authors prescribing a strategy of disjointed incrementalism for future policy making (Braybrooke and Lindblom, 1963). These writers have failed to take into account, or adequately conceptualize, the extent to which future options are shaped by the incremental changes. Thus, the stress of the incremental approach on the reversability or mutability of policy if initial choices are inappropriate overlooks the (variable) extent to which any changes made will shape the future policy succession process. For example, a poorly designed income maintenance program will develop as many clients as (or maybe more than) a well-designed one, and once clients are made it will be difficult to return them to their former condition of independence.

It should be stressed that what is being argued here is not a simple hypothesis about the inevitability of inertia or the difficulty of termination, but rather that the nature of the policy process involved in the transformation from one policy to another is shaped by earlier policies and the clientele, legislative and producer interests which have built up around them [4]. (In this paper we use the term legislative to refer both to members of elected assemblies and to members of the executive who are involved in the legislative process.) Neither policy analysts nor political decisionmakers have shown much explicit awareness of what might be the malleable variables which affect the outcome of the policy transformation process, or the extent to which their ability to affect these variables in the future may be narrowed or widened by decisions taken now.

The process or policy cycle model is not only a useful framework within which to analyze public policy, but it is also a checklist of stages which the would-be policy maker would do well to bear in mind in the policy formulation stage if he or she is concerned to see the proposals result in desired outcomes. Thus, a number of writers, notably Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), have argued that potential problems of implementation must be taken into account when policies are designed. So, too, we would argue that the concept of policy succession is both a useful additional academic tool and an essential item on a policy formulator's checklist. This is true for programs designed to be long-term, but it is even more important for policies where problems of policy succession are endemic, e.g. the "re-entry" problem after a pay control policy.

This paper moves away from a focus on the difficulties of policy termination, or the inevitability of incrementalism, toward attempting to identify the contingent features of policy succession as one of three possible outcomes of the policy cycle. Following the evaluation of an existing policy, either in a policy-analytical mode or through evaluation of clientele, producers or legislators, a policy can be maintained, terminated or succeeded.

The first possible outcome of a policy cycle is *policy maintenance*, by which an

existing policy, program, or organization is continued with the same task definition. Policy maintenance may come about in a variety of manners:

(1) *As a result of inertia.* In this case the existing policy is not evaluated or challenged. This does not imply contentment or quiescence, but merely a failure to make conscious choices about the policy or to have the issue of replacement placed on the political agenda.

(2) *As a result of an explicit decision.* After evaluation a dominant coalition may decide that the policy is acceptable and will legitimate the continuation of the existing policy. Again, this may not imply total contentment with the policy or organization, but merely the lack of alternative solutions offering the coalition apparently better outcomes.

(3) *As a result of failed policy termination.* Here attempts at ending the policy may have failed at the agenda-setting, decision-making or implementation stages. Through the lack of authoritative termination the policy will continue (except in cases where policy succession is proposed as an alternative when proposed policy termination seems likely to fail).

(4) *As a result of failed policy succession.* Similarly, where attempts to replace the existing policy with the new policy fail, the obvious result will be the continuation of the existing policy (except in the unlikely case where policy termination is proposed as an alternative to failed policy succession).

*Policy termination*, as used in this paper, refers to the abolition of a policy, program or organization with no replacement being established. In most instances, this would mean that the policy area would be returned to the private sector as no longer requiring government attention or action. As the policy termination literature itself has noted, terminations of policy are very rare, even where "built-in" terminators, such as sunset laws, are in use (*Sunset Act of 1977*, 1977: Compendium of Statements). This can reflect either the fact that no attempt is made to institute termination or failure to follow through the policy termination process to its final outcome. Truncation of the policy termination process can result either in the maintenance of existing policy or in its replacement in whole or in part (referred to by some policy termination writers as "partial termination").

Finally, *policy succession* is conceived of as an instance in which a previous policy, program or organization is replaced by a new one directed at the same problem and/or clientele. Policy succession occurs as a result of a process in which the issue of replacing is put on the relevant political agendas, a coalition is mobilized to authorize the replacement, and the replacement is successfully implemented. It will be argued that the policy succession is affected at each stage by the previous policy, with the extent of this effect depending on the nature of the policy succession attempted.

## The Nature of Policy Succession

All is flux, nothing stays still.  
Heraclitus, *Fragments of the Pre-Socratics*

### The Threshold of Policy Succession

All policy delivery is dynamic in the sense that it is rare indeed that in successive time periods exactly the same amount of service is delivered to exactly the same number of clients by organizations retaining exactly the same structure and personnel. To this extent, policy is always changing, so we can never talk of one static policy being replaced by another static policy. Is it therefore possible to distinguish between policy succession and the type of "continuous replacement" involved in developing programs and organizations? We would argue that it is both possible to do this and necessary to do so if we are to use the concept of policy succession as an analytic focus.

There are a number of types of changes which may occur in policies which will not be relevant to our concept of policy succession (Hall et al., 1975: 18-20). We are not concerned with adjustments to levels of income eligibility or with increases in the level of benefits in line with inflation or the standard of living (though we might be interested in the initial commitment to do so). Nor would we be concerned with an exogenously determined expansion in the number of clients resulting from higher unemployment. This is not to deny the importance of such factors – indeed, they have been more important in recent years in determining changes in the size of social insurance budgets than innovations and reforms – but to indicate that our focus is different. Similarly, we do not include changes in policy activity resulting from the phenomenon known as "goal displacement," by which an organization promotes objectives tangential to the purpose for which it was originally established, or promotes the individual security goals of its members. Typically, then, policy succession will require legislation or an order made under legislation, in most democratic Western political systems.

### Policy, Program and Organizational Succession

The concept of policy succession involves the idea of a policy process with special characteristics, and it is necessary to go beyond general reference to replacement or reform to analyze the different types of policy succession which can occur and the likely success of policy succession attempts once initiated. Before doing so, it is worth discussing the relationship between policy and program succession and organizational succession. DeLeon (1978: 279) distinguishes between functional termination, policy termination, program termination and organizational termination. The concept of functional succession does not appear meaningful, and in practice functional termination very rarely occurs, except when exogenously determined [5].

The distinction between policy and program is that a policy is a statement of what the government wishes to achieve, and a program is the means designed to achieve it. Thus it is possible that a program is replaced without the general statement of policy being affected: e.g. grants could be replaced by tax reliefs of the same value directed towards the same purpose. Programs can also survive the end of the need for the policy they were meant to fulfill. The Labour government in Britain in 1965 initiated a program of Office Development Permits (ODPs) designed to fulfill the policy need of reducing physical congestion in London (Wehrmann, 1978). However, even when this problem no longer existed, ODPs were retained as an instrument of regional policy. It is often difficult to separate policy and program in practice, and changes in program normally involve some changes in policy if only at the margin. While bearing the conceptual distinction in mind, this paper will not always treat policy and program as requiring separate consideration. Insofar as policy and program can be distinguished, we might expect proposed replacements of policy to lead to a more highly politicized policy succession process than proposed program replacements would. However, this will not be the case where service providing interests are particularly important in the particular policy area and where they would be adversely affected by the proposed change.

Policy and program changes are often associated with changes in the organizations delivering them, but, as the organizational termination literature has pointed out, organizations have a greater permanence and ability to adapt than individual programs or policies with which they are associated. As we will show below, the implications of policy succession for organizational change will depend on the type of policy succession which takes place.

#### **The Dimensions of Policy Change**

So far the discussion of the various types of policy change – policy innovation, policy maintenance, policy succession and policy termination – has been of their ideal-type forms, since this is a useful way to illuminate their distinctive features. When we move from an ideal-type classification to a working framework which might help us to describe policy changes in practice, we find that few, if any, issues or policy changes conform to any of these ideal types. Policy changes can, however, be characterized in terms of the extent to which they do have the attributes of the various ideal types. In other words, any given policy change can be located on a set of dimensions on which the ideal types form the polar extremes.

The innovation-succession dimension can illustrate how important differences in real policy changes can be analysed. In practice, some policy changes tend to embody elements of both innovation and succession. A policy change designed to replace an existing policy will invariably embody some innovation feature (a new technique not previously employed by government, an addition to the clientele served, etc.); a seemingly dramatic new initiative by government may partially overlap with previous

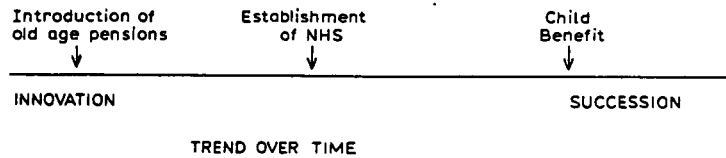


Fig. 1. Locating issues on the innovations-succession dimension.

provisions with a history of centuries behind them. The extent of innovation and succession in each case will vary, thus enabling us to locate each on a dimension between the two ideal types, as in Fig. 1.

For example, the introduction of old-age pensions in Britain in 1908 was not the first provision for the indigent elderly, but it was the first systematic provision targeted at the elderly as a whole. Thus it lies at the innovation end of the spectrum. The formation of the British National Health Service in 1948 was a bold initiative, involving the nationalization of all hospitals; however, through the municipalities the state provided already many of the health services, so the NHS lies nearer the middle of the spectrum. The introduction of child benefit in Britain in the late 1970s did involve certain elements of innovation in the form of a cash benefit for all first children and special arrangements for one-parent families, but it largely consisted of a replacement of the previous system of family allowances and child income tax allowances. Thus the introduction of child benefit lies near the succession end of the spectrum.

This spectrum does not merely represent a static ordering on which individual issues can be ranked, but can be used to portray a *trend over time* whereby policies have increasingly incorporated greater elements of succession. In other words, the argument is not that contemporary policy issues conform to the succession ideal type and never incorporate any innovation, nor that succession never occurred in earlier time periods, but that the *relative* distribution of policy changes is now more heavily biased towards the succession end of the innovation-succession spectrum. This is illustrated in Fig. 2. The relative distribution of innovation and succession may vary, however, in different policy areas. For social policies the 1970s were years of succession and even termination, while for energy and environmental policy they were

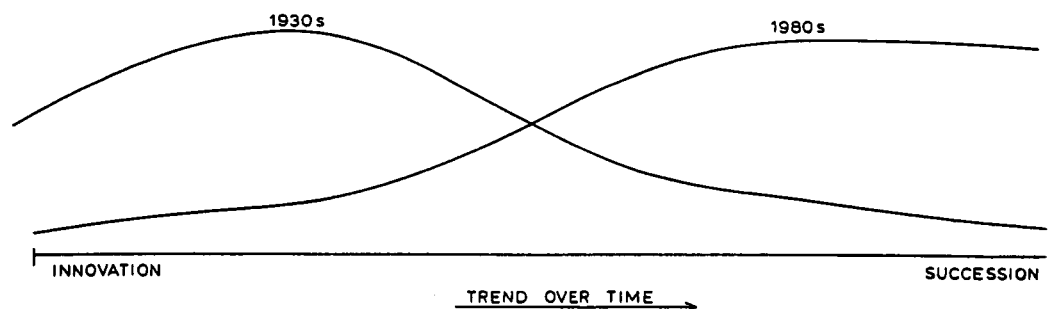


Fig. 2. Distribution of policy changes in different time periods in terms of relative mix of innovation and succession elements.



**TABLE 1**  
**A Comparison of the Mean Features of Innovation and Succession**

Policy innovation	Policy succession
<i>Agenda Setting</i>	
Issue has to overcome initial hurdle of legitimacy	Issue has legitimacy
No established place on agenda	Possibility of routinized recurrence
No existing institution for which proposal is core issue	Service provider organizations provide institutional agenda letterbox and receptor for cross-fertilization
Problem perceived as lack of policy	Problem perceived as inadequacies of existing policy (though may be difficult to reopen issue if it is considered "solved")
Mileage for politicians in advocating new provision	Little mileage in advocating modifications
Key role for political elites	Greater role for service providers and clientele groups
<i>Policy Choice</i>	
Existing organizations have little central interest in using resources to promote proposal; frequently defensive	Organization(s) with core interest now exist and have resources to resist or promote policy
Potential clientele without structure	Clientele defined and structured (often with mandatory consultation)
For both service providers and clients <i>potential</i> benefits are at risk	For service providers and/or clients <i>actual</i> benefits may be at risk
Traditional professions well mobilized and may perceive threat; embryo professions poorly mobilized and perceive opportunity	Professional providers exist, are mobilized and may perceive their jobs and service delivery criteria threatened
No current organizational base for "ideologies" about service delivery	Organizational "ideologies" about service delivery exist
High return to investment of legislative time and credits	Greater probability of low return to investment of legislative time and credits
<i>Implementation</i>	
Need to design completely new organization	Need to alter or consolidate existing organizational structure(s)
Need to recruit and socialize new personnel	Need to resocialize existing personnel (some of whom may be committed to previous policy) at field level as well as center
Need to devise operating rules (including informal)	Need to adapt operating rules (especially informal, which since often unwritten are difficult to rewrite)
May be interactive effects with other existing programs, but policy space relatively uncrowded	Strong likelihood of interactive effects with other existing programs
<i>Impact</i>	
Symbolic payoff high	Symbolic payoff low
High expectations of substantive impact; impact in practice variable	Relatively lower expectations of substantive impact; impact relative to previous programs variable but normally low
Evaluation relatively easy (no policy compared with policy)	Evaluation more complex

years of significant innovations. Once succession has become the dominant form of policy making, further bursts of innovation are not precluded. In the United States, the policy successions in social policy in the 1940s and 1950s were followed by significant innovations in the 1960s.

### **The Policy Succession Process**

If the process by which replacement policies are decided upon and implemented was identical to the process involved in genuine policy innovations, then the concept of policy succession would not be worthy of a further exploration. Certainly, both the process of policy innovation and the process of policy succession can be analyzed in terms of a series of stages: agenda-setting, mobilizing political support to secure an authoritative decision, implementation, and impact and evaluation. However, the nature of the activities contained within each of these stages differs substantially depending upon whether policy innovation or policy succession is being described. And in addition, the characteristics of the specific issue will also influence each of the stages of the process.

Space precludes a detailed discussion here of all the distinctive features of the policy succession process, that are treated in Peters and Hogwood (1980). Instead, in Table 1, we present a highly simplified compendium of the key differences between the innovation and succession processes. For ease of presentation, this is done in terms of the ideal types of innovation and succession, and it should be borne in mind that the extent of each will vary across issues. If the distinguishing features of the policy succession process were to be briefly summarized, we would point to the extent to which the policy actors, the process, and the substantive outcomes of the policy succession process are all shaped by existing policies which the proposed succession is intended to replace (Wildavsky, 1979).

The effects of existing policies are evident at each stage of the policy succession process. At the agenda-setting stage, the range of issues considered is shaped by those which have already been considered and adopted. Once a particular type of policy has been processed by the political system, the systemic agenda has been expanded to include that issue, although the previous treatment(s) of the issue may lead to the assumption that the problem has already been "solved", with the consequence that political elites would be less willing to assume the role of advocates of policy change (Cobb and Elder, 1972).

At the stage of the process requiring the formation of a majority coalition to adopt a proposed policy, policy succession will encounter more mobilized interests than would a policy innovation. Both producers and consumers of policies will have developed around a particular existing policy, so that an attempt at policy succession will challenge their interests. This may be contrasted with policy innovation in which the absence of these interests permits the formation of a coalition with less direct involvement of affected interests. Also, at this stage, legislators must consider the political payoffs to them for mobilizing a majority. In general, they have a higher rate

of return on their investment of political time and energy when they can advocate a new policy rather than when they "simply" attempt to modify an existing policy (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1980).

Implementing policy succession rather than a policy innovation involves changing existing organizations rather than creating new organizations. It also involves changing the attitudes and behaviors of existing organizational members rather than recruiting and training new members. Perhaps more importantly, implementing policy succession is more likely to involve greater interactive effects with other policies and programs than is genuine innovation. Therefore, the interorganizational politics of accommodation and adjustment are more likely to be pronounced in policy succession than in policy innovation (Scharpf et al., 1978).

Finally, the impact of policy making upon clients and the policy environment is likely to be different depending upon whether a policy innovation or a policy succession is being adopted. In particular, once a policy area has been processed through the policy cycle, expectations of benefits from future policy changes tend to be diminished by the probable ineffectiveness of the initial policy. Policy areas would rarely be candidates for policy succession if the initial policy adopted were totally salutary in its effects and capable of solving the problem being addressed. Initial failures breed disillusionment concerning subsequent changes so that there is less idealism and more realism about the probability of significant improvements in the policy area. However, it will be considerably more difficult to isolate the effects of a policy succession as compared to a policy innovation. All the problems of repeated treatments in research design obtain in the real world of policy evaluation, so that making definitive statements about the effectiveness of a particular policy choice becomes increasingly difficult as the number of different policy successions in a particular policy area increases.

In summary, both the policy innovation and the policy succession processes have hurdles which present particular difficulties. For the policy innovation process, one important hurdle is having the issue placed on the agenda for the first time and overcoming resistance to government having a policy in the area at all. In addition, resource constraints are probably more severe for policy innovations, as these inherently require the use of new resources as opposed to the reprogramming of existing resources. Finally, the absence of organizations and clients receptive to a particular policy issue makes government relatively insensitive to the issue being discussed as an area of innovation. For policy succession, however, the principal hurdles are overcoming the inertia and defensiveness of existing organizations and clientele groups which, having identifiable benefits being provided them by existing programs, fear and resist change and policy succession.

### **Types of Policy Succession**

So far, we have been talking about policy succession as a single concept to distinguish it from policy maintenance and policy termination as outcomes of the policy process.

However, policy succession can take many forms, and the form which finally emerges may not be the same as that proposed when the policy succession process was first initiated.

#### **Linear Succession**

Of the forms of succession, the "purest" type of policy succession, and the one which we would suggest occurs only rarely, is "linear" policy succession, by which an existing policy or program is entirely terminated and a new program established to meet the same objective or a new policy which substitutes a new objective. The degree of political contention in the policy process associated with proposals for linear succession will depend on the extent to which the new proposals benefit existing clientele to a greater or lesser extent than the existing program, and on whether the organization responsible for administering the existing program is also given responsibility for the new. The acrimony will be least in cases where those most immediately affected appear to benefit from the change. Thus, the replacement of a pay freeze administered by an expanded bureaucracy would meet less resistance from those directly affected than the reverse substitution.

In general, linear succession will refer to occasions when the termination of the old policy or program and the introduction of the new coincide. However, there are some policies (e.g. prices and incomes policies, commitments to align currencies) where the initial policy may be terminated only for a more or less similar policy to be reintroduced after a relatively short space of time. We would term this a "policy hiatus," and the process involved, a "disjointed succession." A distinction should be made between cyclical occurrences of policy hiatuses, where the problems of disjointed succession are endemic (arguably the case with incomes policy), and a more one-off policy hiatus (for example gaps in anti-pornography policy occurring when the courts throw out existing local laws and local governments require time to formulate new programs).

#### **Policy Consolidation**

A more complex form of policy succession occurs when two or more programs are wholly or partly terminated and a single new one instituted to pursue similar policy objectives which replace those of the original programs. The new program may represent a greater or lesser commitment of resources than the programs it replaces. We would term this type of policy succession "policy consolidation."

An example from the United Kingdom can serve to illustrate policy consolidation, both the policy outcomes and some of the process-related issues. In the late 1970s family allowances (a cash benefit payable in respect of all except the first child, which was partly "clawed back" for those on higher incomes) were abolished and income tax allowances in respect of children were phased out, both being replaced by a non-

taxable "child benefit" payable in respect of all children. Total family income would be increased through the collection of child benefit by mothers. However, the take-home pay of fathers would be reduced by the removal of tax allowances for children at a time when the Labour government was seeking the cooperation of the unions in pay restraint. Accordingly, the government postponed the full withdrawal of tax allowances and the full introduction of child benefit (*New Society*, 1976).

Problems can arise in attempting to follow through policy consolidation if the two or more groups of existing clients or service providers form a coalition in an attempt to thwart the change. Resistance from service providers may be reduced (and may be turned into active support) if one or more of the existing groups of service providers is given responsibility for administering the new program. Resistance from an organization to the removal of an activity will be greatest where that activity is central to that organization's functions or even its survival. Where a program is peripheral the removal of the program may have minimal effect on the organization and may even intensify its focus on its core functions. As Holden and Downs point out, organizations attempt to preserve their "heartlands," and are willing to concede functions that dilute their purposes (Downs, 1967: 198-199; Holden, 1966).

Policy consolidation may raise special problems of policy transition. Even where the replacement program provides a greater net benefit than the previous two or more programs combined, there may be individuals who lose out, either temporarily or permanently. This is a quite likely occurrence, since the purpose of policy consolidation may be to remove existing anomalies or inequities arising from the interaction of existing programs, as in the case of the introduction of child benefit in the United Kingdom referred to above.

Clearly, while clientele, service providers, and legislators associated with an existing program may all be in the same coalition during a battle over policy succession, this may not necessarily be so. Consider the situation where a replacement program larger than existing programs A and B combined is to be administered by the organization currently administering program A but will be of greatest benefit to the current clientele of program B. Which program the legislators associated with programs A and B will support will depend on whether they identify more with service providers than with clientele. Thus a coalition of interests might form as follows:

Pro-consolidation coalition	Anti-consolidation coalition
Clientele B	Clientele A
Service providers A	Service providers B
Legislators B	Legislators A

The outcome of the policy transformation process in this case would depend on the relative political strengths of the participants in the coalitions.

Finally, we must draw attention to the possibility of a purely cosmetic policy consolidation, which results in previous programs continuing to be executed in much

the same way. This may be associated with organizational mergers which do not lead to any effective integration of the previous structures or activities. Such largely symbolic mergers may, however, be sufficient to defuse pressure for more substantive policy consolidation. Cosmetic consolidation may also be the unplanned outcome of a policy consolidation decision intended to have substantive effects, but which is not implemented successfully. The history of many efforts at government reorganisation in the United States could be taken to indicate that policy and organizational consolidations frequently produce only different names on the letterhead rather than significant policy changes (Szanton, 1981).

#### **Policy Splitting**

The reverse of policy consolidation is policy splitting, by which an existing program or organization is divided into two or more parts. Such splitting occurs in its most visible form when an existing organization is divided into two or more parts, as when the Department of Energy was carved out of the Department of Trade and Industry in the United Kingdom at the end of 1973, or in the separation of the Department of Education out from DHEW in the United States in 1979.

As with policy consolidation, organizational splitting may turn out to be largely cosmetic. In the United Kingdom the Department of Transport was separated out from the Department of Environment in 1976. However, the two departments continue to have joint common services, and have combined regional offices. Further in the case of splitting of large departments, the direct impact on programs may be minimal, since departments are typically responsible for a large number of programs, and the organizational split is unlikely to crosscut programs.

However, there may also be more substantive and more complex relationships between organizational splitting and policy succession. The establishment of a new separate organization may be intended to give a new focus to policy formulation, and this may in time led to some form of policy succession. For example, taking the Department of Education out of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare would have resulted in a more active proponent of change in educational policy had not the Reagan administration intervened. Also, it would have protected the education budget from being the scapegoat when budgets needed paring and both health and social welfare had large entitlements programs which could not be cut (Miles, 1977). However, organizational splitting with the intention of providing a new focus may not necessarily be followed through successfully to the implementation of policy succession. For example, in 1964 the incoming Labour government in the United Kingdom announced that it was splitting economic policy making into long-term planning – the responsibility of the newly created Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) – and short-term economic management – the continuing responsibility of the Treasury. This attempt at policy splitting failed miserably, with the economic management function of the Treasury completely dominating the longer-term

planning attempts of the DEA (Lereuz, 1975: chs. 6, 12). This arose because of the intractability of the task set for the DEA, the political salience of short-term economic crises, and the fact that the DEA was not given resources to implement its policy proposals. Such long-term economic planning as takes place had been completely reabsorbed by the Treasury by 1969, and the DEA by then had been abolished.

#### **Partial Termination**

By partial termination, we refer to a substantial reduction in resources committed to a policy or program as a result of an explicit decision (i.e. not reductions arising automatically from, say, demographic trends). Within the framework we have adopted, we would regard partial policy termination, not only as a possible outcome of failed policy termination but as a type of policy succession which may be deliberately sought by decision makers. This may involve a significant reworking of the criteria of eligibility under the program or a restatement of objectives. An example of a partial termination is the British Conservative government's removal of the obligation on local education authorities to provide subsidized school meals for all school pupils at prices fixed by central government. The aim here would not be the complete termination of the school meal program, but a reduction of the commitment of government to it, with local authorities exercising their discretion to raise charges or alter service provision. Local authorities are exercising this discretion to varying degrees, so the degree of partial termination varies between local authorities, and central government will not be able to determine the overall degree of implementation of the partial termination.

In general, we would expect fairly strong opposition to partial termination from clients, service providers and legislators associated with the original program, since, unlike with other forms of policy succession, there is no replacement program to fill the gap left by the rundown of the old. Indeed, it may be because of such anticipated opposition that partial rather than complete termination is proposed in the first place. In the case of the Conservative government's consideration of the school meals program, this was undoubtedly an influence, as witness the handing of the "poisoned chalice" of responsibility for implementing partial termination to the local authorities.

Two other points should be made about partial termination. First, clients and service providers may have reason to fear a partial termination as a precursor of total termination. There may not be a sufficient coalition available to terminate a program at once, but it may be possible to terminate it in a piecemeal fashion. Relatedly, a partial termination may result in a total termination of program for managerial reasons. Partial termination may mean that the agency cannot provide the services it is supposed to, so that clients may have to go elsewhere, and the organization and its program can be dismantled as ineffective. Levine speaks of this as the "Paradox of Irreducible Wholes" (Levine, 1980).

### Non-Linear Succession

In our discussion of partial termination we have started to move away from the idea of succeeding policies "matching" those they replaced which was implied in the discussion of linear succession and, to a lesser extent, splitting and consolidation. If we envisage at one extreme linear succession by which a new program more or less replaces an old one, and at the other extreme policy innovation which in no way replaces any policy termination with which it may coincide in time, we can characterize circumstances where the new program is closely related in some way to the policy underlying the old program, but has significantly different policy objectives, program characteristics and/or organizational form. Thus, where a program which defined clientele in terms of age or employment status is terminated and a new one instituted which defines clients in terms of income, it would be characterized as a non-linear rather than a linear change, since we would expect a combination of terminated, overlapping, and innovation characteristics in the two programs. The collapsing of previous categorical benefits into the Supplement Security Income Program in the United States is an example of a change of this type. It may be difficult to unravel aspects of non-linear succession from the more complex patterns of policy succession which we discuss below.

### Incidental Policy Succession

From the perspective of those who perceive themselves as initiating a policy innovation, the occurrence of any policy succession relating to their "new" program may appear incidental and peripheral, and the associated politics as an intrusion. Such "incidental policy succession" arises from consequential changes to existing programs, the replacement or alteration of which is not the purpose of the policy proposal. If our earlier argument that there will be few, if any, completely new policy innovations in Western societies is correct, such incidental policy succession will be an intrinsic feature of apparently dramatic policy changes. Although such consequential adjustments to the existing programs may seem peripheral to the proponents of change, they would be foolish to ignore their implications for successfully implementing the proposed change. Skilled politicians will seek the active support, or at least the passive assent, of those involved in programs which may be peripheral from the immediate perspective, but which may be central from the perspective of powerful potential allies or political enemies with the power to contribute to the thwarting of the broader proposal. In seeking such support, advocates of change may have to modify their proposals to meet the objections of those already involved in the existing programs which would be affected.

Even when a proposed policy does not appear to have any direct effect on existing programs, as might be indicated, for example, by amendments to authorizing legislation, there may still be incidental policy succession in the sense that the



proposed new program may constitute an actual or potential rival to established programs. It will not be surprising if such suspicions are engendered, since the purpose of the establishment of new programs and agencies is often to circumvent existing agencies. For example, locating the Office of Economic Opportunity outside of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare during the "War on Poverty" was an explicit attempt to prevent a more innovative approach to problems of poverty from being swallowed up in the large existing organization. Even where there appears to be no immediate threat to the existing program, its supporters may fear that the establishment of a new program may lead to a diversion of resources which would otherwise have gone to the existing program and therefore may pose a long-term threat to its survival. One example may be the "War on Cancer", started in 1971, which constituted a rival to established programs in the National Institutes of Health. Thus, incidental policy succession, whether actual or hypothetical, may lead to "uninvited" policy actors presenting themselves at parties to launch "new" programs.

#### **Complex Patterns of Policy Succession**

The various types of policy succession so far discussed have mostly been "ideal types," relatively simple categories which may bear close resemblance to the examples used to illustrate them, but which by no means embrace the whole range of combinations of characteristics which policy succession in practice may show. Frequently, the forms that policy succession takes will be more complex but will nevertheless contain elements of the types of policy succession discussed above.

One such complex type of policy succession, normally associated with organizational changes, is a combination of splitting and consolidation. One example here is the formation of the Department of Energy in the United States in 1977 from organizational units and programs split off from other departments and agencies. A British example is provided by the splitting-off in 1974 of local authority health functions from the reorganized local authorities. We would expect the politics of the policy succession process to be more complex than in simple cases of linear succession, and we would also expect implementation to be more difficult because of the need to establish more organizations or achieve a reorientation of commitments and loyalties.

#### **Policy Residues**

... it vanished quite slowly, beginning with  
the end of the tail, and ending with  
the grin, which remained some time after the  
rest of it had gone.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Although policy residues are not themselves a type of policy succession, they deserve mention here as an important consequence of many policy successions. Policy

succession of whatever type rarely involves a complete break with previous programs. The "new" program may incorporate a substantial number of features from the old. Even where it does not, contractual commitments entered into under previous programs may continue to entail financial outlays and the employment of administrators for years after the program has been replaced. For example, there continued to be a section of the British Department of Industry in the late 1970s responsible for administering a program of industrial investment grants which had been replaced by the Conservatives in 1970 (in the meantime there had been several further policy changes). This continuation related to projects planned at the time of the change which were therefore eligible for assistance under the program. A rather different form of policy residue, again from the United Kingdom, relates to the earnings-related supplement to basic state pension. The introduction of second pensions under a 1975 Act effectively replaced this provision, but because contributions have been made towards it, this residue of the previous program will be around for decades. In the United States, it took until 1979 to terminate the Renegotiation Board, established to renegotiate defense contracts from World War II. It had some functions relative to the Korean conflict, but after that was largely a vestigial organization. If our contention about the increasing future significance of policy succession is correct, we should expect such policy residues to become a substantial, if esoteric, aspect of public administration. This also points to the importance of designing programs for termination so that residual clients and functions do not require the continuation of outdated programs.

By contrast, some policy residues may, either by design or the turn of events or political fashion, serve as a base for resurrecting the original policy. An example of a residue deliberately maintained to meet a contingency is the retention of Selective Service Boards in the United States after the introduction of the policy of an all-volunteer army in 1972; these boards were able to participate in the registration of potential draftees when a policy of registration was re-introduced by President Carter in 1980. An alternative way of characterizing such episodes is as a special type of "policy hiatus," as discussed above.

### Summary and Conclusions

To this point we have been developing the differences which exist between policy succession and policy innovation, as well as a taxonomy of different types of policy succession. This is in part an exercise directed at our fellow academics, to further the conceptualization of the policy process and the development of analytical models of that process. Much of the writing about policy making assumes that entirely new policies are being proposed and adopted, whereas we have been arguing that this is rarely the case. One purpose of this writing then is to sensitize those who study the policy process to the special characteristics which are encountered when policy changes with large elements of policy succession are proposed. Such an approach

requires substantially greater understanding of the existing constellation of organizations and interests which surround the policy in place than is generally possessed. It also requires a greater attention to the interactions between proposed policies and the policies which already exist in the increasingly crowded policy space. These interactions may produce results at the implementation stage, or even earlier, which might not be anticipated if a more simplistic conception of the policy process were being used. One purpose of academic writing is to simplify the extreme complexity of the "real world," but we would argue that in this case there is a definite danger of over-simplification and distortion of realities.

This essay has an academic purpose, but is also directed towards a more practical objective. Those who make, as well as analyze, policies should also be attuned to the differences between policy innovation and policy succession for three reasons. In the first place, it will enable them to understand better the different political problems faced when proposing policy succession as opposed to policy innovation. A political or administrative actor attempting to modify an existing policy will not have to engage in the battles of having the issue accepted as a part of the legitimate set of governmental activities, but will face potential opposition from entrenched interests which will oppose the issue being reconsidered and the existing policies modified.

At the implementation stage, the organizations which implement an existing policy will be expected to change their manner of delivering the now-altered policy. The inertia of organizations and their resistance to externally imposed changes may limit their ability to make the desired changes. And at the evaluation stage the multiple treatment problem makes the detection of the "real" impacts of the policy succession more difficult to isolate. As policies change, each offering "the" solution to the problems of the clients, it can be expected that clients will grow more cynical about the ability of any policy to solve those problems and may cooperate less to make them a success.

A second lesson for policy makers which can be derived from the analysis of policy succession is the need for them to design their programs and policies for succession and not for permanence. There is a tendency to embark upon a policy initiative with all trumpets blaring and to claim to produce "the" solution to the problem in question. As a consequence, programs are developed which are excessively rigid and which make enduring commitments to clients and/or to public employees. The simple idea of reducing those types of commitments may have some interesting ramifications. For example, social insurance has been a favored policy instrument in both the United States and the United Kingdom, but it may not be the most appropriate policy mechanism for providing social benefits. The very feature which makes social insurance so desirable for many policy makers – the contributory nature of financing – may make it a more difficult type of policy to modify in the future (Behn, 1977, 1978). Citizens who have paid their contributions believe they have a right to a benefit of a certain sort, and indeed they do. Thus, once begun, it is difficult to modify significantly social insurance programs, except to increase incrementally their benefits and coverage.

In addition, civil service rules and procedures may seriously hamper the process of policy succession. As a consequence, there may be reasons other than economic efficiency to consider developing public programs outside the boundaries of what is usually conceptualized as "government." Contractual services and the development of quasi-public bodies, although criticized on other grounds, may be a more flexible means of providing public services, especially for those problems for which the causes and cures are less certain.

Finally, "built-in" terminators, such as sunset laws, may not be very successful in producing termination of organizations or programs, but could be useful at producing policy succession. They will provide a natural time point at which to consider meaningful policy successions. Of course, as shown in our discussion of the legitimation of policy succession, building in a policy terminator does indeed increase the probability that the policy will be terminated. But more likely, it also produces a catalyst for improving the majority of programs which would survive an attempt to terminate.

Thus, it is important for both academic and practitioner to understand the nature and implications of policy succession. The growing relative significance of policy succession is a phenomenon which concerns all those involved in public policy, but it is a phenomenon which has not been fully understood.

### Notes

- 1 As of 1978, over 20% of the American public is covered by public medical programs.
- 2 This is hardly an esoteric point. Data on this are regularly published in the British Government's annual compilation *Social Trends* (London: HMSO). See, e.g., pp. 143-145 of the 1980 edition.
- 3 There are, of course, exceptions. See, e.g., Wurzburg (1979) and Davis and Salesin (1979).
- 4 May and Wildavsky (1978). It should be emphasized that in their introduction these authors do raise some of the points we raise here.
- 5 The now all but complete termination of Britain's colonial function is an exceptional example, as is the termination of the Panama Canal Corporation and American governance of the Panama Canal.

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