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Public managers and policy communities: learning to meet new challenges

Abstract: Comprehending external environments is an increasingly important facet of the work of senior public servants. The purpose of this paper is to introduce concepts that will help practitioners and academic observers to describe and analyse the structure and dynamics of policy communities. The paper first draws from the political science literature to identify different networks in policy communities, considering how the role of public managers changes from network to network, and then models policy communities as "learning" entities consisting of advocacy coalitions responding to policy challenges in competitive and cooperative interactions. The paper concludes that public managers have a special stewardship function in facilitating more productive learning within policy communities.

Sommaire : Dans le cadre du travail des fonctionnaires supérieurs, il devient de plus en plus important de bien comprendre l'environnement extérieur. Le présent exposé vise à présenter des concepts qui aideront les professionnels du métier et les théoriciens à décrire et à analyser la structure et les dynamiques des communautés qui formulent les politiques. L'exposé se fonde d'abord sur la littérature dans le domaine des sciences politiques pour identifier divers réseaux au sein de ces communautés, en tenant compte de l'évolution du rôle du gestionnaire public d'un réseau à l'autre, puis il présente un modèle de ces communautés en tant qu'ensembles «d'apprentissage» composés de coalitions qui militent en faveur d'un certain objectif et qui interagissent de façon concurrentielle et coopérative aux défis que posent les politiques. Selon la conclusion de l'exposé, les gestionnaires publics ont un rôle-clé dans la facilitation d'un apprentissage plus productif au sein des communautés qui décident des politiques.

Ted Hodgetts used the occasion of the inaugural John L. Manion Lecture of the Canadian Centre for Management Development to take issue with the increasingly common use of the term "public management" to describe the

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administrative work of senior public servants.[1] In his thoughtful and provocative analysis, Hodgetts reminded scholars and practitioners alike of the enduring ideas and issues in public administration that seem condemned to be continually reinvented under new guises.[2] However, it is surely just as important that we recognize those facets of public service which have changed markedly. One trend has been the ever-tightening public purse; senior officials have been under sustained pressure to find alternative ways to deliver programs and meet policy objectives with less budgetary and personnel resources. Whether due to the forces of globalization, pluralization, or technological innovation, senior public servants have had to work in rapidly changing environments that call into question the very foundations of many practices, policies, and programs. Another trend is that officials have had to contend with, or rely on, more outside expertise when developing and implementing policy, partially due to the proliferation and increased sophistication of outside groups, and partially due to the government's own fiscal pressures which have led to more contracting-out of analytic services. Related to this has been the growing expectation that public managers must encourage collaboration with and empower groups outside government to deal with pressing policy challenges. Finally, complicating all of these trends is the fact that senior officials have less time to master the technical and political intricacies of sectors; it is now common practice for political and bureaucratic masters to put them on professional merry-go-rounds.

The extend of these trends suggests that what makes "management" different from "administration" has less to do with the core functions of senior public servants and more to do with their changing external professional environment. In the end, whether we call the work of officials administration or management does not really matter; the reality is that their tasks have expanded. For observers, there is a need to develop concepts that capture the challenges these developments pose to public servants at all levels of government.[3] For officials, there is a need for new analytical tools that will help them to diagnose and map the external environments of public agencies, to recognize the inherent tensions and dynamics in these environments as they pertain to policy development and consensus-building, and to develop new

1 J.E. Hodgetts, "Public Management: Emblem of Reform for the Canadian Public Service" (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1991).

2 For a similarly thorough remonstration to a new generation of "statist" scholars, see G. Almond, "The Return to the State," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 3 (September 1988), pp. 853-74.

3 Broad studies of Canadian public management are conspicuous in their neglect of this increasingly important dimension. John Manion did not address external facets of management in *A Management Model* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1989) except to draw attention to the importance of clients. Gordon Osbaldeston, while observing in *Keeping Deputy Ministers Accountable* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1989) that deputy ministers operate in a more complex setting, concentrated on policy advising, collective management,

strategies for "working" these environments in the interest both of their political masters and those of the broader communities they serve. Finally, if public servants are to learn from the experience of colleagues working in other sectors and other levels of government, they will need a vocabulary to facilitate the dialogue.

This paper attempts to begin the process of developing such tools. Below, I draw on a new literature on policy communities that identifies different interorganizational "policy" networks, and then consider its implications for public managers. However, while key contributors to this literature recognize that these networks are often insufficient to meet current and emerging policy challenges, they do not do a good job of describing the specific challenges which confront public managers in those sectors. For example, when officials attempt to build consensus and involve outside groups on pressing policy challenges, they often find that the values and beliefs held by groups, as well as a lack of trust, constitute important barriers to developing new strategies. This paper taps into a new literature that explicitly models values and conflict in policy networks, enabling us to see how "learning" occurs despite the competitive activities of advocacy coalitions - government agencies, interest groups, journalists, think tanks, and academics who share similar ideas and values and continually attempt to translate them into public policy. While the literature celebrates both competition as a vehicle for learning and the positive influence of experts and professionals on this process, this paper argues that experts and professionals can impede learning, and suggests an alternative model: cooperation.

The analysis has three major implications for public managers. First, public managers should work hard to expand their skills for analysing and shaping their external environments. To better serve their political masters and departments, officials need to move beyond simple issues analysis and service quality to consider the institutional fabric and capacity of environmental actors.[4] Secondly, public managers should go beyond furthering the interests of particular departments and where possible act in the interests of larger policy communities. Public managers can moderate conflict among actors in policy communities and provide opportunities to forge new relationships and

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and internal department management. Ken Kernaghan and John Langford have noted that civil servants have an obligation to act in the public interest and consult with stakeholders, but devoted *The Responsible Public Servant* (Halifax: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1990) to the ethical issues arising inside public organizations. Only Tim Plumptre has discussed aspects of managing external environments in *Beyond the Bottom Line: Management in Government* (Halifax: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1988). However, the pertinent topics ("Consulting with Stakeholders" and "Increasing the Public Content in Public Policy") were covered in six pages (in a 450-page volume). Plumptre noted that "this function has not enjoyed the priority that it deserves in public management" (p. 306).

4 Recent efforts to deal specifically with the environments of public organizations fall short because they focus only on short-term considerations like the services, materials, and informa-

values appropriate for addressing policy challenges. Public managers are uniquely positioned to take up *stewardship roles* in communities, to facilitate constructive debate, learning, and perhaps structural change. Thirdly, since it takes time to develop the contextual knowledge to comprehend a policy sector and to build trust with its members, one practical recommendation is that political leaders and the officials at the apex of a public service should allow senior public managers to stay in their positions longer or build the functional equivalent of that experience and concern with the environment into the culture of departmental management teams. These three recommendations may seem like piling on another set of expectations and tasks on already overburdened public managers. The reality, of course, is that public managers are already grappling with these external pressures and must find better ways to cope.

The concept of policy communities

Hugh Heclo was one of the first academics to deal squarely with significant changes in the external environments of government agencies.[5] Writing about the challenges that confronted the "executive establishment" in Washington, Heclo observed the proliferation and diffusion of expertise among new players in the policy process: legislative committees, executive agencies, interest groups, industry associations, think tanks, and academics. Executive agencies were no longer the sole sources of knowledge and information in the system. Moreover, an increasingly rare find was the expert who had spent most of a career in one organization, whether that be inside or outside government; public and private organizations loomed less as stable policy actors than as convenient way-stations for experts and entrepreneurs. To describe this fragmentation of power and expertise, Heclo coined the concept of *issue networks*, or loosely coupled clusters of individuals, organizations, and government bureaus involved in particular issues. The boundaries of these networks are fluid, since issues change over time and overlap with other issues, and the constituent elements of networks - experts - are always on the move.

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tion necessary to carry out programs. See Public Service 2000, *Service to the Public Task Force Report* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, October 1990), and W. Pullen, "Catching weak and distant signals: Using environmental analysis to help management public organizations," CANADIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION 33, no. 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 234-42. Organization theorists would see this approach as limited to exploring the *technical environment* as opposed to examining *institutional environments*, the power relationships, rules, and norms governing the interactions of organizations within larger interorganizational newtorks. See W.W. Powell and P.J. DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and J.W. Meyer, W.R. Scott, et al., *Organizational Environments: Ritual and Rationality*, updated ed. (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992) for more detailed expositions.

5 H. Heclo, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment" in A. King, ed., *The New American Political System* (Washington, D.C.: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1978).

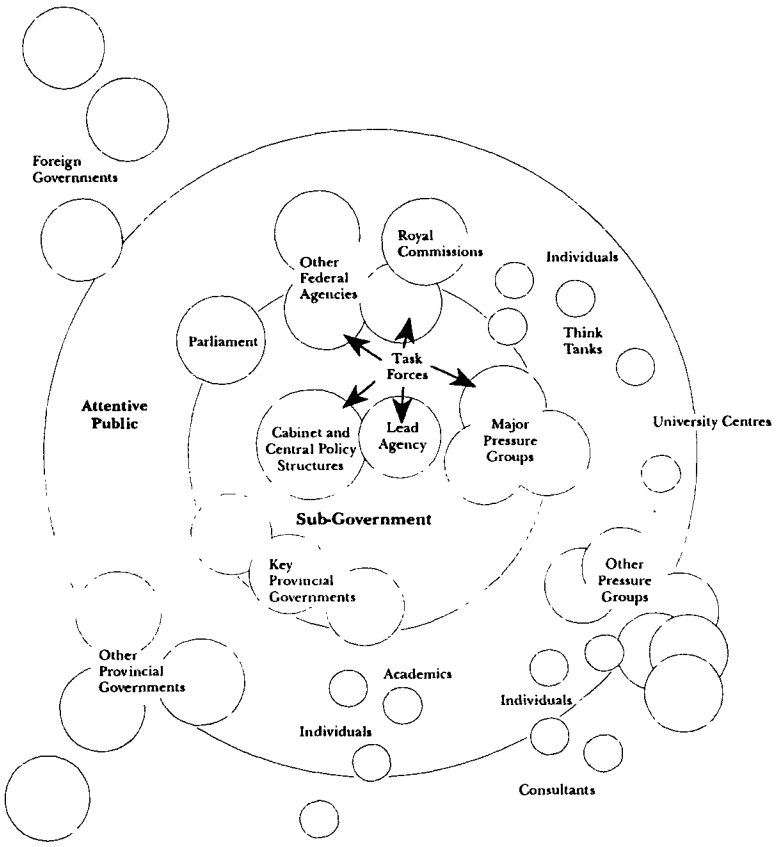
Heclo's formulation also manages to capture some of the changes in the public sector in Canada. There has been an increase in the amount of expertise located outside governments in Canada; not only has there been a proliferation of think tanks, consulting firms, and interest groups undertaking policy-related activities, there has also been a marked increase in the movement of experts between these organizations. But this fluidity exists beyond experts. More than ever, senior officials are moved from department to department, and junior officials are more inclined to opt for career paths that take them back and forth from the public, private, and non-governmental sectors. One outcome of this diffusion of expertise and more elastic career paths is increasing interdependency between state and societal actors. In a manner consistent with Heclo's approach, Alan Cairns has reflected on the complexities and problems this presents for governance in Canada.[6] He points out a paradox: although governments have encouraged the articulation and institutionalization of many latent interests in society, they themselves have been severely constrained as a result. Indeed, sometimes government agencies have become dependent on these outside interests. Cairns argues that these interests have become "embedded" in the state. However, Paul Pross has argued that Heclo's notion of issue networks does not provide a satisfactory description of the Canadian condition.[7] Pross advocates the concept of *policy community*, both to capture the concentration of power in a parliamentary system and to describe the clubby atmosphere in Canadian issue networks due, in large measure, to the smaller size of the country. Nevertheless, even Pross is responding to the developments that Heclo and Cairns were grappling with: an increase in the fragmentation of authority, the diffusion of expertise, and the interdependence between state and society.

Pross has also developed a way to conceptualize and delineate the actors within policy communities (see Chart 1). He says that it should be possible to identify a "sub-government" - that is, the constellation of not only the lead government agency dealing with a particular policy issue, but also the other government agencies and societal interests that have roles in formulating and implementing the policy. The critical insight is that non-governmental actors such as business, professional or other interest associations may be involved in the gestation, design, and implementation of public policy. Not exerting as much influence, but possessing considerable expertise and some capability to affect the policy agenda, particularly through critical commentary, are the remaining members of the policy community - the "attentive public." Pross argues that the actors comprising the sub-government have vested interests in maintaining the status quo for prevailing policies as well as their own influence over the direction of policy, while elements of the attentive public constitute

6 A. Cairns, "The Embedded State: State-Society Relations in Canada" in K. Banting, ed. *State and Society: Canada in Comparative Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1986).
7 A.P. Pross, *Group Politics and Public Policy* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Canada's equivalent to governments-in-waiting, who, along with their experts, wait for the next election or external perturbation which may give them access to the levers of power.

Chart 1. *The Policy Community*



Adapted from P. Pross, "Pressure Groups: Talking Chamelons" in M.S. Whittington and G. Williams (eds.) *Canadian Politics in the 1990's.*

The concept of policy communities resonates with many observers because it captures the increased complexity of policy-making. Many public managers would probably agree with the thrust of these formulations. But they would hasten to add that these writings fail to capture the full implications of a more complex and changing environment; they only paint the backdrop and do not delineate the more specific environments in which public managers operate. This paper introduces two approaches for making sense of policy communities. The first approach suggests that the best way is to identify the myriad of actors associated with a policy area and then analyse their relative power and interrelationships as they get involved in specific policy debates. This is the

structuralist approach. The alternative approach urges us to begin by identifying the ideas, values, and beliefs that circulate within a policy community, determine which actors subscribe to them and to what degree, and then observe how their proponents clash and modify positions on specific issues. This we might call the learning perspective.

Both approaches have important insights for officials and observers, but each is woefully incomplete without the other. On the one hand, ideas do not circulate freely; structures are repositories and shapers of values through which all policy debates are channelled. On the other hand, structures are not impervious bulwarks against ideas and changing beliefs, particularly when we know that actors within state and societal organizations are often divided on issues, and that individuals move regularly within sub-governments and the attentive publics of policy communities, bringing new ideas and perspectives from organization to organization.

Policy networks: configurations of policy communities

The task of identifying different kinds of policy communities was taken up by Michael Atkinson and William Coleman in their excellent study on industrial policy, and more recently in a project spearheaded by Coleman and Grace Skogstad.[8] These scholars adopt what might be called a structural approach to the analysis of policy communities and, more importantly, attempt to explain the pattern of public policy in different sectors. They argue that it is misleading to generalize about the organization of government and outside interests across all policy sectors. There are likely to be different configurations of actors which are the product of historical patterns, prevailing beliefs, as well as the accumulation of previous policy decisions peculiar to a particular sector. The nub of this approach is to determine the relative integration and autonomy of government actors as compared to outside interests in the sector, such as business and labour. It is the structure of policy communities, particularly the absolute and relative capacity of state and society actors to formulate and coordinate policy, which determines how well the sector will respond to short-term and longer-term policy challenges.

At this juncture it is helpful to introduce new terminology to avoid confusion. Policy communities are constellations of actors who share clusters of interests in a broad policy domain. Each policy community deals with many issues, some of which interest or demand the attention or expertise of some members more than others. Accordingly, different networks of actors coalesce around different policy issues. For example, in the case of the AIDS policy

8 M.M. Atkinson and W.D. Coleman, *The State, Business, and Industrial Change in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1989); W.D. Coleman and G. Skogstad, eds., *Policy Communities and Public Policy in Canada: A Structural Approach* (Mississauga: Copp Clark Pitman, 1990).

community, the issue of appropriate protocols for drug research draws together a somewhat different set of actors from the issue of anonymous HIV-testing. Atkinson and Coleman provide another example: for pharmaceuticals there are different styles of policy-making for drug testing and compulsory licensing.[9] Rather than identify the structure of a community, these analysts prefer to identify configurations of actors that come together on particular issues, labelling them *policy networks*. There may be several of these networks within a particular policy community. Indeed, public managers may have to work with actors from one or even several networks.[10]

Five types of policy networks have been identified: pressure pluralist, clientele pluralist, state-directed, concertation, and corporatist. Each network differs with regard to its analytic capacity and the power of government and societal interests, which produces different patterns in policy-making. It follows that public managers working in each network will have different sets of responsibilities and challenges. To determine the relative power of actors in the networks, managers and observers alike should ask the following questions: Which actors have valued data or expertise? Can certain state and societal actors, though representing particular constituencies, act unilaterally? How well coordinated are government agencies? How well coordinated are interest groups? Do most debates and discussions between state and societal actors focus on short-term or long-term issues? Is policy-making reactive or anticipatory in nature? Is it possible to detect convergence in the views of certain state and societal actors?

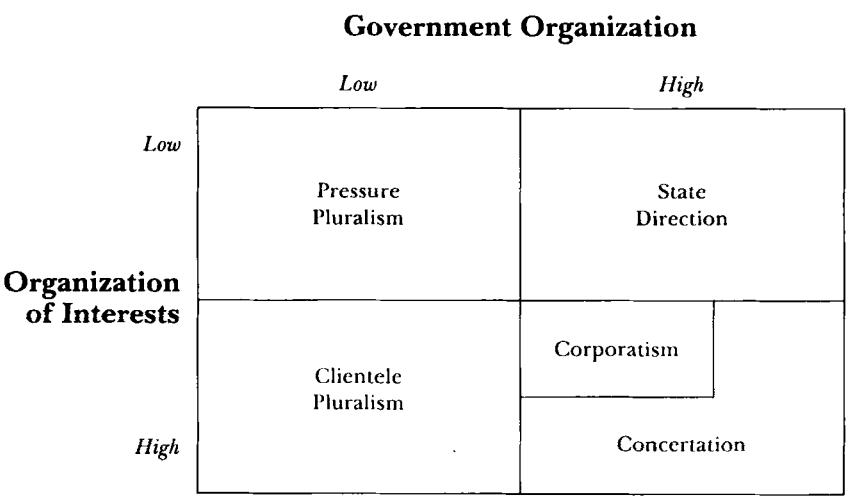
These questions point to one problem with this approach: given the number of dimensions that have been identified, it is difficult to present different networks in a manner that is intuitive and easy to absorb. For more direct exposition, I have collapsed the dimensions into a single dimension depicting "how well organized" the state and societal actors are. Chart 2 provides the summary. Although the chart greatly simplifies structuralist analysis, it nevertheless captures the essential insights. The sections that follow provide an overview of each network, followed by a discussion of the organization of societal interests and state actors, the nature of policy-making and responsive-

9 Atkinson and Coleman, *The State, Business and Industrial Change*, pp. 122-41.

10 There is some debate over the use of the concepts of policy community and policy networks. In some quarters, policy community is reserved to describe a tight cluster of actors sharing a similar world view, and network is then used to refer to the larger constellation of actors. This springs out of studies of British administrative culture. The Canadian and continental European literature sees policy communities as actors who have common interests but not common values, and who develop considerable familiarity with each other as they repeatedly square off on issue after issue in the larger policy domain. See A.G. Jordan, "Iron triangles, woolly corporatism, or elastic nets: images of the policy process," *Journal of Public Policy* 1 (February 1981), pp. 95-123; R.A. Rhodes, "Policy Networks: A British Perspective," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2, no. 3 (1990), pp. 293-317; and G. Jordan, "Sub-Governments, Policy Communities and Networks: Refilling the Old Bottles?" *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2, no. 3 (1990), pp. 317-37.

ness to policy challenges, and the implications for public managers.[11] These networks should be interpreted as ideal types which show the range of possibilities and indicate why public managers must be acutely aware of different external environments. The implicit focus of these network "templates" is on the organization of the sub-government actors. The structuralist

Chart 2. *Different Configurations of Policy Networks*



approach has little to say about the organization of the attentive public consisting of single interest groups, think tanks, parliamentary committees, advisory councils and the like. We will assume that the influence of these actors is consistently diffuse.

Managing in pressure pluralist networks: tracking the constituency

A crass way to describe this network is as a "war of all against all" among members of the policy community. Pluralism refers not only to the competition among societal interests but also among state actors. The capacity to formulate and implement policy does not reach a critical mass anywhere in the network, leading to inherently reactive policy-making.

Pressure pluralist networks are characterized by what Atkinson and Coleman call "weak associational systems" for business, labour, consumer, and other categories of societal groups. This is not to say that there are not organized interests or associations of various groups; indeed, there may be many

11 The analysis does not assume a particular type of public manager, say a deputy minister or senior official responsible for consultation and communications. Relying on such situational analysis would be inappropriate since the structure of departments vary considerably.

associations, often organized on a sectoral basis. Frequently, there is considerable competition among these interests and associations, but there is no mechanism or organization with the capacity or legitimacy to mediate. No one actor is pre-eminent, possessing a capability to develop sectoral overviews and engage in long-term planning. This situation is further complicated by the federal reality in Canada, with associations and interests often organized at the provincial and national levels. Policy initiatives arise when individual firms or organizations form temporary and fleeting alliances with state actors.

The term "pluralism" also describes the organization of state actors. Over time, many societal players may succeed in institutionalizing their interests through the creation of bureaus (sometimes entire departments) or by finding allies within the bureaucracy. Like their societal counterparts, bureaus compete to raise their concerns with policy-makers and to achieve particular policy objectives consistent with the values they embody.[12] However, the existence of such bureaucratic conflict is not the pivotal characteristic here - there will always be bureaucratic politics - rather it is that the government does not have a process or a sufficiently powerful department to resolve conflict within the bureaucracy and develop a coherent, integrated policy stance. Not surprisingly, this implies that the state does not have the capacity to develop long-term policy strategies for the sector under consideration.

This combination of government and societal organization leads to a policy-making process which might be loosely called "disjointed incrementalism." No matter what the issue, members of the policy community typically have a short-term perspective and partial information - pertinent expertise on issues is dispersed throughout the policy network. The network is highly reactive in that it is often surprised by external events and then scrambles to engage in policy "fire-fighting." The government or an individual minister is likely to focus on limited issues, usually with regard to individual firms or groups, since no department has the capacity or clout to design and launch a strategy that would transform a sector involving several departments. Policy change may occur when a group puts forth limited ideas which have their own interests and those of a department at heart. If one group does catch the ear of a department, and the timing is right for a policy change, other interests inside and outside the state will clamour for compensatory changes. The flow of power and influence may shift if one actor develops a significant strategic capacity and develops better tactics. In general, however, given the incremental and reactive character of such networks, they may ignore looming problems or overlook opportunities.

In pluralist networks there is no one pivotal senior manager responsible for dealing with outside groups; instead there are several autonomous agencies in

12 Many readers will find this formulation familiar because it is the hallmark of Graham Allison's "bureaucratic politics" model of policy-making in *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missle Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

competition with each other. Moreover, there are no central means for coordinating or monitoring developments, so senior managers undertake their own intelligence-gathering. Officials are unlikely to develop collegial relationships with counterparts in other departments who work on the same issues since they are likely to have different perspectives and few incentives to cooperate. Under these circumstances, the strategic imperative for officials is to maintain contact with the key constituencies of the department or bureau in the policy network. However, the diffuseness of the network makes this difficult, and considerable effort must be expended simply to keep in contact. As a result, data and other policy-relevant information are difficult to obtain. Indeed, even if a department or bureau identifies an emerging problem or promising policy solution, it will be difficult to mobilize even those groups that stand to benefit from the proposed initiatives. The very structure of the policy network means that it is difficult for the government to launch major initiatives.

Managing in clientele pluralist networks: working the association

Unlike pressure pluralist networks, in this network at least some outside interests are well organized. They are in a position to exert pressure on state actors, who may be quite reliant on these interests. Policy-making in this network is reactive, but more concerted, and is fully directed to maintaining the status quo.

Labelling a network as "clientele pluralist" does not mean that outside interests, particularly those of business, are not in competition with each other. Rather, the key difference from pressure pluralist networks is that, despite these inherent conflicts, various groups organize themselves to work out their differences, engage in a process of making policy trade-offs, develop a consensus position, and then mobilize collectively to bring pressure to bear on the government. The means by which such interests achieve this result is through some form of representative association, often with a good number of staff, the ability to generate its own data from members, and a process by which consensus can be generated. Of course, the autonomy of associations will vary, but there exists a capability to work out policy stances that encompass the entire sector.

The government does not have the same ability to coordinate. Jurisdiction and expertise on aspects of any given issue are dispersed among several departments, no one of which can browbeat the others into adopting a common stance. Perhaps more importantly, the government as a whole does not have the ability to integrate pertinent expertise spread across department and develop a coherent perspective and plan. Government departments may be dependent on interest associations for information and sector-wide perspectives. On particular issues, they may lack the requisite data, cannot mobilize their own expertise, and do not have the policy breadth to put forth

an alternative, credible strategy on the issue in question.

This kind of network has several implications for policy-making. First, interest groups have a vested interest in defending the status quo which they probably helped design. Therefore they are likely to adopt a reactive posture towards policy issues rather than search for ways to improve and reorient policy within the sector. Secondly, many government bureaus share specific interests with some members of an association. Thus they are likely to defer to the compromises made within the association and as a result adopt a laissez-faire approach in this regard. Thirdly, if the government believes that certain societal interests should have greater standing in policy development, then it will likely encourage the association to embrace and accommodate these interests. Finally, if a government is committed to taking remedial action and believes that the association has failed to address some key policy concerns, it will nevertheless move carefully and seek substantial input from the association and perhaps its members.

The main factor that changes as senior managers move into a clientele network involves information and expertise. Although expertise pertinent to the issue is diffused among several actors in both the state and society, a well-organized association has the capacity to pull together information and act on behalf of its members. A similar ability does not exist across the government as a whole, and this coordinating gap cannot be adequately bridged by any particular department or bureau. As a result, government relies on associations for important information.

The up side is that the "search costs" for obtaining information from a key constituency are notably reduced – there is in effect, "one stop" shopping for both data and consultation. Public managers do not have to invest as much time in monitoring the activities and shifting positions of key interests, since the association itself provides that service. The real game for any bureau is to determine what is brewing over at the association and to obtain intelligence on the activities of other departments. The most difficult problem for senior managers is to ensure that government departments present a united front. Indeed, since departmental staff have dispositions on issues similar to their association counterparts, there is far more potential for collegial relationships to develop in this direction rather than with staff at other government bureaus. Even though it is difficult for a government to take the lead on policy development, it may still want to launch a new initiative or believe that an association has failed to adequately address an emerging problem. Senior managers must ensure that ministers are familiar with previous accommodations with the association as well as the protocol governing consultations. Association representatives may expect to be consulted well in advance and have ample opportunity to shape policy. Caution must be exercised because well-organized associations have the wherewithal to mount a concerted public relations campaign to which the government may not be able to respond effectively.

Managing in state-directed networks: planning and coordination

This offers the reverse scenario to the clientele pluralist network: here the state is well organized compared to societal interests. The weak organization of outside groups may be because the interests are diffuse, latent, or just poorly represented. Interests may not have overcome economic, geographical, or ideological barriers to concerted action. Previous acrimonious struggles among interests may also preclude more effective collective action. In any event, the result is the same: different interests or individual organizations do not have the will or ability to mobilize and produce alternative policy strategies. In this network, the policy ball is in the state's court.

The state has considerable capacity to design policy, to coordinate its bureaus, and to act independently of outside interests. Political leaders and senior officials have a vision or plan for the sector. The government controls a battery of powerful policy instruments and is in a strong position to coerce outside interests. The government also has clout because it has considerable technical and policy expertise which, even if located in different bureaus, can be coordinated and brought to bear in a concerted way. A lead agency or coordinating group will often be designated to spearhead policy development. This results in clearer lines of communication and reduces the debilitating influence of outside groups working through sympathetic bureaus.

Not surprisingly, policy-making in state-directed networks tends to be lopsided and occurs at the behest of the government. The combination of a policy vision with substantial organizational capabilities is potent. When juxtaposed against weak outside interests, it creates considerable room for governments to launch unilateral initiatives and to neutralize opposition from threatened interests. This is not to suggest that consultation will not occur in these networks, but ministers and officials know that outside groups cannot think constructively at the sectoral level and so they tend to consult on a selective basis for more limited pieces of information which might fit into the larger puzzle. Policy-making is "anticipatory" in nature, such as restructuring sectors or establishing a new set of sectoral interests.

The challenge for senior managers in state-directed networks is to coordinate expertise dispersed throughout government and the rest of the policy network. Since the lead department will have many of its own experts and considerable sway over the activities of experts in other departments, its senior managers will have more of an administrative posture. If planning a major policy initiative, sufficient organizational capacity must be created to mobilize expertise and information.[13] A sectoral policy stance is likely to be closely

13 For a detailed discussion of this problem see J.A. Desveaux, E.A. Lindquist, and G. Toner, "Organizing for Policy Innovation in Public Organizations: AIDS, Energy, and Environmental Policy in Canada," paper presented at the annual meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, Kingston, June 1990.

linked to the government's policy agenda, and therefore the political sensitivity of senior managers must be acute. In turn, the minister must ensure that cabinet colleagues are supportive of the lead department. Politics aside, since the government is in a position to create, manage, or restructure an entire policy community, senior managers will have a longer time horizon and can afford to adopt different strategic postures for dealing with societal interests. If the goal is to help societal actors to develop and mature, then the lead department is likely to adopt a paternalistic posture and nurture fledgling organizations. If the goal is to retain or build the pre-eminence of the government in sectoral planning, then departments may attempt to neutralize or undermine key societal actors. This may involve adopting a "divide and conquer" strategy where issues are exploited because of their divisive qualities. When undertaking consultations, senior managers must balance the need for secrecy with the appropriate diffusion of information. In any event, outsiders are not likely to be viewed as equals since they do not have the same vision or power. Colleagues will be found in cognate departments, particularly line departments, although this will likely be a hierarchical relationship because a lead department will have been designated.

Managing in concertation and corporatist networks: bargaining versus arbitration

Corporatist and concertation networks are similar in that a balance is struck between two competing, well-organized, and policy-capable interests. Moreover, in both networks the organization of business interests is strong, displaying the attributes of a well-developed associational system similar to that described under clientele pluralism. However, the role of senior public managers differs markedly in each network: in the former, they are preparing the government to bargain, in the latter they are helping the government to arbitrate.

In concertation networks a strong association contends with an equally strong and well-organized government apparatus. Each side can articulate alternative visions for the sector, each has their own sources of intelligence, and each can design and evaluate different programmatic options. Each side must deal with the other on more or less equal terms, resulting in negotiation and perhaps cooperative planning efforts. According to Atkinson and Coleman, the responsibility for implementing a new policy will often be delegated to the pertinent societal interests who have the incentive and capability to ensure that the plans are carried out, particularly since the state has the capacity to monitor outcomes and has recourse to other, less acceptable policy alternatives. The result is an orderly, "closed" policy-making process. Only those who represent legitimate interests and can muster the requisite technical expertise and articulate a broad vision can participate.

Managing the external environment in this case is not unlike the situation in state-directed networks. Senior managers must develop and organize a sufficient expertise to ensure that the government has a planning capacity in an issue area. However, in a concertation network the government representatives find themselves planning and negotiating with organized interests. Much is at stake. The skills and information required are similar to those needed in a complex round of collective bargaining. Information and experts alike are assembled at crucial moments to produce alternative data demanded by the negotiations. Officials from the lead department must anticipate what information and expertise will be needed since they will be pitted against an informed and well-organized opposition. Opposing analysts and negotiators are likely to have much in common. To be effective, senior managers must have a clear understanding of pertinent political interests. In these circumstances, officials want to avoid the embarrassment of being contradicted by political masters and the consequent erosion of their own credibility.

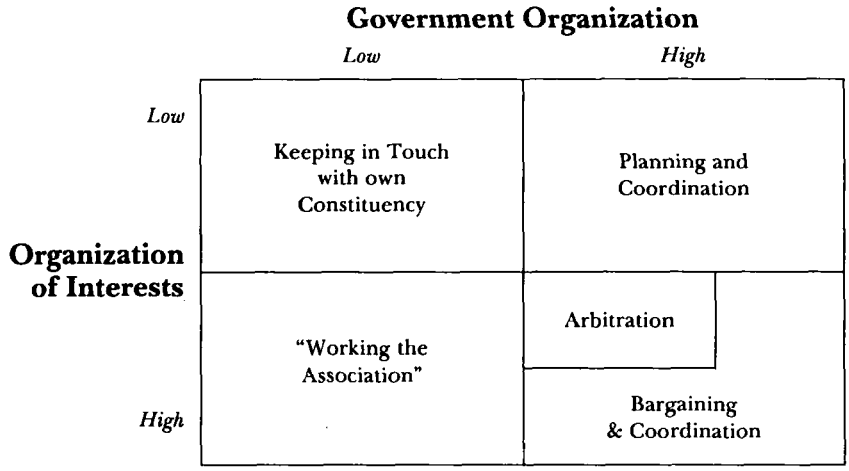
In a corporatist network, the power of one associational system, say that of a particular business sector, is balanced by another equally powerful set of societal interests, such as labour or another business sector. Here the role of the state is to ensure that these respective interests negotiate acceptable policy solutions to problems, thereby avoiding deadlock or retaliatory actions which would not be in the interest of either set of actors or society at large. The government is autonomous in that it is not closely linked to either set of interests. It may even be divided on the issues at stake. But it has neither the ability nor the necessary instruments at its disposal to outflank, transcend, or move unilaterally around these competing interests. However, what the government has that the other actors do not is legitimacy. Accordingly, the role of the state is to develop and administer a process by which societal interests can arrive at agreements. State actors may have the capacity to monitor and evaluate outcomes, but usually it is left to the respective protagonists to implement their parts of the bargain.

In corporatist networks, senior managers in lead departments have a special role to play in assisting their ministers. The management of external relations culminates in negotiating between two sets of organized societal interests which cannot easily achieve compromise without a mediator. Officials must anticipate where deadlocks might occur, identify potential areas of agreement, and encourage the search for consensus. Officials also have the moral authority to remind representatives of each set of interests of the greater public good, and they must find ways to break policy log-jams by transcending conflicting values and visions. Managing the negotiating process is critical. Government resources and expertise are brought to bear not only to search for policy solutions, but also to help two parties reach a satisfactory agreement. Senior managers must ensure that agreements are honoured, although the lead agency will defer both to line departments and to the interests that have the expertise to monitor the technical details of the agreement.

Conclusion: public managers and policy communities

When senior managers shift to a new department, they must expend considerable time and energy mastering its mandate, programs, structure, and culture – all in addition to developing a working relationship with a new minister. But the external environment of the department will also be unfamiliar territory. As senior managers move to different policy communities there will be changes in the organization of actors inside and outside government, and as a result, public managers will be presented with different challenges. For public managers, the department's capacity to garner expertise and information bears directly on its ability to plan and manage its external environment. Moreover, its success in this regard will be heavily influenced by the structure of the policy community, which in turn has consequences for the relationship senior officials have with their ministers and the locus of collegiality among department officials. The analysis in this section is summarized in Chart 3.

Chart 3. *Imperatives for Public Managers in Different Policy Networks*



Knowledge of policy community structure can also help senior managers who work within a policy sector. Policy networks have different capacities to react to problems. Most networks should handle routine or incremental problems with ease. However, outside forces may have a profound impact on entire policy communities,[14] taking them by surprise or at least posing new

14 External influences may come from three sources. First, the gyrations of one policy community can have an impact on other policy communities. Secondly, changes in the broader political system, such as new governments or the adoption of policies with broad effects (e.g.,

quandaries and possibilities for members. Some policy networks are only capable of incremental, ad hoc responses, which may be insufficient to meet the new challenges. And, as a challenge becomes more fundamental in nature, constituting a greater threat to the extant policy regime, it is more likely that a dramatic and comprehensive policy response will be required. Even if the response is more reactive than anticipatory, it will still require substantially more in the way of planning and coordination of organizations in both the public sector and private sector.

Politicians and officials within networks may initiate new policies. However, policy interventions should only be developed with knowledge about the relative capacity of actors within the community, whether they be inside or outside government. Public managers must understand the structure of policy communities because different network configurations implies different government capacities for policy design and implementation. If initiatives constitute only small departures from prevailing policy, departments and ministers will have some latitude and autonomy. Such interventions do not require substantial analysis or coordination with other government agencies or a panoply of sectoral interests. However, as the extent of a planned intervention increases, whether governments have the resources to plan, organize, and put the intervention in motion becomes a critical variable. In pressure pluralist, clientele, and corporatist networks, if a government were to go it alone it would produce a poorly designed intervention and, in the case of the clientele and corporatist networks, it would also risk being quickly neutralized by key societal interests. If a government seeks to establish a new policy regime around an issue, it must also create sufficient planning and coordinating capacity within and across agencies. By doing so, the government is not simply shifting the balance of power within the network, it is establishing a new policy network.

This last point suggests another possibility: at any given time, networks may be in the midst of metamorphosis, even though Pross argues that subgovernment actors will strive to maintain either the existing policy regime or their positions of influence. For senior public managers this means that as problems or conflicts of increasing proportion arise within a network, they should be vigilant because previous protocol may no longer be appropriate and because changing conditions may provide opportunities for reshaping networks. There are several ways in which change may occur. First, if certain societal interests are weakly organized and severely threatened by economic developments, they have a strong incentive to mobilize and, depending on whether the network was pluralist or state-directed, may transform it into

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tax or monetary policy) may alter the political or economic resources of actors within any given policy community. Finally, some changes, such as global recession or war, will affect all policy communities, albeit in different ways.

either a clientele network or a concertation network. Secondly, Atkinson and Coleman suggest that crisis may produce demands for strong government action and state-directed networks may take shape. Perhaps the quintessential example of such a development was the 1980 National Energy Program when the Liberal government, in the name of security of supply and nationalism, announced a battery of policies, programs, and organizations that radically revamped the structure of the oil and gas industry. Thirdly, corporatist networks may emerge out of conflict and deadlock between societal interests, forcing government departments to take on more of an arbitration role. Fourthly, Atkinson and Coleman identify one other network structure, parentela pluralism, which is a temporary alliance between a single interest and a new government. Policies sympathetic to the group are announced, but neither a sectoral strategy nor a permanent capacity for policy development within the government emerge. When political fortunes shift, the alliance fades quickly.

Public managers know that to serve ministers well they must keep abreast of how developments in cognate policy communities, national and regional politics, and the national and international economy might affect their policy community. The analysis in this section suggests that public managers should include another dimension when undertaking environmental scans. Regardless of the network, public managers should be aware of when any organization, another department or interest association, increases its policy capacity on issues in which they have a stake, since by doing so they are able either to launch new policy initiatives or react in a more concerted fashion to state-led initiatives.

Meeting new challenges: learning in policy communities

One of the more sobering conclusions of Atkinson and Coleman was that there was a mismatch in sector after sector between the configuration and policy trajectories of policy networks and the realities which they need to confront for developing new industrial policies. Their concern was about whether members of policy networks can see broader challenges, rise above parochial interests, and develop the necessary organizational capacity inside and outside government to move the network onto a new plane. Accomplishing such objectives can be daunting. The recent experience of Agriculture Canada illustrates the problem.[15] In 1988 departmental leaders feared that continuing support for stop-gap agricultural policies was unsatisfactory. Despite the presence of well-organized producer-groups along commodity and provincial lines, the sector was confronting the fact that the problems

15 This information was taken from the remarks of Jean-Jacques Noreau, deputy minister of Agriculture Canada to the university seminar sponsored by the Canadian Centre for Management Development, 22 February 1991.

were not transitory but permanent in nature. Following a concerted effort to release information that would highlight these problems, a conference was held to discuss them and several task forces were struck to examine issues which cut across commodity sectors. Although it was reported that the process encouraged a cross-sectional perspective as opposed to the traditional commodity-based understanding, and prodded its members to think about change and adapation, these efforts did not result in a major policy shift.

To ask if members of policy communities recognize or are prepared to deal with new policy challenges is to inquire about their capacity for learning.[16] Before delving into how learning takes place in policy communities, it is useful to have in mind different kinds of learning. Argyris and Schon have delineated three.[17] First, there is *single-loop learning*, which occurs when individuals and organizations recognize errors or failures to meet performance targets and then make adjustments consistent with prevailing belief structures and strategies. *Double-loop learning* occurs when errors or poor performance are acknowledged but a critical examination of strategic orientation and underlying norms and beliefs is undertaken, leading to a new strategic posture. *Deutero-learning* follows when individuals and organizations are in a position to reflect on how they have learned, with the objective of improving efficiency and effectiveness of future adjustments.

Although the structuralists do not employ learning concepts, their complaint is that many policy communities are mired in single-loop learning, unable to step out of patterned and myopic thinking, and incapable of addressing new challenges. The simple fact is that, like individuals and organizations, it is difficult to get policy communities to engage in both double-loop and deutero learning. Embracing many different organizations, values, and interests, policy communities are not ideal learning environments. Value conflict is inevitable and distrust is usually rampant. Whether officials want to monitor or effect change, they understand that knowledge of structures and relative power is not sufficient: they must also contend with the beliefs, premises, and values of policy actors impeding or forcing change.

Advocacy coalitions: repositories of beliefs and values

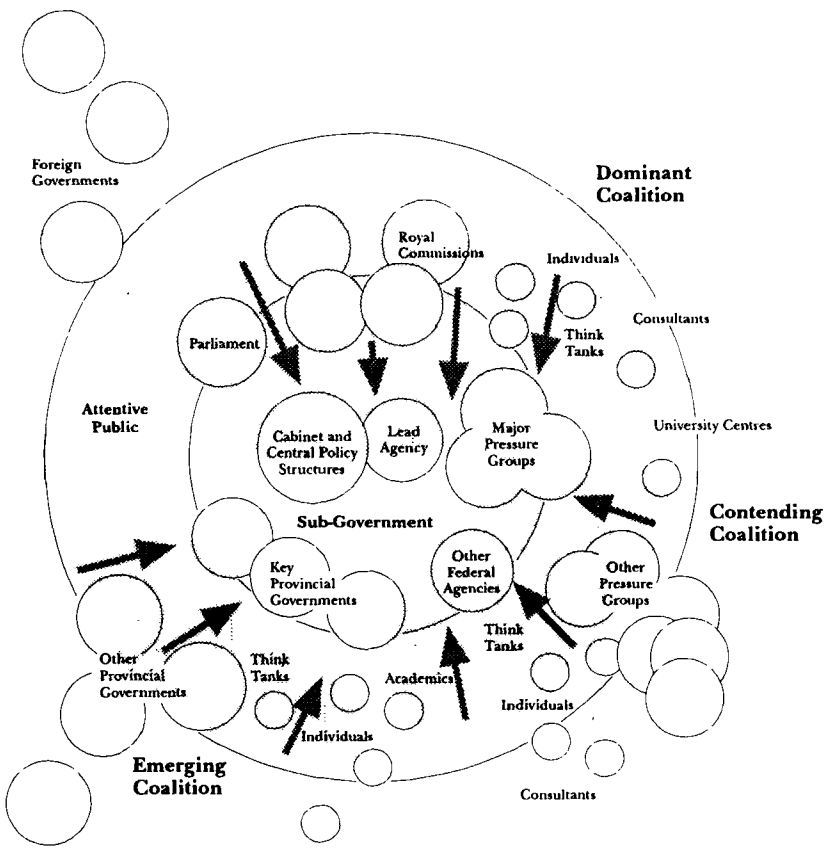
The work of Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith is not yet widely recognized in Canada, but they add a new level of analysis which greatly enriches our

16 For a review of the literature, see L.S. Etheredge, "Government Learning: An Overview" in S.L. Long ed., *The Handbook of Political Behaviour*, vol. 2 (New York: Plenum Press, 1981), pp. 73-161, and E.A. Parson and W.C. Clark, "Learning to Manage Global Environmental Changes: A Review of Relevant Theory" in J.T. Kildew, ed., *Environment: Agent for Change* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1992).

17 C. Argyris and D.A. Schon, *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (Don Mills: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

understanding of the dynamics of policy communities.[18] According to Sabatier, within any policy community there will be several advocacy coalitions "composed of people from various organizations who share a set of normative and causal beliefs and who often act in concert" and that will include "actors at various levels of government active in policy formulation and implementation, as well as journalists, researchers, and policy analysts who play important roles in the generation, dissemination, and evaluation of policy ideas." In other words, coalitions span the sub-government and the attentive public within a policy community, their members trading ideas and information and working in concert in policy debates. Sabatier argues that we should find two to four important coalitions in a policy community and that "on major

Chart 4. *The Policy Community: an alternative interpretation*



18 See P.A. Sabatier, "Knowledge, policy-oriented learning, and policy change: An advocacy coalition framework," *Knowledge* 8, no. 4 (1987), pp. 649-92; P. Sabatier and H. Jenkins-Smith, eds., "Policy Change and Policy-Oriented Learning: Exploring an Advocacy Coalition Framework," *Policy Sciences* 21, nos. 2-3 (1988); and H.C. Jenkins-Smith. *Democratic Politics and Policy Analysis* (Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole, 1990).

controversies ... the lineup of allies and opponents will tend to be rather stable over periods of a decade or so."[19] Thus, advocacy coalitions are relatively constant, identifiable elements of the environments of public managers which they can "map" with some degree of confidence. However, it must be emphasized that advocacy coalitions, in terms of degree of coordination and ideological coherence, will vary from issue to issue, as well as within and across policy communities.

Despite the potential for variation in the organization of advocacy coalitions, their stability is derived from shared beliefs as well as the economic and organizational interests of members. Sabatier says that it is possible to identify structures in the belief systems of advocacy coalitions: *deep core* normative beliefs, deeply ingrained in the personalities of members; *near core* strategies and propositions best viewed as the attempts to operationalize deep core beliefs into practice by articulating approaches to public policy; and *secondary aspects* that involve the details and issues wrought up in the design and implementation of the strategies and propositions associated with the policy core. Sabatier argues that within advocacy coalitions there is "substantial consensus" on the policy core, but its members may differ on secondary aspects of the belief systems.[20]

According to this formulation, even if the environment surrounding the policy community is placid, conflict will continue - there will be an endless clash over ideas. What drives change is the constant desire of advocacy coalitions to "translate the policy cores and the secondary aspects of their belief systems into governmental-action programs."[21] At any point in time, each coalition contains a broad strategic posture embracing a cluster of policies that members believe will further their objectives. Coalition members are determined and inventive, seeking to find new approaches to policy and political problems. Even members outside the sub-government, such as academics, think tanks, and single interest groups, may produce new arguments and strategies. Members also to react to perceived threats to their interests, either as result of general changes in economic or political conditions or in response to the specific initiatives launched by other coalitions.

At any point in time, one coalition will usually be dominant within the policy community. However, this does not mean that the government necessarily dominates all societal interests within a policy network, but rather that members of one advocacy coalition, including some government bureaus and interest groups, will have far more resources and power to implement their policy programs.[22] This raises the possibility that policy-makers, if associated

19 Sabatier, "Knowledge," pp. 652, 663.

20 Ibid., pp. 666-68.

21 Ibid., p. 670.

22 Actors not associated with the dominant coalition are unlikely to be heard or taken seriously until there is a shift in the prevailing power structure of the policy community. Both Pross and

with a particular advocacy coalition, may be more comfortable reaching out to certain members of their own coalition for support and information than to other government bureaus. Certain associations, experts, think tanks, and institutes in the attentive public, therefore, will have greater voice in the policy process. These individuals and organizations may not be bona fide members of the sub-government, but their ideas have greater currency than other members of the attentive public. They will help identify problems and invent strategies for solving them. Conversely, some government departments may not have much influence if not associated with the dominant coalition. In other words, in some circumstances, bureaucratic politics may simply reflect broader and longer-term struggles among advocacy coalitions within a policy community.

Learning through conflict

Policy and analytical debates typically involve confrontation. However, they can also be a potentially productive learning process, perhaps leading to a better grasp of policy problems, even though the views of participants may not have changed dramatically when a round of the debate is completed.

Policy-oriented learning may occur as a byproduct of competitive interactions between advocacy coalitions. Jenkins-Smith defines policy-oriented learning as "the process of attempting to better understand and achieve core policy objectives until confronted by new constraints or opportunities, at which point one attempts to adjust to the new situation in a manner that is consistent with the core."[23] In this model, there are two motivations to learn. One is the desire of coalition members to further their interests and to expand the audience for their visions of how the world ought to work. Effort is expended towards developing a better understanding of the variables and their linkages that are defined as important by their belief systems in order to improve policy proposals and achieve shared goals. So, for example, monetary economists who attempt to comprehend the gyrations of the economy through money supply movements undertake research on defining kinds of monetary aggregates, how these aggregates relate to each other over time and are linked to other significant variables such as interest rates and the real economy. The findings are intended to draw the attention of policy-makers to these factors, as opposed to those highlighted by Keynsian economists, when considering how to manage the economy.

The other motivating factor for advocacy coalitions to learn comes in the form of perceived external threats to the interests of members. These threats

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Sabatier argue that, as a general rule, significant policy change is unlikely to occur within policy communities because dominant sub-government actors seek to maintain the status quo. Moreover, a shift in the balance of power within a policy community is unlikely to occur unless reinforced by some sort of external shock to the community.

23 Jenkins-Smith, *Democratic Politics*, p. 93.

may emanate from the analytic challenges of other coalitions or from relatively neutral groups that produce data or anomalies that challenge or contradict the claims of an advocacy coalition. External threats may also come in the form of unexpected shocks to policy communities, providing new opportunities to exploit or ideological disasters to bridge. In any event, in order to respond to these threats, coalition members must modify their belief systems, launch counter-attacks, and adjust to the new realities.

To the extent that one or more advocacy coalitions alter their respective policy agendas to account for changing conditions or new knowledge, then we can say that there has been policy-oriented learning. Depending on the circumstances, there may be a significant change in aspects of the policy core in one or more of the coalitions. Sabatier claims that competing coalitions will learn at more or less the same rate, thus preserving the balance (or imbalance) in their respective political resources.[24] This should not be taken to mean that there is an ideological consensus – it is far too difficult to modify deep core beliefs – but it does imply that, from that point on, debate within a policy network proceeds on a new plane, presumably more in tune with the changed environmental reality that provoked the adjustment. However, the critical point – and this is not readily apparent in Sabatier's approach – is that since learning is stimulated either through conflict with other coalitions or by shocks to policy communities, the locus of learning is not throughout policy communities but rather *within* respective advocacy coalitions.

Perhaps the most important insight for public managers that flows from this approach is that advocacy coalitions will find some kinds of policy issues easier to learn about than others. Jenkins-Smith writes that "the resistance to alteration of elements of the core means that learning occurs most readily in the peripheral aspects of a belief system."[25] Members of advocacy coalitions find it much easier to modify the secondary aspects of belief systems – for example, making adjustments to a program when confronted with the realities of its implementation – than admitting to flaws in the underlying values behind the program. In practical terms, the implication is that in a debate on, say, pension reform in Canada, members of the two primary advocacy coalitions are unlikely to retreat from their respective beliefs about whether there should be a public or a private pension system, but they can engage in constructive discussions and negotiations on an issue such as survivor's benefits.

Another practical constraint on policy learning looms especially large in parliamentary systems. Dominant coalitions in policy communities are not

24 Sabatier assumes that coalitions must have access to a sufficient amount of technical resources so that they can partake in analytic debate in a reasonably effective manner. However, following the structuralist arguments presented above, this premise should be modified because different policy communities have different distribution of analytic resources inside and outside government.

25 Jenkins-Smith, *Democratic Politics*, p. 93.

regularly unseated by political events or analytic debates; the core of government policy remains intact and policy debates tend to alter only the secondary aspects of extant programs and policies. In other words, despite the inventive and skittish nature of advocacy coalitions, significant policy change is not likely to occur under normal circumstances. It is precisely these conditions that are conducive to single-loop learning and not much more. Members of advocacy coalitions and constituent organizations strive to protect their interests and resist careful examination of the policy core. No matter what the configuration of a policy community, policy development is likely to be a product of isolated responses to challenges and threats, rather than broader anticipation of impending policy challenges. It is only when coalitions receive significant external shocks or are confronted with substantial failure, perhaps upsetting the balance of power within a policy community, that coalitions will engage in double-loop learning. Members of all advocacy coalitions will then examine aspects their belief system and perhaps embark on significant modification of their respective policies.

One of the most intriguing elements of Sabatier's discussion is his argument that there must be "an intermediate level of informed conflict between different coalitions" to provide optimal conditions for policy-oriented learning.[26] On the one hand, there should not be too much conflict; debates are rarely productive if representatives begin with direct criticisms of the core values of rival advocacy coalitions. On the other hand, Sabatier argues that analytic debates will be most productive when challenges have been made to either important secondary or near core aspects of coalition belief structures. The fascinating implication is that there must be a minimal amount of conflict if policy learning is to occur.

This line of analysis tells us that if public managers want to encourage learning in policy communities, they should resist the natural inclination to dampen conflict and reduce the struggles between advocacy coalitions. Conflict can be construed as a prime motivator for learning, although there are points beyond which conflict ceases to be productive. It is critical that public managers take steps to comprehend where these outer limits lie and how to nurture productive competition and learning within them. Public managers may also be able to steer the debate by shifting discussion towards more constructive topics, encouraging the protagonists to drop direct criticism of rival coalitions and to focus on secondary issues.

Learning through cooperation

While it may be comforting to know that conflict can lead to learning, it does not mean that it always leads to the best outcomes for policy communities and citizens. It does not seem wise nor efficient to wait until disaster strikes or until

26 Sabatier, "Knowledge," p. 679.

a charismatic leader convinces all community members that significant change is required. There is an alternative path to policy learning, an approach not discussed by Sabatier or Jenkins-Smith – that of cooperation. This path consists of encouraging learning *across* advocacy coalitions. Rather than considering policy communities as arenas where coalitions compete and learn, we must try to comprehend entire policy communities as coherent learning entities.

Conceiving of policy communities as learning systems is not a straightforward exercise and it helps to begin by making comparisons with organizations. No matter how diffuse or complex, organizations are goal-directed systems with specific mandates, designated leaders, chains of command, and shared norms and values. Standing in contrast are policy communities, which are aggregations of a great variety of organizations, each possessing different mandates, interests, and norms. Although these organizations are involved in exchange relationships too numerous to categorize, it still remains that policy communities do not stand as coherent task systems.[27] This is why so much learning in policy communities is of the single-loop variety: it proceeds according to the respective interests, norms, and values of its constituent organizations and broader advocacy coalitions. However, it is often overlooked that such conflict and self-interested behaviour on the part of advocacy coalitions and member organizations takes place on the basis of shared premises on such matters as basic priorities, rules of conduct, appropriate standards of living, and civil liberties and protections.

Cooperation necessarily involves modifying or forging new "sector-wide" values, premises, and norms within policy communities so that problem-solving can move onto a new plane. This is exactly what Jack Munro was referring to when he spoke recently about the need for all actors in the forestry sector to work together to deal with international competition.[28] Encouraging cooperation within policy communities means finding ways for advocacy coalitions to begin a dialogue, exchange ideas, and perhaps come to agreements – in other words, to work in tandem rather than in open conflict with each other. For representatives of advocacy coalitions to consider cooperation is to consider developing a new strategic orientation and involves modifying their policy cores – a form of double-loop learning.

To speak of cooperation and forging new values across advocacy coalitions is not to call for the end of conflict. It is impossible to deny or eliminate the essential differences between advocacy coalitions – and, more specifically, between the great variety of government, business, union, and non-profit organizations. It does mean, however, that the scope of conflict can be moved

27 If a policy community were a coherent task system it would resemble a planned economy.
28 Remarks to the 1991 Public Policy Forum's annual testimonial dinner on 15 April 1991 in Toronto.

onto a new level, that organizations and coalitions need to re-evaluate their beliefs and programs, and that they must address in some way concerns other than their own. Indeed, if existing advocacy coalitions do not respond to the challenges, then perhaps new coalitions will be formed to step into the vacuum.

Cooperation is an easy path to recommend for any endeavour, but it is far more difficult to ensure that it comes to fruition. In the case of policy communities, it means bringing together the leaders of organizations who may have campaigned against the ideas and projects of counterparts associated with opposing coalitions. Building trust is arduous. As a precondition, it requires that all participants recognize the legitimacy and standing of other parties. All of this entail taking risks, particularly for organizational leaders who must mollify and reassure their staff and constituents that to cooperate does not mean losing autonomy or relinquishing the core values of their organizations. Indeed, the resistance of autonomous organizations within advocacy coalitions may restrict their leaders' ability to partake openly and fully in cooperative learning exercises. This last point deserves further elaboration.

It may seem trite to observe, but organizations are formed around core values. These values are necessarily rooted in the past; they are fixtures in organizations and because of their accrued social meaning, members may find it difficult to relinquish or alter certain values. Indeed, what might be secondary issues to some groups might constitute direct threats to the core values of particular organizations, even within the same advocacy coalition. In their attempt to account for the motivation and activities of environmental groups, Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky contrasted the cultural dispositions of organizations operating at the centre of society versus those sitting at the periphery and concluded that the latter were not likely to embrace the values of the centre.[29] Members of such organizations chose to live at the periphery precisely because they were intolerant, even fearful, of the attitudes and beliefs of those at the centre. These perceptions, in turn, lead to the development of strong organizational cultures, resistant to compromise. Here values constitute severe constraints on the potential for learning and no amount of consultation is likely to change the situation. I would like to add a complementary argument: some organizations simply do not have sufficient capacity to evaluate facts and to consider the merits of alternatives. Values, not technocratic expertise, bind members of the organization together. In either circumstance, whether it be a repugnance of other values or lack of analytic capacity, to the extent that policy proposals challenge their core values, it is likely that organizational members will respond viscerally and seem unreasonable to others engaged in the debate.

29 M. Douglas and A. Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

There have been many attempts to engender cooperation between government, business, unions, and non-profit organizations – in other words, to encourage learning across organizational and coalitional divides. Early attempts have included royal commissions, government councils, and an uncountable number of conferences. These "learning" mechanisms were designed to liberate representatives from their respective organizational environments and enable them collectively to examine policy problems, to resolve value-conflict, and to inject new values into policy debates. But none possessed "a bias for action,"[30] the wherewithal to commit constituencies and coalition members to preferred action plans. Partially in response to perceptions about the scant payoffs from these experiments, and partially due to worsening economic conditions and other problems, there have been more recent attempts to create new working relationships and dialogue across business sectors and with government.[31]

There are several ways to increase the likelihood that cooperative learning will succeed. First, participants must be committed to the specific values and problems motivating the interaction, but should not be expected to embrace each other's belief systems. An atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance of different belief systems must be established among representatives from different sectors and advocacy coalitions. Secondly, participants must search for a common and neutral language to facilitate constructive dialogue on matters of substance, and inform these discussions with credible data focused on the issues at hand.[32] Finally, there must be a bias towards achieving concrete results, otherwise interest will flag and the exercise will be symbolic. This implies extracting commitments from participants to educate and challenge members of their own organization and coalitions.

The reality, however, is that forging new values is often more difficult that defending old ones, no matter how inappropriate the latter are for confronting new realities, and that conflict between advocacy coalitions seems a more likely prospect than cooperation, unless dire circumstances suddenly emerge.

30 This is one of the key attributes in excellent, innovative private sector organizations. See T.J. Peters and R.H. Waterman, *In Search of Excellence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

31 Examples include the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre, the Western Wood Products Forum, the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy and its provincial counterparts, the Public Policy Forum, and the Business Council on National Issues.

32 In early 1984 Environment Canada brought together leaders from the private sector and from environmental groups under the auspices of the Niagara Institute. Despite a strong commitment to the overall objective of improving the environment, at different junctures the exercise foundered and was in danger of failure. At one point, according to Glen Toner, "the whole thing ground to a halt in an atmosphere of conflict, recrimination and frustration." Nevertheless, participants recognized that there was a lack of trust, a paucity of data considered legitimate by all participants, and a lacuna of concepts and definitions on which to base discussion. Following a search for new ground rules, better ways to organize discussion and work, and a renewed impetus from a new minister to produce legislation, including a

But it is precisely the fact that this latter prospect has come to pass in so many policy sectors that public managers should actively seek ways to promote cooperation.

Experts and professionals: facilitators or impediments to community learning?

In any policy community, there is a preponderance of experts and professionals who are sought by policy-makers and others who clamour for a hearing. Experts and professionals include not only those who work in the professions (accounting, medicine, law, social work, engineering, and the like) but also a variety of academic disciplines possessing a strong sense of identity and a set of professional norms.[33] However, the organization and influence of experts and professions in policy communities has yet to be systematically modelled.[34] One reason for this oversight is that, like advocacy coalitions, experts and professionals are not attached to particular organizations and are spread throughout policy communities. In contrast, Sabatier attaches particular importance to experts, and although experts and professionals are often viewed as "hired guns," he sees in them the potential to moderate the conflict between competing advocacy coalitions and to improve the prospects for learning. Below, this sanguine conclusion is tempered by scrutinizing underlying assumptions – not only may experts fail to help policy communities achieve workable solutions, they may be part of the problem.

Unlike advocacy coalitions, which derive their coherence from common values and beliefs, experts and professionals are bound together by common skills and some degree of control over information, techniques, and procedures, as well as standards for evaluating policy options and outcomes. Sabatier believes they can moderate and regulate partisan and ideological struggles between advocacy coalitions because they have "a desire for professional credibility and the norms of scientific debate will lead to a serious analysis of methodological assumptions, to the gradual elimination of the

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commitment to open up the drafting process, there emerged new legislation on toxic chemicals. Toner concluded that the "key lesson ... was that it was possible for individuals from very different work cultures and environmental philosophies to overcome major barriers and to learn to collaborate in positive ways that can have lasting impacts." See "Whence and Wither: ENGOS, Business and the Environment," mimeo., School of Public Administration, Carleton University, October 1990. Sabatier hypothesizes that issues are more tractable and conducive to policy learning when, first, there are relatively more quantitative than qualitative indicators available to measure performance, and secondly, the problem involves more natural as opposed to social phenomena (p. 680).

33 For a detailed discussion, see the chapter on "Professions and Professionals" in R. Hodson and T.A. Sullivan, *The Social Organization of Work* (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth 1990).

34 Contributors to the volume edited by Coleman and Skogstad, *Public Communities,* noted the presence and often the strong influence of experts and professions. However, the structuralist framework which guided the studies did not model or locate these actors.

more improbable causal assertions and invalid data, and thus probably to a greater convergence of view over time concerning the nature of the problem and the consequences of various policy alternatives."[35] This regulatory role is more likely to be pronounced when certain types of experts and professionals are located in each of the advocacy coalitions.

For Sabatier, the potential virtue of professions in particular is that they may provide a "relatively apolitical forum" for professionals represented in each advocacy coalition to discuss policy issues. According to Sabatier, the forum must be prestigious enough to attract these individuals and have a strong set of professional norms that serve as a partial countervailing force to belief systems and "to force debate among professionals from different belief systems in which their points of view must be aired before peers."[36] Two examples might include the meetings hosted by the Canadian Tax Foundation and the Canadian Public Health Association. Although Sabatier comes dangerously close to arguing for the merits of technocracy, the essential point is that experts and professionals educate members of advocacy coalitions about the merits of their opponent's case and the drawbacks of their own.

Sabatier assumes not only that a professional forum will be available but also that one profession will be influential, and that both will be appropriate for dealing with the policy challenges at hand. To the extent that analytic competence on a problem or issue falls squarely within the domain and competence of a particular profession, there would seem to be considerable potential for the professional groups to help guide the debate between advocacy coalitions. But an increasingly complex world make this proposition problematic. First, as the variety of relevant expertise necessary for grappling with a problem increases, there has to be a forum sufficiently inclusive for these experts to gather and engage in problem-solving.[37] But the forums provided by professional groups or umbrella associations may be inappropriate for dealing with certain policy problems. Moreover, the lack of one guiding set of standards or norms lessens the potential for experts and professionals to inform and temper policy debates. Secondly, as the variety of expertise necessary for grappling with a problem increases, so does the potential for conflict. Experts and professionals have their own ideologies, perceptual blinders, territorial jealousies, and are not trained to act in a supra-disciplinary way.[38] Many policy-makers would argue that experts have not facilitated cooperation but have exacerbated conflict. Indeed, Sabatier says little about what role experts and professions might play in promoting cooperative and double-loop learning. Narrowing the scope of conflict through expert know-

35 Sabatier, "Knowledge," p. 880.

36 Ibid., p. 670.

37 Another factor to consider is whether individuals without any particular professional background may expect or be invited to participate in the discussion.

38 See, for example, R.L. Meehan, *The Atom and the Fault: Experts, Earthquakes, and Nuclear Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984).

ledge, even if possible, is not the same as taking part in the creation of new values and understandings to meet new challenges.

While Sabatier places great stock in the moderating influence of experts and professionals on policy debates, the reality is that public managers must mediate and make sense of the differences among the very groups that are ostensibly to reduce conflict between advocacy coalitions. Public managers can search for available forums that promise to make policy debates the most productive, but if none exists then the government may have to establish a new forum in which experts and members of different advocacy coalitions will feel comfortable and exchange views in a frank and constructive way. When problems are not addressed adequately by established experts and professions, new disciplines or sub-specialties may have to be created, nurtured, and in some cases, empowered. Thus, in addition to value mediation among coalitions, public managers must seek to create synergies between experts and professionals, since there must be a sound and credible knowledge base to guide cooperative ventures.

For public managers and academic observers seeking to analyse policy communities, the learning or advocacy coalition approach provides essential conceptual tools that complement and build on the structural perspective. The learning approach calls on analysts to identify conflict and the underlying belief systems that clash, while at the same time uncovering the common values that provide the basis for cooperation inside and outside the state, and across actors in the sub-government and the attentive public. It presses us to consider more carefully the sources of innovation and moderation, to look beyond actors in sub-governments with greater power and autonomy to smaller organizations and professions in the attentive public. By doing so, it expands the basis on which assessments can be made about the prospects for policy change and takes us a few steps further towards suggesting how to improve those prospects. However, as we have noted, these insights cannot be divorced from and are conditioned by the relative distribution of power inherent in particular policy.

Policy managers as stewards of policy communities

The concepts reviewed and developed in this paper should help public managers to analyse more effectively and efficiently the environments which surround their departments. By understanding the variety of shapes which policy communities may take, and the processes of policy learning as well as the limits to consultation within and across advocacy coalitions, public managers should be better able to deploy their resources, adjust the expectations of employees, and serve their ministers. By becoming fully aware of structure and change in their institutional environments, public managers should be in a better position to assess the impact and implications of change, for policy issues and for future relationships within the policy community.

On reflection, however, this would only put the insights brought forth in this paper to limited use. While it would surely be an accomplishment to persuade readers to move beyond immediate narrow preoccupations to ponder systematically the underlying institutional environments, this would still have the limited pay-off of enabling managers to better protect the interests of only their own ministers and departments. The same could be said for its use by any actor within a policy community. In the end, this effort to broaden the horizons of users might only manage to serve particular interests and continue to result in very partial views of policy communities and networks.

There is another set of lessons to be drawn from this analysis. Public managers could start to see policy communities as organic systems, as collective learning systems.[39] This implies adopting a holistic view of policy communities, a view which calls on readers to ensure that policy communities are better prepared to recognize and confront challenges, and to help mitigate pathologies that work against such adjustment.

We have already acknowledged the conclusions of Atkinson and Coleman, who suggested that many Canadian policy networks have not mobilized to confront the realities which they must address. It is difficult for policy communities to rectify incongruities between structure and needed strategies. Individuals and organizations often find themselves in similar circumstances, but after recognizing that seemingly insurmountable problems or learning deficiencies exist, they can turn to outsiders to facilitate the process of change. Organizational leaders can invite consultants to help with organizational development,[40] whether the objective be to improve morale, to increase productivity, or to initiate restructuring as part of a new strategic orientation. In some cases, outsiders may succeed in teaching individuals or organizations to learn *how* to change, leaving them with some measure of independence and a critical, reflective faculty for dealing with future challenges.

Transferring this line of thinking to policy communities is not easy. There are no community-wide leaders that can take on responsibility to hire a "community development specialist" to uncover pathologies and prod the community to reorganize itself to learn better. The unfortunate result is that most policy debates continue to be partial and internecine in nature. There seems to be little prospect of breaking away from parochial conflict, to consider collective interests, and to engage in constructive dialogue and debate. If, by dint of authority, there is no leader available, who looks beyond the interest they represent to think about the interest and health of the policy community? Who will be its steward?

Senior public managers are the most likely candidates to assume this role. Many already do. They are natural nodes for interaction in policy communi-

39 See D.A. Schon, *Beyond the Stable State* (New York: Norton, 1971), for one early attempt.
40 See Argyris and Schon, *Organizational Learning*, for the best-known treatment of this topic.

ties; they usually command significant amounts of financial resources and expertise; and they have the advantage of relatively long periods of tenure. More than most actors in a policy community, senior public managers are trained to think broadly about the public interest, even if their department may be affiliated with a particular advocacy coalition. This stewardship role is certainly considered to be legitimate when governments nurture an infant industry or support the organization of previously unorganized interests. While both of these development strategies are consistent with the posture of state-directed networks, there is no reason why there should not be room for senior public managers in all types of policy networks to orchestrate meetings of the representatives of various groups to discuss, in a non-confrontational way, where the sector is going and whether the sector needs to rethink its organization.

Such recommendations are never without their costs and problems. For one, senior managers would have to divert resources and create the capacity within their department to undertake this kind of ongoing exercise. Such activity might be difficult to justify in a tight fiscal climate: the social pay-off would not be immediate, benefits would accrue to many actors besides the department, and senior managers already have considerable demands on their time. Many of the constituent tasks could be delegated to consultation and communications specialists within a department, but systematic thinking about the department's institutional environment should be a priority of the management committee. Another problem is the regular rotation of senior managers, which militates against continuity in nurturing the "health" of the broader policy community. The analysis in this article suggests that, from a community perspective, the merits of this practice are dubious; it takes considerable time to develop an understanding of the nuances of a policy community, to build trust with its members, and to develop a strategic posture. This process is obviously made more difficult with the frequent rotation of ministers, deputy ministers, and assistant deputy ministers. But if the process was made a responsibility of the management committee, it would be possible to create an analytic capacity and organizational memory on these matters that can withstand moderate turnover in senior managers.

Another practical difficulty is the potential for conflict between the goals of a minister and the senior public manager's own assessment of the needs of the policy community from a community learning perspective, which is bound to have a longer time horizon and be more holistic in nature. Such a dilemma, of course, is not new: we are simply revisiting the enduring debate over the circumstances when public servants should act in the public interest as opposed to following the directives of a minister. However, it has typically been assumed that the public servant's position is predicated on a personal interpretation of the public interest. If consultation and systematic environmental scanning of issues and institutional developments have been undertaken, such interpretations of the public interest are on firmer ground and are

less likely to be considered the personal views of senior public managers. Indeed, in some instances this may suggest a new standard for evaluation.

Lastly, the reader may have noticed that, aside from mentioning the concept, I have had little to say about the third level of learning delineated by Argyris and Schon: deutero-learning, or learning about learning. However, the subtitle to this article – learning to meet new challenges – declares an intent to stimulate such learning on the part of public managers, other members of policy communities, and academic observers. It seems appropriate to begin by presenting these ideas to public managers because they have the potential to be stewards of learning in policy communities, even though such social learning cannot be the domain of any one group in society. My hope is that these tools will assist them in their efforts to compare and contrast their experiences in managing external environments and encouraging community-wide learning. It is ironic that the very practice that militates against public managers performing a stewardship function – rapid rotation from one department or position to another – should help them see the value of these conceptual tools for analysing policy communities.