

KAY 493

Comparative Public Policy

Week 8

Step 7: Should a lesson be adopted?

Step 8: Can a lesson be applied?

Rose, Chapters 8 & 9



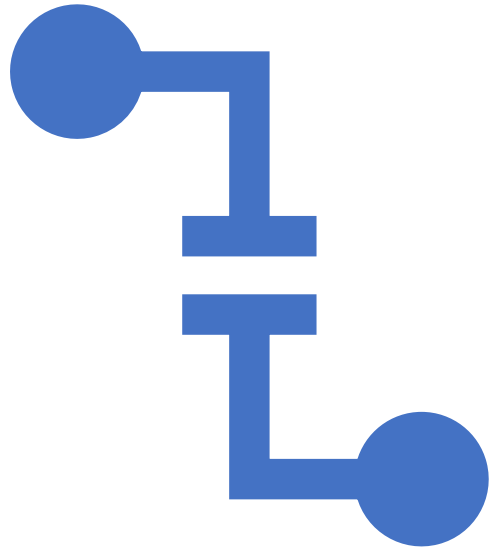
Step 7: Should a lesson be adopted?

Rose, Chapter 8



Different types of evaluation for adoption

- Whereas drawing a lesson is about the technical details of programs in two different countries (role of experts/bureaucrats), the **adoption of a lesson is a political decision (role of political decision-makers).**
- Bureaucrats evaluate programs according to technical values, favoring programs that are **easy to implement and administer.**



Examples

- How did 9/11 attacks affect the adoption of security policies?
- How did COVID affect the adoption of pandemic-related policies?

Critics of adoption

- Critics can demand major modifications of a proposed lesson.
- Because political values are disputed, they are potentially unstable.
- Existence of unresolved battles is important in explaining why many proffered lessons are not, or not yet, adopted



Political conflicts about ends and means

- Since politics involves conflicting opinions about what government ought to do, any lesson of political interest will face challenges about its ends or its means, or on both counts.
- Elected politicians are likely to give more attention to debating program goals, while experts are more likely to focus on program means.

The cultural values described as obstacles to adopting a lesson often divide a country.

Box 7.1 Values differ within as well as between countries

Q. There is a lot of talk these days about what the aims of this country should be for the next ten years. What would you consider most important?

	USA	BRITAIN	FRANCE	SWEDEN	Avg
	%	%	%	%	%
Economic growth	54	43	52	51	50
People have more say about work, community	26	40	36	33	34
Other	20	17	12	16	16

Source: Inglehart *et al.*, 1998, Variable 257.

Opposition to lesson-learning

- Proponents of a lesson will face opposition from within government by those with an interest in the status quo.
- Just as the preparation of a lesson involves cross-national learning, so too national governments are subject to cross-national political pressures.



Opposition to lesson- learning

- Any new program invariably imposes costs, such as changes in personnel, abolishing a government agency, or increasing benefits to some groups but not others.
- Defenders of the status quo can argue that the costs of a new program are real, while its benefits are hypothetical

People learn but organizations decide

- The idea of government as a body with a single mind does not accurately describe the network of organizations that become involved when a decision is to be made about adopting a lesson.
- A more apt metaphor is that of an **octopus**, with eight arms, wanting to get into the decision-making act.
- The variety of organizations creates **multiple** opportunities for finding a **sponsor** for adopting a lesson; it also ensures the existence of **multiple critics**.

Scrutiny of a Lesson

- A lesson is subject to scrutiny through the eyes of many different government agencies. It will be examined carefully by
 - The department that will be responsible for administering it;
 - Departments whose existing programs will be affected by a new measure;
 - Officials controlling public expenditure;
 - Lawyers checking to be sure that the proposed program does not violate existing laws.
- Before making a judgement about the attractiveness of a proposal, officials will **consult with regional and local organizations** responsible for administering the program and with affected **interest groups and experts**.

Compulsory lessons?

- To assume that best-practice programs sell themselves is naive.
- It ignores the **dimension of power** in international relations.
- But poor governments use **tactics to resist domination** by strong and rich governments and intergovernmental institutions.

Pressure to adopt a lesson

- Whether a lesson is adopted or not is the result of the interaction between **pressures at home, pressures from abroad, and the response of the government.**
- Pressure from abroad is most problematic when foreign influence is concentrated on a program that a national government regards as undesirable.



Box 7.3 External pressures and domestic responses to lessons

		<i>External pressures</i>	
		High	Low
<i>Domestic desirability</i>			
High		CO-OPERATE	LONELY ADVANCE
Low		SUBMISSION, NEGOTIATION, EVASION	AVOID

Counterpressures from NGOs

- The movement of ideas is not the exclusive preserve of national governments and intergovernmental organizations; it is also a primary concern of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- NGOs must operate transnationally when the problems that concern them cut across national boundaries.
- National pressure groups increasingly turn to transnational NGOs to advance their interests.

Impact of elections on lesson-drawing

- Newly elected governments can use lessons to implement new policies.
- Even if an election does not produce a change in party control of government, it can change politicians in charge of programs in many departments. An incoming Cabinet minister usually wants to make his or her mark by doing something different.
- This too offers policy entrepreneurs an opening to promote lessons from abroad.



Step 8: Can a lesson be applied?

Rose, Chapter 9

When do lessons get applied?

- Even if a lesson appears desirable and the pressure of events creates a demand for action, this does not guarantee that it will be applied.
- For the lesson's application,
 1. There must be space to introduce a new program into an already crowded set of government commitments;

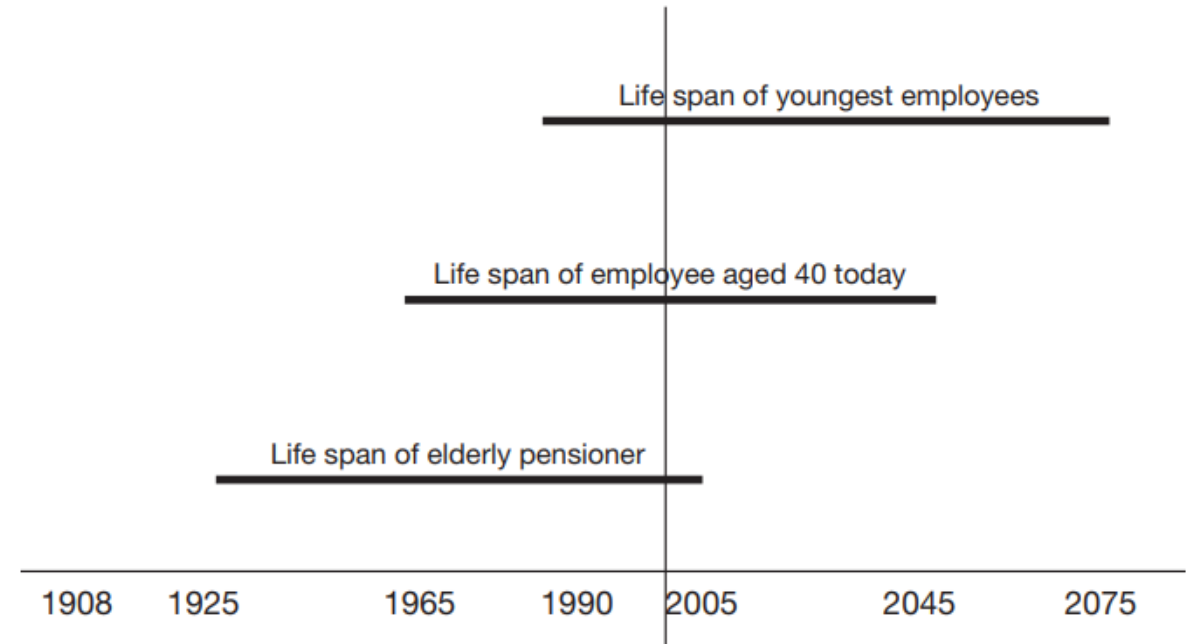
For the lesson's application

2. There must be the resources (e.g. legislation, money, personnel, and organizations) to implement it;
3. There must not be cross-cultural misunderstandings that lead to a mismatch between what a lesson requires and the beliefs and practices of the government adopting it.

Path-dependence

- The logic of path-dependence is simply stated:
- **Past commitments limit current choices** – and thus what lessons can be applied.

Box 8.1 Long shadow of social security programmes



Path-dependence

- Since today's programs reflect past commitments, path-dependence 'locks in' the government of the day by limiting its scope for choice.
- When a path-dependent programme confers benefits on a group, this creates strong pressures against adopting lessons from abroad that threaten their interests.
- Path-dependent programmes have a tendency to become inefficient with the passage of time.

The wicked context problem

- Most fields of public policy are built up over the years by successive governments each adding a program or two.
- The result is a crowded space with limited ground for erecting new programs and requires any new measure to take into account neighboring programs, or even to clear ground by repealing an old program in order to find space for a new one.
- Inserting a lesson into a crowded policy field produces friction, because the new programme will compete with established programs for public attention, political support, and cash.

Novel problems

- When a novel problem arises, such as genetically modified food, policymakers will face an 'empty sky' problem because of the absence of potentially relevant programs.
- While this lack of prior history imposes few inherited constraints on government choice, unfamiliarity means there are no rules of thumb for diagnosing what is happening.

Other factors that limit lesson application

- Mutual misunderstandings
 - When advisors and recipients of advice have very different agendas, the politics of giving and receiving advice encourages misunderstandings.
- Cultural beliefs
 - The greater the cultural differences between countries, the greater the need for foreign advisors to listen to those to whom they tender advice.

Box 8.4 What advisors who give lessons need to learn

- 1 Approach an unfamiliar country with a mind that is free of preconceptions about how similar or different it is from your own country.
- 2 Ask questions of responsible officials there about why existing programmes operate as they do, what problems they are meant to deal with, and what problems they create for the government.
- 3 Inventory the resources available for current programmes in your field and estimate the money, personnel, and political capital available to support new measures.
- 4 Ransack your mind for examples from other countries of programmes that appear to fit the situation at hand.
- 5 Brainstorm with people in the country about changes that *might* be introduced. If people resist the idea of change, emphasize the costs of doing nothing. If people endorse a lesson you offer, press them to explain how they would deal with obstacles to introducing it.
- 6 Accept a programme only loosely inspired by lessons you can offer – as long as it is likely to improve conditions within a country and there is a good chance that national policymakers will implement it.

Desirability and practicality of lessons

Box 8.5 Two standards for evaluating a lesson

		<i>Programme desirability</i>	
		High	Low
<i>Practicality</i>	High	DOUBLY ATTRACTIVE	UNWANTED SOLUTION
	Low	SIREN CALL	IRRELEVANT
