Public policy actors view success differently, and it matters

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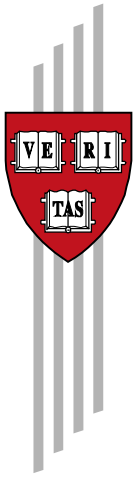

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Abstract

Literature tells us there are many dimensions of public policy success, and different actors in the policy process will likely focus on different dimensions. This paper asks how different actors in the policy process view policy success, and how much their views differ. It finds evidence that actors devising policy plans— designers—view success narrowly, as achieving near-term, programmed goals; whereas other actors involved in advocating for, authorizing, and implementing policies have a broader success perspective, paying more attention to non-program criteria like long-term impact, distributional and endurance success, and intertemporal gains that manifest in the way policies grow capability, political support, stakeholder satisfaction, and process legitimacy. Such finding raises a question about how policy objectives are determined when actors disagree, given that literature also tells us that policies are more likely to succeed when actors agree on what success is and how to achieve it.

Introduction

Literature tells us there are many dimensions of public policy success, and different actors in the policy process will likely focus on different dimensions (Bovens et al. 2001, Boyne 2003, Compton and t'Hart 2019, Marsh and McConnell 2010, McConnell 2010, and Newman and Head 2015). With this message in mind, this paper addresses a simple question: How do different actors in the policy process view policy success, and how much do their views really differ? It finds evidence that actors devising policy plans and initiatives in governments across the world—whom I call 'designers'[1]—view success narrowly, as achieving near-term, programmed goals; whereas other actors involved in advocating for, authorizing, and implementing policies have a broader success perspective, paying more attention to non-program criteria like long-term impact, distributional and endurance success, and intertemporal gains that manifest in the way policies grow capability, political support, stakeholder satisfaction, and process legitimacy. Such finding raises questions about how a narrow designer success perspective might foster successful failure in policy work (where policies successfully deliver goals but fail to meet other criteria).[2]

The paper builds this narrative through three sections. A first section introduces the idea that success is multi-dimensional, referring to a study that identifies 30 potential success criteria for policy workers to consider, in six dimensions (Andrews 2022a). It concludes by reflecting on the idea that different policy actors emphasize different types of success when doing policy work, asking the paper's primary research question (posed above). A second section discusses how four sets of policy studies—in the public health, education, climate change, and international development arenas—describe the different ways four sets of different policy actors (civic

[1] Others might call these actors planners, policy-makers, or advisors (Galanti 2017, Howlett 2014).

[2] The term 'successful failure' has been used in various ways. It sometimes describes work that fails initially but ultimately succeeds because of adaptive learning (like NASA's Apollo 13 flight, described in Kaufmann (2001)). I use it differently here, and in Andrews (2021) to describe the opposite situation—where policies appear successful enough in yielding near-term, low-level results but ultimately fail to achieve longer-term, high-level impacts. This usage reflects the spirit Seibel (1996, p.1011) brings to the term, in referring to organizations that appear functional enough to persist and even grow "despite permanent failure" in advancing their mission (succeeding in consistent activities centered on 'symbolic problem solving' but failing to actually solve problems).

advocates, political authorizers, designers, and implementers) seem to think about policy success. This discussion informs two hypotheses, offered as a potential answer to my research question:

- Designers seem to think narrowly about policy success, as delivering high-quality work programs that achieve set goals in a cost efficient, reliable manner
- Other actors appear to think more broadly about success, as delivering high-quality programs and achieving set goals, *and* fostering durable, distributionally fair impact beyond program boundaries, *and* strengthening policy systems (and the people, politics, and processes in such).

A third section introduces and describes results of a modest survey-based research effort to examine these hypotheses. The survey asked respondents from the four sets of actors mentioned how often they considered various criteria relevant in assessing policy success. Results show that designers do exhibit a narrow bias towards goal-driven program success and other actors do have broader success perspectives. A conclusion discusses how the finding may contribute to literatures on policy and project success—agreeing with McConnell et al. (2020, p.589) that the issue of 'policy success for whom' is "important but under-researched". While recognizing the modest nature of this study, I suggest it is an important addition to this literature—offering nascent evidence about how different actors think about policy success and a research method to develop more evidence of such. I also reflect on the relevance of the research finding itself, especially for those who argue that actors need to have clarity on success to achieve success (reflected in a recent comment by FitzGerald et al. (2019, p.9) that, "One thing is clear from most analyses: for policies to be successful, they should have clear and achievable goals.") Given the disagreement actors seem to have about what success means, I ask how likely it is—and what it takes—to come to agreement on the issue. I suggest that a path of least resistance involves compromising on goal and compliance focal points, which institutionalize the achievement of 'successful failures' (where policies achieve low-level near-term goals but fail to foster high-level, longer-term impact).

Policy success criteria and dimensions

Various literatures tell us that public policy and project success is multi-dimensional, and that different "stakeholders will have varying perspectives" about success (Sullivan et al. 2004, p.1603).

Three relevant literatures that carry such message address success in public policy work directly (where prominent studies include Bovens et al. 2002, Marsh and McConnell 2010, and Compton and t'Hart 2019), in project-driven policy work (where key papers include Shenhar et al. 2001, Khang and Moe 2008, and Ika 2009),[3] and in respect of the evaluation of policy and project work in developing countries (with influential sources like OECD 1991, 1998, 2000, 2013, 2019).

In a recent study, I analyzed 45 studies from across these literatures to capture how policy success was assessed (Andrews 2022a), generating a list 30 success criteria in six dimensions (see Table 1) that relate well to those commonly presented in public policy and project management research:

- Dimension A emphasizes success criteria related to the design and execution of a policy program, where studies employed different criteria (or standards) to evaluate success, reflected in the following questions: Was a program of action approved? Did it address real problems facing society? Was it high quality? Did it deliver promised milestones? Was it cost and time efficient? Did it achieve programmed goals?
- Dimension B captures success criteria associated with the impact, distributional effect, and endurance of policy work beyond the time and scope constraints of a bounded program, where studies asked: Did the policy work have a net positive social impact? Were distributions fair (such that no one gained or lost in inappropriate ways)? Did the policy gains and work endure through time? Did the policy catalyze new ideas, activities, and opportunities?
- Dimension C includes success criteria reflecting the policy's contribution to building system capability, with three concerns: Did the policy strengthen existing capability? Did the policy build new capability? Did the policy improve system confidence and motivation?

[3] The success of projects matters because projects are commonly used as vehicles for public policy work. One only needs to refer to Dennis Rondinelli's research to see this in respect of developing countries (Rondinelli 2013). It is also true in developed countries. In her study on education policy in Europe, for instance, Brunila (2011, p.421) refers to the way "[p]roject-based work has permeated the public sector." Similarly, Sanderson and Winch (2017, p.221) introduce a special edition of studies on project-based policy work in Europe saying that, "Project management is very deeply embedded in the public sector." The embedded nature of projects in a country like the United States is demonstrated by lists of projects in major policy initiatives (like the 'Top Recovery Projects' implemented by the Environmental Protection Agency as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act shown at https://archive.epa.gov/recovery/web/html/success.html).

- Dimension D focuses on the political success of policy work: Did the policy enjoy sufficient political support? Was political resistance manageable? Did the policy enhance the reputation and influence of political patrons? Did the policy have positive electoral impact for its patrons?
- Dimension E combines success criteria related to non-political stakeholder satisfaction and support, with studies asking about such in respect of implementing agents, policy users, targeted beneficiaries, financing entities, the public administration, and citizens in general. An additional question probes whether policy work enhances trust in and support of government.
- Dimension F captures questions posed about process success and the legitimacy of policy work: Is any part of the policy work or result perceived as illegal or corrupt? Do stakeholders consider the policy process sufficiently inclusive, participatory, and transparent? Would stakeholders say that the policy process was sufficiently fair? Are policy processes sufficiently respected? Was the policy process sufficiently flexible (to ensure appropriate adaptations)?

Table 1. A list of potential public policy success dimensions and criteria

A. Program success	*D. Political success, contd.*
1. Policy program is formally approved and funded	16. Political resistance to policy is manageable
2. Program responds to recognized social needs/problems	17. Policy enhances reputation/influence of political patrons
3. Program is technically sound and contextually feasible	18. Political patrons view electoral impacts of policy positively
4. Policy activities/outputs are delivered as programmed	*E. Stakeholder success*
5. Policy work is considered cost efficient	19. Implementing agents support policy objectives/work
6. Policy work is considered time efficient	20. Policy users are satisfied with/support and use policy
7. Policy goals are achieved as programmed	21. Targeted beneficiaries are satisfied with/support policy
B. Impact, distribution, and endurance success	22. Financing entities support policy objectives/work
8. Policy work has a positive net impact on society	23. The public administration supports policy objectives/work
9. Policy does not yield unacceptable gains and losses	24. Citizens in general support policy objectives/work
10. Policy is expected to endure and expand	25. Policy builds trust in and support for government
11. Policy catalyzes new ideas, activities, opportunities	*F. Process success*
C. Capability success	26. Policy work is not perceived as illegal or corrupt
12. Policy work strengthens existing system capability	27. Policy process is considered sufficiently inclusive,
13. Policy work fosters new system capability	participatory, and transparent
14. Policy work improves system confidence, motivation	28. Stakeholders view the policy process as sufficiently fair
D. Political success	29. Policy processes are sufficiently respected
15. Policy objectives/work enjoy sufficient political support	30. Policy processes are sufficiently flexible

Source: Andrews (2022a). Six dimensions are lettered, 30 criteria are numbered.

As noted, these criteria emerged from a study of 45 applied analyses of policy successes and failures. All 30 criteria were not all referenced in any one study, however. The number of criteria considered per study was between 7 and 19, with an average of just over 11. This suggests that success can never be assessed by focusing on just one criterion, but also that different criteria matter for different policy engagements or at different times, or for different actors or observers

who seem to exhibit different 'success perspectives'. Such sentiment is conveyed in McConnell et al. (2020, p.590), who write that different policy stakeholders can have "significantly different 'success' experiences," such that policy research or evaluation should always ask, "'policy success for whom?'" The sentiment is similar in Sullivan et al. (2004, p.1603), who note that different "stakeholders … have varying perspectives on impact" and Bovens et al. (2001, p.20), who claim that "success and failure mean different things to different people at different times."

There is something unobjectionable about this idea. It must be true that different policy actors view success differently. It is a weighty observation, however, given that studies commonly find that actors must agree about policy success to allow for that success. Wolman (1981, p.439), for example, argues that clear and agreed objectives are required to "design a program, administer it competently, [and] assess its performance." Beleiu et al. (2015, pp.64-65) find similarly that project managers rate "clearly defined goals and directions" and "compliance with [agreed] performance criteria" as key project conditions that, when met, foster success. Such studies do not necessarily assume that actors have the same success perspectives, but they assume that actors' different success perspectives can be harmonized through things like negotiation, coalition building, stakeholder consultation, and the like; to ensure everyone 'rows in the same direction' when it comes to policy work. This assumption raises an important question: How do different actors in the policy process view policy success, and how much do their views really differ?

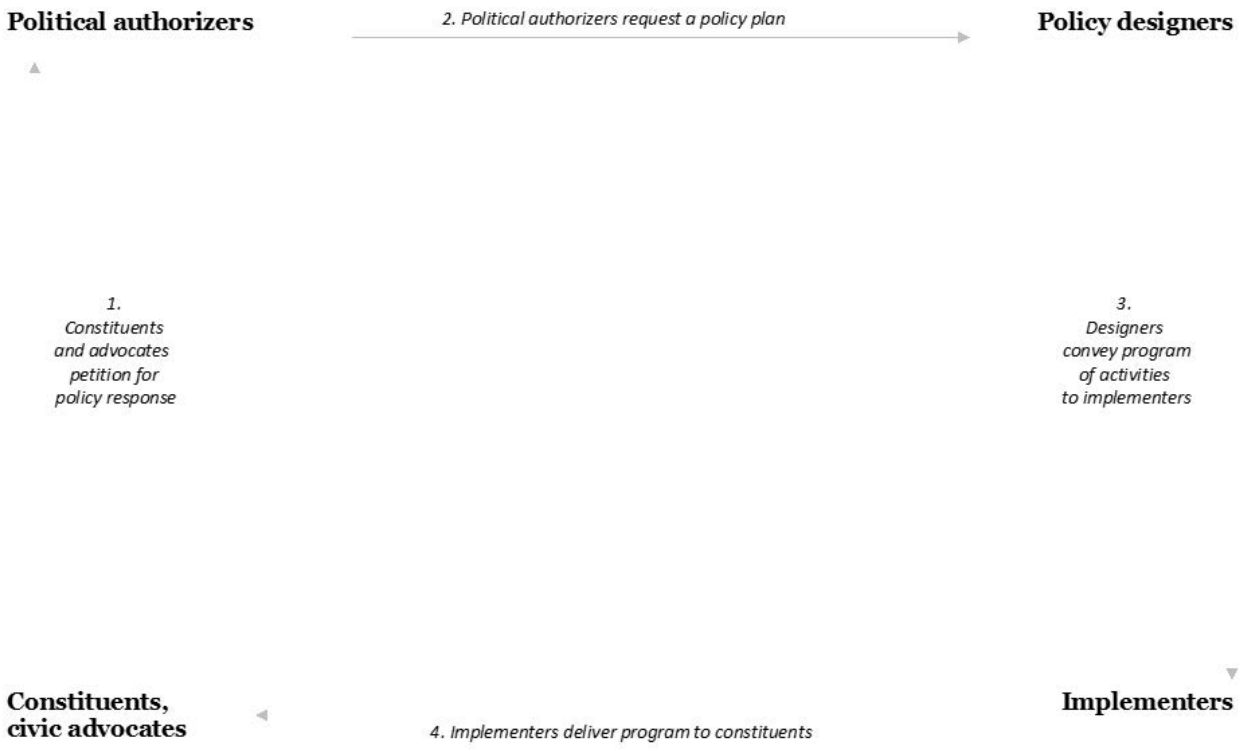
Different actors, different success perspectives

The best way to answer this question would require identifying all the actors involved in doing policy work and assessing each actor's success perspective (asking, essentially, about the criteria they care most about in Table 1). The demands of such approach are beyond the scope of this paper, however, which is based on a simpler strategy—inspired by Davis's work examining project management success (Davis 2014, 2018)[4]—of identifying the main types of actors commonly found in policy processes and asking if they have common, generic concerns about policy success.

[4] Davis (2014) and Davis (2018, p.41) analyzed different stakeholder views of project management success by first defining key stakeholder groups (through a rigorous literature analysis) and then interviewing and surveying members of these groups to develop a view of "their common and differing views of success."

This strategy was also difficult to execute, as literature tells us policy processes differ from context to context and can be opaque, hard to 'see', and different to what theory suggests (Cairney 2021, Weible and Cairney 2021). Recognizing such challenges, but in the interests of facilitating analysis, Figure 1 offers a simple model of what Colebatch (2006, p.32) calls the "universally accepted," theoretical, "authoritative account" of policy work, where the "policy process is seen in terms of identifying problems, choosing appropriate responses, and ensuring that these are implemented."

Figure 1. A simple 'authoritative' account of the policy process and its actors



Source: Author's original work

While obviously simplified, Figure 1's model points to four main groups of actors engaged in policy work—civic advocates, political authorizers, designers, and implementers[5]—and offers a simple understanding of these actors' formal roles. Put plainly, citizens and their advocates have a role in voicing needs to political representatives (step 1), politicians decide where government should work and authorize such work (step 2), designers develop policy plans and programs (step 3), and

[5] Other actor groups could also be included, like evaluators and finance providers; and the groups could all be decomposed into different interest groups (with different kinds of civic advocates, for instance).

implementers deliver the planned program to citizens and other beneficiaries (step 4). Though simple, I find that policy workers across the globe commonly recognize the model in Figure 1 as representative of the formal processes framing their work, even if they do admit to departing from such in practice.[6] Case studies on policy successes and failures also often reference the actor groups featured in the model and help frame a view on how these groups think about success.

An interesting set of studies examines health sector case management policies in countries like the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada. These policies involve introducing health care processes where a "professional helps a patient or client develop a plan that coordinates and integrates the support services that the patient/client needs to optimize their healthcare and psychosocial possible goals and outcomes" (Giardino and De Jesus 2021, p.1). Studies show that actors involved in designing such policies (often in central ministries of health or finance) define success as achieving pre-programmed goals, like decreased use of emergency departments services and lower costs of treating patients (Hudon et al. 2017).[7] In contrast, studies show that patients (and their advocates) and implementers focus on a broader set of success criteria, like the quality of relationships between case workers and patients, patient satisfaction, and the level of patient capabilities. As Knox et al. (2022, p.3) explain, "Case managers frequently … mentioned three characteristics of success: (1) establishing trust; (2) fostering change in patients' mindset or initiative; and (3) promoting stability and independence." Knox et al. hold further, that "case managers expressed that success is patient-defined," and "contrast[s] with external [and designer] perceptions of success [based on] common operational or productivity metrics."

Another example comes from Wallner's (2008) study on education policy in Ontario and Alberta, Canada, which describes differences in the way high level policy designers and street level implementers (like teachers) and beneficiaries (like parents and students) perceived success.

[6] In surveys of former students working in policy processes across the world, the author finds strong recognition of this kind of process as the formal framework in which policy work is done. In keeping with studies like Colebatch (2006), however, survey respondents do note that actual informal processes often depart from the formal one, with actors involved in multiple stages, stages overlapping or missing, and more. It is thus important to keep two things in mind when working with the 'authoritative account', staged process model presented here: This is the formal process framework most policy actors make policy through, but it does not tell the full story of how policy is made.

[7] Hudon et al. (2017, pp.3-4) summarize the goals of 13 case management interventions, showing that all had some measure of decreased emergency department use as a goal, 7 had a measure related to cost savings as a goal, and only 3 had other measures as goals (things like stability of housing, patient satisfaction, and alcohol use by patients).

Wallner discusses the proclivity of designers in both provinces to focus on goal-based success, which she views as evidence of a 'performance, effectiveness, and efficiency' bias. The specific high-level designer-defined goals in question centered on cost reductions in the education sector in both provinces. In contrast, members of the public, teaching community, and others cared about a broader set of success criteria—related to strengthening student well-being and relationships in the school system and improving the quality of schools and the legitimacy of the education sector in general. Wallner notes that the policy process focused only on the designers' narrow goal-driven success criteria in Ontario, which led to a design that alienated other stakeholders and generated a negative sentiment among the public, ultimately contributing to a policy intervention that many citizens viewed as failure. In concluding her article, and citing Weir (1992, p.193), Wallner notes that 'strategies' and 'tricks' used by designers in the pursuit of goal-based program success "undermine[d] the emergence of long-term political coalitions and enduring institutions needed to sustain policy direction."

A third example comes from Australia, where the Labor government agreed, when ratifying the Kyoto Protocol in 2007, to meet emissions reduction targets by 2012. After years of effort, a progressive carbon pricing policy became law in the 2011 Clean Energy Act, requiring large carbon dioxide emitters to obtain permits for their emissions.[8] Government officials involved in its design lauded this policy a success, calling it an 'historic' achievement[9] and crediting it as a key reason Australia's carbon emissions dropped from 410 to 393 million tons between 2008 and 2013, helping the country meet its Kyoto goals (Ritchie et al. 2020). Unfortunately, the policy was also

[8] The policy emerged over many years, involving a lot of stops-and-starts. Designers in academia and in parts of the government's environmental and climate administration had been advocating for an aggressive approach that attracted a lot of political opposition under prior governments. This aggressive approach—and program of action—was largely incorporated in the 2011 law, however, because a new coalition government had an agreement with the Green party, who provided needed (though small-margined) support. This was seen as a victory for a range of designers, including "policy entrepreneurs like the Greens, expert advisers, [and] independent think tanks" who achieved success in "advancing [the aggressive] change agendas and exploiting policy windows" (Crowley 2013, p.381). Even with this victory, however, observers raised questions about the potential for real impact and endurance, given known political and social opposition (which the designers saw as an obstacle they had overcome, rather than an objective to address), and Crowley (2013, p.381) noted that it was impossible to "guarantee that the government withstands industry lobbying during the implementation of carbon pricing nor that Australia ultimately achieves effective emissions abatement."

[9] This was a word used by the Minister of Finance, as cited in the Reuters article 'Australia passes landmark carbon price laws' (https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna43701256).

subject to social and political criticism, and media and political opposition blamed pressing economic problems on the new pricing mechanism—labeling it a 'tax' on normal Australians (Newman and Head 2015). This messaging contributed to Labor losing the September 2013 election, which led to the Act's repeal in July 2014. As the Center for Public Impact explains, "even though it did succeed in reducing emissions, [the reform] failed to get the support it needed"[10] because many parts of civil society viewed it as conferring unfair and unmanageable costs on them (an indication of failure) even while it met its goals.

Similar observations hail from the international development project management literature, where Diallo and Thuillier (2004) find that high-level project coordinators—responsible for upholding project designs—view success as ensuring programs have a high profile, are respected by donors, attract additional finance, and produce deliverables described in plans—with ultimate success shown in the on-time and on-budget achievement of programmed goals. The authors find that these project coordinators are not interested in whether policy initiatives have a positive net impact on beneficiaries, if beneficiaries are satisfied, or if the work is likely to be sustained. In contrast, coordinators perceive that other actors—like civic advocates and beneficiaries—view success predominantly in terms of these latter 'impact' criteria. The authors state that "beneficiaries' concerns reside only in project impact" and "all stakeholders but the coordinator appreciate impact" (Diallo and Thuillier 2004, p.11).

Reporting on similar research, and helping to make sense of these stories, Lim and Mohamed (1999, p.244) note that planners—the actors I call designers—often view success "as the achievement of some pre-determined project goals" [but] "the general public do not necessary have similar pre-determined goals regarding the project at all." Such message is carried in the studies I discuss here on health, education, emissions control, and international development policy and project work, where designers seemed goal oriented but other actors seemed to define success in different ways, often focused on things like distributional impact, stakeholder satisfaction, and more. This observation informs two hypotheses, offered as a potential answer

[10] See the Center for Public Impact study at https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/carbon-tax-australia

to the question asked earlier (about whether actors think differently about success, and how differently they might think about such):

- H1: Designers seem to think narrowly about policy success, as delivering high-quality work programs that achieve set goals in a cost efficient, reliable manner.
- H2: Other actors appear to think more broadly about success, as delivering high-quality programs and achieving set goals, *and* fostering durable, distributionally fair impact beyond program boundaries, *and* strengthening policy systems (and the people, politics, and processes in such).

Examining different success perspectives

One could restate hypothesis 1 (H1) as saying that policy designers only attend to Dimension A in Table 1, focused on success criteria related to the design and execution of a policy program and asking the following kinds of questions: Was a program approved? Did it address real problems facing society? Was it high quality? Did it deliver promised milestones? Was it cost and time efficient? Did it achieve its goals? In a similar restatement, hypothesis 2 (H2) suggests that other actors—politicians, implementers, and civic advocates—have broader views on success, focusing on multiple criteria in dimensions A, B, C, D, E and F (program success, impact, distribution, and endurance success, capability success, political success, stakeholder success, and process success).

I conducted a survey to examine whether the relevant actor groups do think of success in the ways suggested. My survey strategy was targeted, intended to access views of the four groups of actors discussed—policy designers, political authorizers, implementers, and civic advocates.[11] I surveyed four groups of 50 past students who I knew held positions required to locate them in the four actor groups, defining each role as follows:[12] designers are the people involved in identifying what a policy (or project) will do, and planning out the details of how it will do such—including planners

[11] As noted, the approach draws on that used by Davis (2014, 2018) to capture the views of different project stakeholder groups on project success criteria and factors. It is important to target such work because one is trying to get responses from specific types of actors and not general stakeholders.

[12] I conducted an online survey, with a pre-test involving 8 former students (from each group)—each of whom offered thoughts and concerns in a post-survey discussion. This pre-test allowed me to test the survey instrument and ensure there were no glitches with language or questions.

in governments and international development agencies; political authorizers are politicians working in executive entities who provide support to policy;[13] implementers are the agents in administrative entities who execute plans at the street level;[14] civic advocates are people and organizations representing constituents in the process of identifying what policies are needed, including entities like Chambers of Business and community-level lobbyists.

I received 36, 37, 26, and 22 responses (for designers, implementers, politicians, and civic advocates respectively), with response rates ranging from 44% to 74%.[15] Respondents were from all over the world, with 36% from Africa, 19% from Latin America, 15% from Europe, 12% from North America, 12% from Asia, and 7% from the Middle East. All respondents confirmed that they had more than 5 years of experience in their role (with 54% having more than 10 years of experience). As such, even though the respondent group was small,[16] I was satisfied that each set of respondents represented the four targeted actor groups, and their responses could reliably offer at least a modest view into each group's thinking about success (even though the samples were relatively small and there was a lower-than-optimal response rate in two of the groups).[17]

The survey instrument was simple. I shared the list of potential success criteria shown in Table 1 and asked, 'how often would you consider each criterion when assessing policy success?' Potential responses were structured on a five-point scale, where a score of 1 denoted 'never', 2 meant

[13] I included political authorizers in the executive only, who spent time acting as policy patrons (deciding on policies and then actively authorizing work on those policies). I did not include politicians in legislative roles as my experience suggests they make policy decisions but authorize work passively most of the time.

[14] Other studies have included high-level administrators—like project coordinators in World Bank projects—as implementers (Diallo and Thuillier 2004, Ika et al. 2010). I did not engage such actors, but chose rather to define street level implementers. This is because the higher-level coordinators are often steps removed from actual implementation, acting as conservators of plans and designs and as resource managers. They facilitate the mobilization of resources and coordinate and monitor activities but are not as active in delivering on projects and policies as those who work at the street level, who I focus on as the direct implementers.

[15] In comparison, Davis (2018) had a sample of 300 and response rate of 48% (with 143 respondents). She shows that rate to be about average for this kind of study in the project management literature (Davis 2018, p.181). This means my response rates were average-to-high for this kind of study (as appropriate for the smaller sample size).

[16] This size is not uncommon in such work, however. In their work on project success, Pinto and Slevin (1987) had 52 usable responses. Toor and Ogunlana (2010) based similar research on 76 responses. Pinto et al. (2009) examined project success using 92 responses (out of a sample of 150).

[17] It is hard to determine any response bias in the final sets of respondents. I knew who I had approached in the full sample, but the actual responses were anonymous (in an online survey I could not determine who responded and who did not). I do know that 43 emails sent to potential respondents bounced back, suggesting the most obvious reason for their non-response was probably an outdated email. This explanation would account for 54% of the non-responses, leaving about 34 unexplained and impossible to track and examine.

'seldom', 3 'sometimes', 4 'often', and 5 'always'. This simple tool was intended to gather information and obtain a better picture of patterns in success perspectives across groups, to offer evidence about the two hypotheses proposed. Table 2 provides a graphic picture of the average scores for each group of actors on each criterion.

Table 2. How different groups view the relevance of different success dimensions and criteria

	Designers	Political authorizers	Implementers	Civic advocates
A. Program success				
1. Policy program is formally approved and funded	3.8	3.65	3.4	3.45
2. Policy program responds to recognized social needs or problems	4	4	3.45	4.05
3. Policy program is technically sound and administratively/politically feasible	4.05	3.4	3.45	3.3
4. Policy activities and outputs are implemented as programmed	4.1	3.6	4	3.45
5. Policy work is considered cost efficient	3.9	3.8	3.9	3.4
6. Policy work is considered time efficient	3.25	3.2	3.45	3.25
7. Policy goals are achieved (as formally defined)	4.63	4.15	4.15	4.15
B. Impact, distribution, and endurance success				
8. Policy work has a positive net impact on society	3.7	4.15	4.2	4.2
9. Policy does not yield unacceptable gains and losses	3.4	4.05	3.9	4.05
10. Policy work/results are expected to endure and expand	3.8	3.9	4.15	3.95
11. Policy work catalyzes new ideas, activities, and opportunities	3.2	3.3	3.8	3.8
C. Capability success				
12. Policy work makes appropriate use of and builds existing capability	3.25	3.25	4.05	3.25
13. Policy work builds new capabilities	3.2	3.4	4	3.7
14. Policy work improves confidence and motivation	3.1	3.25	3.65	3.2
D. Political success				
15. Policy objectives and work enjoy sufficient political support	3.2	3.45	3.8	3.65
16. Political resistance to policy objectives and work is manageable	3.35	3.45	4.15	3.4
17. Policy work enhances the reputation and influence of political patrons	3.3	4.25	3.45	3.3
18. Political patrons view electoral impacts of policy as positive	3.3	4.1	3.5	3.3
E. Stakeholder success				
19. Implementing agents support policy objectives and work	3.1	3.3	4.05	3.4
20. Policy users are satisfied with/support policy objectives/work	3.45	3.45	4.1	4.15
21. Targeted beneficiaries are satisfied with/support policy objectives/work	3.6	4.1	4.15	4.15
22. Financing entities provide enough support to policy objectives and work	4	3.2	3.8	3.2
23. The public administration provides enough support to policy work	3.05	3.1	3.3	3.15
24. Citizens in general provide enough support to policy objectives and work	3.25	3.65	3.4	3.55
25. Policy work builds trust in/support for government policy initiatives	3.35	3.6	3.8	4
F. Process success				
26. Nothing about the policy program or work is perceived as illegal or corrupt	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.05
27. Policy process is sufficiently inclusive, participatory, and transparent	3.4	3.6	4.05	4
28. Stakeholders view the policy process and distribution as sufficiently fair	3.35	3.7	3.8	4
29. Policy processes are sufficiently respected (as appropriate to the work)	3.2	3.2	4	3.65
30. Policy processes are sufficiently flexible (to allow adaptations)	3.1	3.2	4	3.2

Source: Author's analysis of surveys of practitioners on views about success criteria.

To obtain a sense of the focal points of each group—the criteria their responses suggest they focus on when thinking about success—I began by identifying primary and secondary success concerns in each group. Dark grey cells show the 'primary success concerns' (where most respondents noted that they 'often' to 'always' consider the criteria and few suggested a lower rate of concern, leading the average score to be 'often' (4) or above). Light grey cell show 'secondary success concerns' (where most responses were 'often' to 'always' but a good number were lower, leading to an average below 'often' (4)). Other criteria—where most scores were less than 'often' (4), suggesting most respondents consider the success criteria 'sometimes', 'seldom', or 'never'—are seen as non-concerns and shown as clear cells. With cells shaded, an eyeball analysis of the table yields an important observation: The designer group have fewer primary and secondary success concerns than others. This suggests that designers have a narrower success perspective than the other groups. Such evidence supports both of my hypotheses.

Building on this observation, I used the lists of primary and secondary concerns to develop a measure of the breadth of success perspective in each group. This involved calculating a weighted sum of primary and secondary concern criteria and determining their share in the full set of 30 potential success criteria. Primary concerns were given full weight (scoring 1, recognizing they are often or always considered) and secondary concerns were given half weight (scoring 0.5, given that they are referenced sometimes or less regularly). Table 3 summarizes the number of primary and secondary concerns and weighted sum and share of these concerns (the latter as a percentage) for all four groups.

Table 3. The breadth of success perspectives for all four actor groups

	Designers	Political authorizers	Implementers	Civic advocates
Number of primary success concerns*	6	8	14	10
Number of secondary success concerns **	5	8	8	6
Weighted primary and secondary success concerns^	8.5	12	18	13
Share of weighted primary + secondary success concerns (ex 30)^^	28%	40%	60%	43%

Source: Author's original work. *Notes:* *The number of success criteria where most respondents answered 4 or 5 and the average was 4 or above; ** The number of success criteria where most respondents answered 4 or 5 but the average was below 4; ^ Primary concerns score a full 1 and secondary concerns score 0.5; ^^ The weighted sum of concerns divided by the potential full sample of 30.

The data in Table 3 confirm that designers do have narrow success perspectives, and that other actor groups exhibit broader perspectives. The designer success perspective covers 8.5 of the 30

potential success criteria, with a success perspective breadth score of 28%. Political authorizers averaged 8 primary and 8 secondary criteria, with a success perspective breadth score of 40%. Implementers averaged 14 primary and 8 secondary criteria, yielding a success perspective breadth score of 60%. Civic advocates averaged 10 primary and 6 secondary criteria and a success perspective breadth score of 43%. The biggest difference is between designers and implementers, with implementers focused on more than twice the number of success criteria as cited by designers. Once again, this evidence supports both of my hypotheses.

Table 4 illustrates another difference between the groups' success perspectives, related to the distribution of these perspectives across the six success dimensions. A first observation is that designer perspectives are less distributed than others (across four dimensions, as compared with five dimensions for political authorizers and six dimensions for implementers and civic advocates). A second observation is that designers' concerns are concentrated in a single success dimension—program success—which accounts for 59% of their success perspective. This level of concentration is out of sync with other groups, where the highest other single-dimension emphasis is about half (with program success criteria accounting for 29% of the political authorizers' success perspective and stakeholder and process success criteria both accounting for 27% of the civic advocate success perspective).

These observations again support my hypotheses, showing that designers have a narrow success focus, other groups have broader success perspectives, and—particularly—that designers seem biased to emphasize program success when thinking about their policy work.

Table 4. Distribution of success perspective, by dimension and group of actors

Success dimension	Designers	Political authorizers	Implementers	Civic advocates
A. Program success	59%	29%	13%	15%
B. Impact, distribution, endurance success	12%	21%	17%	23%
C. Capability success	0%	0%	14%	4%
D. Political success	0%	17%	8%	4%
E. Stakeholder success	18%	17%	22%	27%
F. Process success	12%	17%	25%	27%

Source: Author's analysis of surveys of practitioners on views about success criteria. The percentages show shares of each group's success perspective made up by criteria in the relevant success dimension.

Whereas program success was their dominant focus, designers did exhibit some concern from non-program success criteria. Two primary success concerns were in the stakeholder and process success dimensions, for instance, focused on whether observers perceive policy work as legal and non-corrupt and if financing entities support policy work. Additional secondary concerns were in the impact, distribution and sustainability and stakeholder success dimensions, focused on the net impact and durability of policy work and satisfaction of targeted beneficiaries. This list on non-program concerns is much shorter than for all other groups, however, with non-program criteria accounting for 11 of the political authorizer's 16 primary and secondary concerns, 19 of the 22 implementers' concerns, and 14 of 16 civic advocates concerns. This shows how much more designers emphasize program concerns than other groups (even though the designers do bat an eye at other concerns). Such observation is reinforced when recognizing the extent of designer concern on goal achievement, arguably the ultimate program success criterion. Every designer gave a score of 4 or 5 for criterion 7, 'policy goals are achieved (as formally defined)', which yielded an average designer score of 4.63—statistically higher than every average score in the table.[18]

Such evidence speaks to a designer emphasis on goal achievement—and program success—as the fundamental concern, in support of hypothesis 1. The implication of this single-dimension (and even single-criteria) emphasis is quite significant, especially if most actors accept their policies will never achieve full success, and it suffices to succeed on most of one's concerns (which I think is a reasonable view). Given this rationale, designers will likely be satisfied with policy results and declare overall success if they only meet the program success conditions they are most concerned about (achieving goals, in a cost efficient manner, by following a respected program of action),[19] because these account for 59% of their overall success perspective. Actors in other groups would need to meet the conditions associated with at least two success dimensions to check of 50% of their concerns (with political authorizer achieving such by meeting all of their concerns in the program success and impact, distribution and success dimensions, civic-advocates getting to this

[18] Given t-tests, this score was statistically higher than every other score (at the 1% level).

[19] These are, in order of the average designer group scores, 'policy goals are achieved (as formally defined)', 'policy activities and outputs are implemented as programmed', 'the policy program is technically sound and administratively and political feasible', 'the policy program responds to recognized social needs or problems', 'policy work is considered cost efficient', and 'the policy program is formally approved and funded'.

level most efficiently by ensuring policies achieve focal criteria in the stakeholder success and process success dimensions, and implementers needing to meet conditions in three dimensions—stakeholder success, process success, and one other).

This evidence supports both hypotheses once again, showing that designers seem to think narrowly about policy success, as delivering high-quality work programs that achieve set goals in a cost efficient, reliable manner (H1), whereas other groups of actors think more broadly about policy success, as delivering high-quality programs and achieving set goals, *and* fostering durable, distributionally fair impact beyond program boundaries, *and* strengthening policy systems (and the people, politics, and processes in such) (H2).

Concluding thoughts

In examining—and finding evidence in support of—these two hypotheses, this study builds on a key idea in the literature on public policy success—that "[d]ifferent stakeholders have different vantage points, values and interests with regard to a policy, and thus may experience and assess it differently … [such that] policy evaluation occurs in a context of multiple, often competing, cultural and political frames and narratives" (Luetjens et al., 2019 p.5). This idea is also advanced in the project management literature, where it is commonly held that a "project has a range of stakeholder groups … [and] Each stakeholder group will have its own view of project success, judging it according to different criteria" (McLeod at al. 2012, p.69).

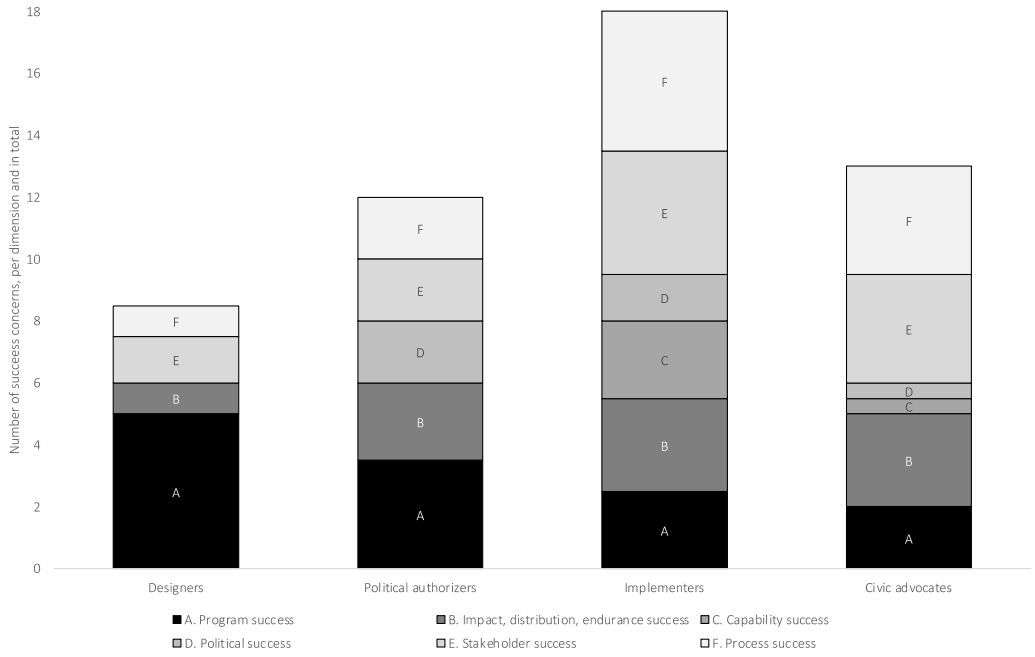
Most work on public policy success perspectives is qualitative, taking the form of ex-post case studies that examine the way different stakeholders perceived success in some or other policy initiative. Drawing on the project management literature (especially Davis (2014, 2018)), this study applies a more quantitative approach to such work, identifying key stakeholder groups and using survey methods to identify and quantify different views of success. The study is exploratory and based on a relatively (but not inappropriately) small set of targeted survey responses,[20] but still yields interesting findings. As such, the method offers an interesting approach to use in studying

[20] As discussed in earlier footnotes, targeted studies like this tend to have smaller samples.

different perspectives on policy success, which leads me to suggest the need for more such work in future. This future work could be strengthened by identifying policy groups at a more granular level than I have done here, [21] and cultivating larger survey samples, which would facilitate more rigorous analysis and more specified findings.

I believe this study's findings are valuable in and of themselves, however. At base, the findings endorse messages in the public policy literature on success, showing that different policy actors do indeed view success differently. The differences in success perspectives of selected groups are summarized in Figure 2, which draws on data in Table 3 to illustrate the number of primary and secondary success concerns—used in this paper to assess what I call the success perspective—per dimension and in total, for each actor group.

Figure 2. Number of success concerns, per dimension and in total, for each actor group



Source: Author's analysis of survey results, as described.

The figure shows that designers have the smallest—or narrowest—success perspective of all groups (with success concerns scoring 8.5 out of a possible 30) and are focused on one success

[21] I think it would be valuable to deconstruct political actors into policy patrons and opponents, for instance, and to deconstruct civic advocates into those representing civic users, beneficiaries, and opponents. I also think it would be useful to include resource managers and monitoring and evaluation agents.

dimension (A. Program success), with marginal concern for three other dimensions (B. Impact, distribution, and endurance success, E. Stakeholder success, and F. Process success). In contrast, implementers are concerned about the most success criteria (scoring 18 out of 30) that are spread quite evenly across all six dimensions (with no single or dominant dimension). The other groups (political authorizers and civic advocates) fall in-between, scoring 12 and 13 with criteria in five and six dimensions respectively and—once again—no outstanding singular dimension.

This evidence supports the hypotheses tested, that designers have a narrow success perspective and program success bias; while other actor groups are likely to have broader, varied perspectives.

Table 4 offers more granular findings, showing the top seven success criteria, by dimension, for each actor group. The table illustrates that all four groups of actors have different top ranked criteria: Designers placed the most emphasis on achieving goals, political authorizers were most focused on ensuring policies promote their image, implementers were most concerned about legal legitimacy, and civic advocates cared most about policy impact. The table also reveals the designers' bias towards program concerns, with five of their top seven concerns in the program success dimension. In contrast, only one of the top seven concerns in the political authorizer and implementer groups were in the program success dimension. The political authorizers I surveyed included more criteria from dimensions B and D (showing primary concerns over impact, distribution and endurance success and political success), and the implementers had more concerns in dimensions B and E (where dimension E relates to stakeholder success). Civic advocates had sets of primary concerns in three dimensions, A, B, and E, and one in dimension F.

Table 4. The top 7 success criteria, by dimension, number, brief title, score, for each actor group

Designers		Political authorizers		Implementers		Civic advocates	
A	7. Goals (4.63)	D	17. Political image (4.25)	F	26. Legal legitimacy (4.3)	B	8. Impact (4.2)
F	26. Legal legitimacy (4.2)	F	26. Legal legitimacy (4.2)	B	8. Impact (4.2)	E	21. Beneficiaries satisfied (4.15)
A	4. Policy as programmed (4.1)	B	8. Impact (4.15)	B	10. Endure (4.15)	E	20. Users satisfied (4.15)
A	3. Policy quality (4.05)	A	7. Goals (4.15)	D	16. Low political resistance (4.15)	A	7. Goals (4.15)
E	22. Financing support (4)	D	18. Electoral gains (4.1)	E	21. Beneficiaries satisfied (4.15)	F	26. Legal legitimacy (4.05)
A	2. Responsive program (4)	E	21. Beneficiaries satisfied (4.1)	A	7. Goals (4.15)	B	9. Distributionally fair (4.05)
A	5. Policy cost efficient (3.9)	B	9. Distributionally fair (4.05)	E	20. Users satisfied (4.1)	A	2. Responsive program (4.05)

Source: Author's analysis. *Notes:* A = Program success, B = Impact, distribution, endurance success, C = Capability success, D = Political success, E = Stakeholder success, F= Process success. Merged cells indicate criteria that received the same score and were thus tied in their rank order.

These findings raise an important question for those doing policy work: How do actors with different success perspectives come to agree on a single, common, clear, and agreed view of what it means to succeed in policy work? This question matters, because literature tells us that policies are more successful when objectives are clear and agreed. This view is reflected in a recent study that finds disaster management policies are more likely to succeed when, "There are common objectives; that is, every[one] shares the same objectives, no matter which institutions they are from… [and] they work together toward the same goal or objective" (Siriporananon and Visuthismajarn 2018, p.274). This seems like an incredibly difficult condition to meet in policy work, especially if actor groups' success perspectives differ as much as my survey results suggest they do. How does one bring designers, political authorizers, implementers, and civic advocates together to agree on and work towards the same success criterion or criteria?

The question has been addressed, implicitly at least, in much policy work—especially studies about top-down and bottom-up planning, and the use of boundary spanning strategies (like coalition building, stakeholder engagement and collaborative policymaking) that help diverse sets of actors move 'beyond [the] boundary' of their group and towards some shared perspectives (Siriporananon and Visuthismajarn 2018). Such studies often describe how policy actors came to a compromised, agreeable vision for their work, and identified common, shared criteria to use in determining its success (which then guide planning, implementation, and evaluation work).

If a compromise were to be hashed out across the four actor groups I surveyed, I imagine it would lead to the identification of criteria they are most aligned on. These are shown in Table 5, where the ultimate 'agreeable criteria' are 'policy goals are achieved (as formally defined)' and 'nothing about the policy is perceived as illegal or corrupt'. These two criteria rank in the top 5 for all four groups, suggesting that they are the most shared concerns in the full population of actors. The three criteria rounding out this top 5 are 'policy work has a positive net impact on society', 'beneficiaries are satisfied with and support the policy', and 'policy work and results are expected to endure and expand'. If these five criteria were included in a compromised set of agreed objectives, one would have four dimensions represented—program success, impact, distribution, and endurance success, stakeholder success, and process success. The only missing dimensions would be capability success and political success.

Table 5. The top five ranked criteria, across all groups (with group rankings for each criteria)

Criteria	Designer rank	Political authorizer rank	Implementer rank	Civic advocate rank	Overall rank	Std. deviation (of ranks)
7. Policy goals are achieved (as formally defined)	1	T-3	T-3	T-2	1	0.96
26. Nothing about policy perceived as illegal or corrupt	2	2	1	T-5	2	1.73
8. Policy work has a positive net impact on society	10	T-3	2	1	3	4.08
21. Beneficiaries satisfied with/support policy	11	T-5	T-3	T-2	4	4.03
10. Policy work/results expected to endure and expand	8	9	T-3	11	5	3.40

It is unlikely that all groups would agree on the full list of five shared objectives, however, because there is much less common ground in respect of the last three criteria. At least one group ranks each of these criteria well outside of their own top 5, leading to a relatively high standard deviation (of ranks). Designers rank the last three criteria below 5 (10^{th}, 11^{th}, and 8^{th}), for instance, and political authorizers and civic advocates rank the last criterion 9^{th} and 11^{th}. Given these low rankings, I imagine that it would take a lot to get these groups to compromise on accepting such criteria accepted as guiding objectives of their policy initiatives. Which results in only two readily share-able, compromise-ready success criteria—'achieve goals' and 'ensure legal compliance'. And, if one assumes that designers have significant power and influence determining what is in plans, it may be that only one criteria really passes muster (their preferred 'goal' criteria).[22]

I certainly see short-to-medium term goal-based objectives as the normal success criteria in most policy and project work in governments (Andrews 2022a, 2022b). I believe their common use reflects the preference, power, and influence of designers in shaping policy content, and they are accepted by other actors as the most agreeable criterion available. As McLeod et al. (2012, p.69) note, "They [goal-based success criteria] are popular … because they can be made objective, tangible, and measurable; they fall within the ambit of the project organization; they are short-term, ending upon project delivery; and they can be used to evaluate a project manager's performance." Goals, therefore, are the ultimate compromise lens through which to make sense of policy success. But are they a good lens? Or do they foster successful failure—situations where policy achieves short-run goals but fails to foster enduring impact—and bake-in all-around stakeholder dissatisfaction (given that they do not foster success on most actor groups' concerns)?

[22] I reflect on this issue of power in defining success given Lim and Mohamed's warning that it matters "who … determine[s] project [or policy] success" (Lim and Mohamed 1999, p.243). The answer might help us understand why policy designs and activities may seem biased to reflect some lenses and narratives and not others .

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