

One Size Does Not Fit All: A Contingency Theory Approach to Policy-Making

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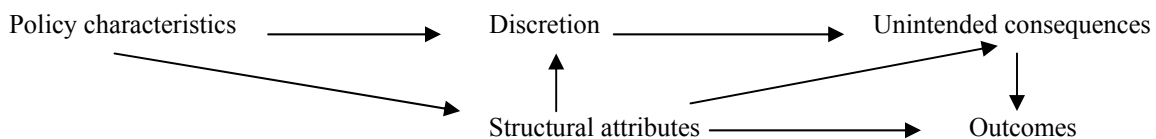
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It is no coincidence that some policies and programs are very similar across countries. Theories of policy convergence and policy transfer account for some but not all of these similarities (Rose, 1991; Haas, 1995)–. In this paper, we suggest that policy areas themselves systematically vary from each other, and subsequently have implications on policy and program design. Drawing upon organisational contingency theory, we propose a model, which suggests that certain inherent policy characteristics affect the use of policy discretion, the structural attributes of policies and programs, and the number of unintended consequences. It is a blend of these characteristics that explain the unique outcomes in different policy areas.

Because it is possible to specify the extent to which these characteristics exist within a policy area, one can also predict, to some degree, the amount of discretion and the extent to which there will be unintended consequences at work within the policy outcomes (Dexter 1981; Merton 1936; Harmon and Myer 1986; Desveaux et al. 1994). This in turn affects the necessity for pre-audit controls and monitoring. In areas such as airline safety where the consequences of error are broad and/or uncorrectable, or in areas such as housing or immigration policy where the effects will be with us for a considerable time to come, recognising these characteristics, and acknowledging how they might interact is important for program design. The graph below shows the relationship between the variables we use in this study.



In this paper, we define policy discretion as “[t]he ability to adjust programs or policies to suit the circumstances. It is the process by which the administrator is able to use a judgmental decision strategy to change or alter programs to suit the client, or in

some cases, the administrator”(Carroll and Siegle 1999, 73-74). Unintended consequences are unforeseen and unexpected outcomes, either positive or negative, of public policy decisions brought about by inattention to the actual implementation process. Structural attributes include institutional arrangements such as the public/private provisions of goods and services, the choice of policy instruments and the rules and procedures in place.

The characteristics identified in this paper are complexity, organizational differentiation, compression, decision points, the degree of internal and external coupling within the policy area, homogeneity, resonance, technology and visibility (Thompson 1967; Laporte and Metlay 1996). The policy areas we have selected to apply this framework are immigration and housing. These two policy sectors were chosen first, since they consistently vary on almost all of the above policy characteristics, second, because although immigration deals with decisions about individuals, housing more often deals with large scale projects and third, the model can explain the relative success of Canadian immigration policy and the relative lack of success of Canadian housing policy.

Immigration policy includes many responsibilities. It deals with the admission of immigrants, foreign students, visitors and temporary workers who enhance Canada’s social and economic growth. It also resettles, protects and provides a safe haven for refugees and manages programs that help newcomers adapt to Canadian society and become Canadians citizens. This paper focuses mostly on the selection/admission process of immigrants. Assessing the success of a policy area can be complex, especially with a policy such as immigration, which has many responsibilities and different objectives to achieve. However, there are some tools that can be used to get some indications of how well Canada has performed in this area. A look at the annual immigration plan of the last 5 years reveals that Canada’s estimates of landings fell pretty close to the planned range. For example, the total number of new permanent residents for 2002 (229,058) fell within the planned range of 210,000 to 235, 000 as announced in Parliament in 2001. While in 2001, there was a difference of 25,000 between the estimates and the actual landings of permanent residents, the number of landings for 1999 (189,816) and 2000 (227,209) were

much closer to the planned estimates of 200,00 to 225,000. Moreover, those estimates corresponded to the planned representation of different categories of immigrants. In 2002, economic immigrants represented approximately 60 percent of all new arrivals to Canada, while immigrants such as family members or refugees made up the remaining 40 percent. This shows that overall the Canadian government has achieved with relative success its objectives in terms of attracting both the expected number of newcomers and the right category of immigrants.

There are many aspects of housing policy that can be considered (Bourne 1981). In this paper we consider only two: affordability and urban spatial design. In other words, the extent to which the government intervenes in housing markets to make housing available to those who cannot afford market accommodation usually referred to as ‘social housing’; and the extent to which government controls over land use provide for economical, effective and aesthetic land use. While the latter is often confused with public housing there are other ways to provide affordable housing other than government owned and managed housing. Similarly, land use is often confused with zoning, although again there are other ways of achieving the stated goals. On both aspects of housing policy Canada has been an abysmal failure. In 1967, there were 1,000,000 Canadian households who could not manage to pay for affordable housing (Carroll 2002). In 2003, there are close to 1,000,000 Canadians who do not have any permanent shelter at all (Carroll 2003). In a country where urban land servicing costs are the highest in the world, the degree of urban sprawl and consumption of agricultural land, in Southern Ontario alone, let alone the rest of the country is unconscionable.

We have defined the characteristics of our model as follows (see table 1):

- Complexity refers to the degree of expert knowledge required in the decision-making and implementation processes in a policy area.
- Organizational differentiation refers to the number of layers there are in the organisation that implements the policy.
- Compression is the length of time between policy action and the impact of that policy on society.

- External coupling is the amount of interaction between the policy area itself and other policy areas.
- Internal coupling is the interaction between the policy and its subject.
- Decision points are the number of persons or units inside or outside the organisation involved in the decision-making process.
- Homogeneity is a form of functional determinism. The extent to which the form of the policy is determined by the policy area itself and varies little across time or country (Carroll and Garkut 1996).
- Resonance is the degree of importance placed on the policy area by the general public. It is the relationship of the policy area with people's basic values. What Sabatier calls "core value".
- Technology is the ordering of functions in the policy area.
- Visibility refers to the degree to which a policy area impinges on public awareness or attracts attention.

Complexity refers simply to how complicated the policy area is (see table 2). The degree of complexity determines the degree of expert knowledge required in the policy area and is often associated with high levels of professionalism and pre-audit controls. It allows for high levels of policy discretion to be exercised but decisions tend to be predictable because of the similarity of the training and professional values of the implementers (Blau and Scott 1962; Meitsner 1976). Education, economic policy and health care are policy areas with high levels of technical complexity.

Immigration is a policy area of lower complexity. The decision to permit entry does require some, but not a great deal of, complex knowledge. Nevertheless, the regulations that are part of the implementation process are voluminous and involve judgment: evaluating employability, establishing familial relationships for admissibility and assessing personal suitability. As a result, decisions of this type may be both a function of professionalism and of the culture of the organization. If the knowledge of different cultures, psychology and techniques of interview are likely to help immigration officers to assess newcomers and make better decisions, these skills are not prerequisites

to get the position of an immigration agent in Canada. Yet, personal and professional discretion is a tool often used to assess newcomers. In a recent study, Bouchard and Carroll demonstrated that the use of judgment is an important factor in the selection process of newcomers and that it can take different forms (2002).

Housing has high complexity. Housing development is the responsibility of teams of experts from architects, planners, engineers and lawyers. Social housing, while less complex, still involves a number of different types of professionals, and when it deals with the production of new housing, it implicates the same number of professionals plus three levels of government and often public/private delivery agents.

An important aspect that relates to complexity is the number of layers there are in the organisation which implements the policy. We call this *organizational differentiation* (Lawrence and Lorsch 1986; Aucoin and Bakvis 1984). If the policy is delivered in field offices that are geographically and hierarchically some distance from the policy-makers and senior officials, there will be more difficulties with control. While traditionally this problem has been dealt with by using bureaucratic structures, it is more difficult to do so when the policy area requires flexibility due to technology, or when attempts at control are in conflict with other characteristics. A complex organisational structure is more difficult to control and a highly deconcentrated, or decentralized, organisation will be more complex. A complex organisational structure, which is more difficult to control, could facilitate the use of discretion by policy implementers and thus increase the propensity for the number of unintended consequences.

In the sense that complexity relates also to the organisational structure and specifically to the distance between formulators and policy implementers undermining the capacity of the former to monitor and control the latter, immigration can be defined as being a policy area with high level of organisational differentiation. The immigration officials who deliver services are mostly in overseas offices, at points of entry, or in regional offices, which are far from immigration headquarters. Overseas offices are

usually the first line of processing for all forms of immigrants including asylum seekers; officers at the point of entry have the discretion to stop visitors and act as a second line of processing for asylum seekers and illegal immigrants; regional offices process 'in-country' applicants for family reunification demands and those seeking to change their current status including asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. In short, this rather complex administrative structure overseeing actions with mostly long-term consequences makes it difficult to monitor and measure success or performance. It might seem that an individual would be (or not be) an appropriate citizen, but in five to ten years time this judgment could prove to be wrong.

That is not to say it is impossible to control field offices. A well-known anecdote about control is that Ottawa controlled immigration from certain countries by providing a limited number of application forms. Without an application form, potential immigrants could not become a case to be reviewed! Another method the government has used to restrict the number of applicants is to assign fewer officials to do the processing work, or in some cases to fail to assign any personnel to certain overseas embassies or High Commissions. For a number of years the only immigrant processing offices in Asia, were in India, Thailand and Hong Kong. Another way to control immigration agents is to reduce the room for the use of discretion in the selection process. As Bouchard points out, although discretion is still part of the selection process in Canada, the new selection grid has recently diminished the weight given to some of the important discretionary criteria such as personal suitability (2003).

The organizational differentiation in housing policy is moderate to low. Planning decisions are made at a local level within provincial guidelines with some appeal to provincial agencies. At one point there was also federal involvement in decision-making but it has disappeared. Similarly, approval of and management of social housing is usually controlled by one agency within provincial or municipal jurisdiction. Again, at one time there was a strong federal presence in the approval or management but this no longer exists. Devolution of housing policy has become more or less complete, and despite changes to programs which will introduce more funding into programs for social

housing, it is unlikely that the federal government will have more than policy design control over policy implementation.

Compression which we define as the length of time between policy action and policy impact can be seen in some ways as the opposite of the t-1 problem (Sabatier 1988). Whereas the t-1 problem responds to past occurrences, compression responds to a new problem emerging in the future or t+1. In a policy area with low compression, the impact is almost immediate. The impact of an increase in the central bank rate of interest on general interest rates is an example of low compression. The impact of early childhood experiences on literacy rates in prisons is an example of high compression. It may take years for the unintended consequences of the policy to be felt, and once they have been recognised it takes a long time to try to change them; in this case, through literacy programs in prison and classes for “at risks” children and parents in early childhood programs. Policy areas with high levels of compression have high levels of unintended consequences. There is also an indirect impact on discretion. In cases where compression is high, policies are hard to control and the results of the performance of field level officials are difficult to measure. This leads to their increased capacity to exercise discretion, if they choose to do so. Policy areas with high levels of compression are relatively difficult to control because the impact is unknown until some time in the future, or as in the case of nuclear power policy the outcomes are with us for a considerable time.

Immigration is a case of a particularly high level of compression because at the point of entry it is unknown what impact the individuals and their families will have on the country. Once they are in, there is no point of return unless there is a serious security issue or threat. Moreover, with the family relationship program in Canada, a decision concerning one individual can easily impact a larger group. Indeed, the principle of family reunification that exists in most open-door countries such as Canada grants immigrants and refugees the right to bring any number of family members at any time in

the future to the host society. The impact of the arrival of these newcomers into the host country varies greatly and takes some time to materialise.

Compression is low in housing policy. The impact of changes are seen as soon as new units or new subdivisions are built, and to a limited degree when units are made available to allow families into the housing market. While the errors may be felt for generations, the immediate impact is obvious.

External coupling is the degree of interaction between the policy area itself and other policy areas. In other words, it could be considered to be a measure of the degree of what has come to be referred to as “horizontality” of a policy area (Sproule-Jones 2000). Policies with high levels of external coupling have high levels of unintended consequences and are difficult to control because they are simultaneously affecting, and being affected by other policy areas, while loosely coupled policies tend to be quite independent of other policy areas. Education, health care and defence are examples of policies with a low level of external coupling.

Immigration is a tightly coupled policy area because decisions pertaining to immigration policy affect a large number of other policy areas, such as education, health care and employment. This is an important characteristic that has been raised many times by cities, which assume most of the settlement costs for both immigrants and refugees. Canadian immigrant- and refugee-receiving cities such as Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal have complained, from time to time, that the cost of language training, social services, health services, housing and so on have put a lot of pressure on their budgets. This is likely to become an increasing concern because there are indications that immigrant labour-market outcomes have deteriorated among recent cohort of newcomers— thus increasing the demand for health, social services and income security programs (Census 2001; McIsaac, 2003).

The level of external coupling in housing policy is moderate. Planning decisions about housing affect transportation choices, infrastructure-related decisions, and schools but these are increasingly integrated into one large scale decision revolving around ‘development planning’. Similarly, while expenditures on social housing can reduce demand for welfare funds as it provides one of the largest demands for funds, or can indirectly affect expenditures on remedial education or health for children who are poorly housed, the level of horizontality is much less than in many other policy areas.

Internal coupling refers to the degree to which the policy itself changes through the implementation process. High levels of internal coupling require a considerable amount of flexibility in program delivery in order to adjust for the interactive changes, which take place. Any policy intended to affect the decision-process of individuals has high internal coupling. Much of the public policy literature tends to view the object of policy as rather inert subjects who can be adjusted by, or have their behaviour changed through the policy (Balwin 1990; Hill 1981; Van Gunsteren 1976). However, in some policy areas, there is an interaction between the policy and individuals. Education and health care are good examples of such policy areas. There is interaction between the policy and its recipients (McCall 1977; Schulman 1989).

Immigration is a relatively low internally coupled policy. However, a good example of high internal coupling is the refugee or asylum seeker entry process. A country that is recognized as generous towards refugees and asylum seekers is more likely considered attractive. It is known that a large number of asylum seekers go through the United States and stop at the Canadian border to make their claims. The new safe third country agreement signed by these two countries might have an impact on asylum seekers’ behavior. Under this new agreement, anyone must file their claim with the first country in which they arrive. Therefore, in order to avoid stricter rules in the United States asylum seekers might change their traditional pattern of transiting in the United States en route to Canada.

There is a moderate to high level of internal coupling in both forms of housing policy although not as high as refugee policy. In the urban form, developers and builders quickly learn ways through which the existing policies can be skewed to circumvent the spirit by finessing the letter of the law. Any reading of the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) deliberations would provide ample evidence of this, as well as the ‘let’s make a deal planning’ which has plagued Toronto for years but has no spread to other urban areas in the country. Within social policy, particularly with new projects, this is problematic, but the same form of interaction is seen in any program, such as social housing waiting lists where there is a known formula that is applied and people have means of adjusting themselves to the formula (Carroll 1994).

Decision points are defined as the number of persons or units inside or outside the organisation involved in the decision-making process. An organisation where decisions are taken by several persons or by different units is likely to create less space for individual discretion. When a decision is the responsibility of more than one person and therefore has the potential of being revised by different persons and at different stages, a control or a natural check should be part of the decision-making process. At the same time, when there are sequential decisions in which each decision point is independent and can not be reviewed, or corrected, the potential for unintended consequences from earlier decisions are high. The classic expression of this is in Wildavsky and Pressman (1979) where they estimate the probability of none error being in the range of 1/250,000.

Immigration in Canada is a policy area with a low number of decision points. In contrast to the United States where the selection process is handled by different organisations— the State Department, Immigration and Naturalisation Services and the Labour Departmentⁱ—Canada has centralised the responsibility for selecting newcomers into one department—Citizenship and Immigration Canada.ⁱⁱ As a result, Canadian officers are often the first and the last ones to look at immigration applications. The fact that the same Canadian officer pilots an application file from the beginning to the end and

because, in most cases, he/she is the one who makes the most important decisions in the selection process, this opens the doors to a more extensive exercise of field discretion.

There are many decision points in housing policy. They occur in the planning, the financing, the construction and the point of occupation. They occur again if the form of any of these is going to be changed. There are also, in addition to the individual actors involved, multiple governments involved at different stages. This should not be confused with the moderate levels of organisational differentiation. Housing hierarchies are not deep, nor are there many field offices to be taken into consideration, but the federal nature of housing means that there will be many fingers in the pie (Carroll 1990). Within social housing this matter is even more complicated as much of the housing stock is delivered by private non-profit bodies who have their own Boards of Directors and agendas, plus the housing coordination agencies who maintain waiting lists, and the various government agencies involved. This can be further complicated when the recipient of social housing is on welfare which brings an entirely new hierarchy of decision-points into play (Carroll 1989).

The *homogeneity*, or its opposite heterogeneity, of the policy area is in some ways a form of what could be considered functional determinism. How much variability is possible in the policy area? Are there finite choices of policies available? From one country to the next does the policy area look much the same, and are similar tools used throughout it? Education would be considered a homogeneous policy area. While there are variations in the degree of centralization of policy, the various components within the policy area are similar and they vary little from country to country. Similarly hospital care would be relatively homogeneous but not health care generally. There is a wide range of public-private models of health care delivery, which produce wide variations across countries and even within countries. Homogeneity would tend to reduce discretion as it would be possible to train people about what they should be doing and everyone would be taking relatively similar actions. Homogeneous policy areas tend to have a low level of unintended consequences. Since policy makers can predict actions that will be

taken by implementers, this reduces the possibility of having high levels of unintended consequences.

There is a low degree of homogeneity in immigration policy. Countries differ a great deal in terms of approaches to immigration. The most fundamental distinction is between close-doors (France, Germany etc.) and open-doors countries (Canada, United States, Australia etc.) which have completely different objectives. Although some parts of the world such as European countries are having discussions about harmonising immigration policies, this process is far from being achieved and the basic distinction remains. There are also important policy differences within the same set of open-doors countries. To name only a few: open-doors countries place emphasis on different components of the immigration population; they have different selection processes; they have different understandings of integrating newcomers; and they have different settlement programs.

There is a high degree of homogeneity in housing. There are only so many ways to organize a housing market or to allocate housing — public, private, mixed— so many ways to provide assistance— supply or demand— and despite the various claims of new technology in housing a building site today does not look that different than would have some 100 years ago or more. Nor do houses, or urban forms, look particularly different from one part of the world to the other.

Resonance is the degree of importance placed on the policy by the general public. Health care, education, immigration and citizenship are examples of policy areas which are expected to have high resonance since almost every member of the public has an opinion which they hold quite deeply, an opinion often based more upon belief than fact. Environmental policy or nuclear power policy, on the other hand, probably only has high resonance for those members of the public who care a great deal about these issues. A high degree of resonance tends to lead to policies with vague, symbolic goals and a high degree of discretion in the policy process because legislators are either unwilling to enter

into a specific debate on the issue, or major trade-offs are papered over during the legislative process. In the same way, policies that have vague and symbolic goals will tend to be defined more loosely. They will be more difficult to control and will therefore create more space for unintended consequences.

Immigration is a policy area of high resonance. It is a sensitive and complicated issue in Canada as it must recognize and satisfy many different concerns and expectations of often mutually incompatible interests, such as ethnic groups, business demands for labor, provincial demands, and the desire for cultural accommodation. Since September 11, this issue has become even more sensitive as national security is near the top of the Canadian political agenda. Agencies, laws and regulations concerned with security, customs, immigration and even financial assets have all come under greater scrutiny, with Canadian immigration policy and its effectiveness in controlling entry of unwanted migrants being front and center. Whereas immigration issues had previously been subject to only sporadic public interest, there is now widespread debate over the ability of the system to meet its stated goals while contributing to shared security objectives. The highly resonant nature of the immigration issue leads to a more general formulation of the immigration policy by politicians that prefer, or are constrained due to a lack of technical information, to leave this difficult task to implementers with rules being established not through legislative debate but through the change in regulations which in Canada can be done without debate through Orders-in-Council. As a result, this policy area leaves some room for policy discretion, which, in turn, impacts, on the likelihood of unintended consequences.

Housing has very low resonance until someone wants to build a 'monster house', a public housing project, a group home, or some other form of housing which can be perceived to detract from the property values and the aesthetic appeal of your house and neighbourhood. Then it has very high resonance but only for a few people and for a short period of time. There has only been one time in Canadian post-war history when housing had a high resonance and that was because of the convergence of a number of factors, primarily a group of urban reform activists, at the same time in the 1960's and 1970's.

Social housing has never had any resonance unless it was a backlash against the subsidy dollars spent on what could appear to be expensive homes for the poor. But social housing is almost the classic Downsian good, it is paid for in such small quantities by many and consumed or demanded by such a few that is difficult for it to become prominent on the public policy agenda.

Technology is the ordering of functions with the policy area. Thompson identifies three distinct technologies: a long-linked or assembly line technology in which the policy function are carried out sequentially; a mediating technology which involves matching components to each other; or an intensive or craft technology in which each case is treated uniquely (1967). Health policy, for example, can be argued to be in a transition area from long-linked in which each action is dependent upon some previous action to a mediating technology utilizing multiple teams and processes, which match protocols to patient needs. Intensive technologies are more difficult to manage and require greater flexibility of structure to accommodate the various types of individual cases. The degree of discretion is low in long-linked technology since the process must be routinized with each of its parts done in a similar way. It is more likely to be higher in an intensive technology since there is an element of judgment regarding the necessary action for the case. As a general rule long linked technology is more efficient as there is more room for specialization and routinization. It is not necessarily more effective. The extent to which there are unintended consequences is also a function of the technology-in-use. Intensive technologies may have less scope for unintended consequences because the interactions among the various elements are evident. With long-linked technology, just as with sequential decision points, because there is no review or reference point, at some stages, the system becomes out of skew. The potential for unintentional consequences are high because there are no self-correcting mechanisms built into the technology.

Canadian immigration practices are considered as an example of intensive, or craft technology with each file being handled separately by an individual officer. In the United States, a more linked technology is used in which the application moves from the

Immigration and Naturalisation Service, through Labour to the Department of State with each carrying out a different function. While the technology tends to constrain the implementation design, it is not entirely deterministic. It is possible to choose the technology to be used. In the example relating to immigration, clearly the United States and Canada have chosen to organize the functions relating to processing the potential of immigrants in different ways. The processing of unemployment insurance claims at Canada Employment Centers, for example, has undergone a change in technology from being a long-linked process to becoming more intensive in trying to develop training and assistance packages for the needs of each individuals.

The technology of housing is affected by the size of the market and the size of the firm. It can be any form of technology and can change over time. This adds to the complexity of housing policy and in particular the complexity of internal coupling because the number of actors is organized differently and will react distinctly to various forms of policy (Carroll 1998).ⁱⁱⁱ The technology of social housing once the projects are built is a mediating technology as clients and units are matched to each other.

Visibility is defined as the degree to which a policy area affects public awareness or attracts attention. In other words, visibility simply refers to those things which we can see. These are policy areas in which the outcomes are not references in files, or cheques being sent, but very visible outcomes which people see and have to face each day. Roads and highways are one of these areas. The intricacies of subsidies to truckers are not things which are visible to most people. The deterioration of roads and highway congestion are. When there is high visibility, there will be a greater tendency to limit discretion because highly visible outcomes are more likely to be questioned and, therefore, need greater transparency. In the same way, there is an incentive to maintain control and reduce the unintended consequences due to the very public nature of failures.

Housing is one of the most visible of policy areas. It is all around us, from the shape of our subdivisions, the design of our houses, to the size of our lots. Housing is

something that is around us all the time and is difficult to escape. It is something everyone has an opinion about. Social housing is also very visible because, in some cases, it has a distinctive form or density. By its very nature housing is visible because it is with us in a physical sense for a very long period of time (Carroll 1995). Unfortunately, the failure of social housing is increasingly becoming visible as even smaller centres have to cope with the problems of homelessness.

Immigration is much less visible, almost invisible. Unless they are involved with ESL, or some other aspect of immigration policy, the average Canadian would not be aware of it except when a high profile case hits the headlines. Many immigrant communities tend to keep to their own geographical boundaries, particularly those who have not yet integrated into our educational and economic system. In any event, there have been 'visible minority' immigrants coming to Canada from more than one hundred years and the absorption of 200,000 individuals in any given year does not constitute a visible issue.

Conclusion

Together these characteristics have a considerable influence upon the way in which policy develops. Directly, as we have discussed, in the structure for implementation, and also indirectly, through their influence upon the culture of the organization. For our purposes the most important effect, or outcomes, of some combination of these characteristics is the extent to which it explains the way policy discretion is exercised. A policy area, which is complex, has high resonance, an intensive technology, and low levels of homogeneity, is inclined to have high levels of discretion. If it also has high levels of compression there is an added tendency for unintended consequences to develop. If it has high levels of internal and external coupling this tendency is aggravated. At the same time, the structures will likely be highly flexible with relatively pre-audit control. Pre-audit control is largely associated with complex policy areas with highly trained professionals.

As our model shows, immigration policy which combines high levels of organisational differentiation and resonance with low levels of homogeneity, complexity and decision points is expected to leave more space for the exercise of discretion. This policy area which also displays high levels of external coupling and compression tends to have a high propensity for unintended consequences. In contrast, housing policy which combines high levels of complexity, decision points and internal coupling with a low level of homogeneity is expected to create some but less space than immigration for the use of discretion and unintended consequences.

This paper has not dealt with all aspects of the policy process. Outcomes, for example, differ depending upon the policy agenda and interactions between the actors in the process (Ryan 2001; Radin 1997; Segal and Weisbrod 2002; Steelman and Maquire 1999). We have focussed instead upon the aspects which we think systematically differentiate policy areas from each other. A partial review of the literature will indicate how an explicit consideration of these characteristics makes some research more applicable to other policy areas.^{iv} The underestimating of the complexity of a policy area has led to problems in training and achievement of goals in the environmental field (Miles 1998; Fluharsy; and Korfmacher 1998). This has also been relevant in attempts to deal with science and technology policy (Guston 1997). A lack of recognition of the nature and importance of compression has been a particular problem with environmental problems (Miles 1998). There is also considerable literature documenting the problems of unintended consequences which develop from an underestimation of the extent of internal (Freudenburg and Gramling 2002; Kline 2001) and external coupling (Auer 2000; Fenger and Kok 2001; Miles 1998; Poncelet 2001). Other studies have considered how the degree of resonance has affected peoples' perceptions of risk and the eventual policy outcomes and have attributed anomalies in outcomes to the degree of what we have called resonance (Gowda 1999; Tesh 1999). Tesh has also considered the degree to which the visibility of the policy in terms of environmental risk has affected the degree of discretion in the area of toxic wastes. Finally, Clarke has examined how the change of technology in forest policy has changed the way in which policy is made and in particular the degree of discretion.

We view this paper as an exploratory one in which we are trying to establish a framework in which it would be possible to integrate the various findings about different policy areas by delineating what we see to be the systematic variations between them. Obviously, more work is required in applying it to different policy areas, or sub-areas.

Table 1
Policy Characteristics, structural attributes and their relationship to policy discretion and unintended consequences

Policy characteristics	Structural attributes	Relationship to policy discretion	Impact on discretion	Probability of unintended consequences
Complexity/	– Technical experts	High	Positive	Low
Organizational differentiation	– Pre-audit control – Private provision possible/ – Control problem	High	Positive	High
Compression	– Policy is hard to control – Performance of implementing officers is hard to measure – Tendency to public provision	Moderate	Neutral	High
Coupling: External	– Difficult to control – Pre-audit control – Specific rules – Private and/or public	Low	Negative	High
Internal	– Flexible structures – Public provisions	High	Positive	High
Decision points	– Control problems – Specificity – rules	Low	Negative	High
Homogeneity	– *	Low	Negative	Low
Resonance	– traditional bureaucracy – pre- and post-audit control – public provision	High	Positive	High
Technology	– vary depending on technology	Varies	Varies	*
Visibility	– pre- and post-audit controls – flexible structures	Low	Negative	Low
* does not or has a low impact				
* assumes high level of characteristics				

Table 2

Policy characteristics applied to immigration and housing policies

Immigration Policy

Housing Policy

Policy Characteristics	Applied to immigration
Complexity/ Organizational Differentiation	Low/ High
Compression	High
External Coupling	High
Internal Coupling	Moderate to Low
Decision points	Low
Homogeneity	Low
Resonance	Moderate to High
Technology	Intensive-craft technology
Visibility	Low

Policy Characteristics	Applied to Housing
Complexity/ Organizational Differentiation	High/ Moderate to Low
Compression	Low
External Coupling	Moderate
Internal Coupling	Moderate to High
Decision points	High
Homogeneity	High
Resonance	Low
Technology	Mix Technology
Visibility	High

Endnotes

ⁱ Immigration and Naturalization Services decides to accept or refuse petitions. This department looks at immigrants' application and determines whether a candidate qualifies for a specific category. The Labor Department is in charge of the labor certification. The State Department assigns visa officers around the world to examine immigration files that are sent beforehand by the Immigration and Naturalization Services.

ⁱⁱ Except for the immigrants who are destined to the province of Quebec. In those cases, the responsibility for selecting economic and family immigrants is handled by the Quebec government while the federal government manages the admission process.

ⁱⁱⁱ The terminology about the characteristics is ours. We have interpreted the articles in terms of these characteristics. Not all characteristics are considered.

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