

Multiple streams and the construction of policy problems

Explaining reforms to the governance of fire and rescue services in England



@peckersley

@KatarzynaLakoma

Dr Pete Eckersley

Katarzyna Lakoma

Nottingham Trent University

**NOTTINGHAM
BUSINESS SCHOOL**

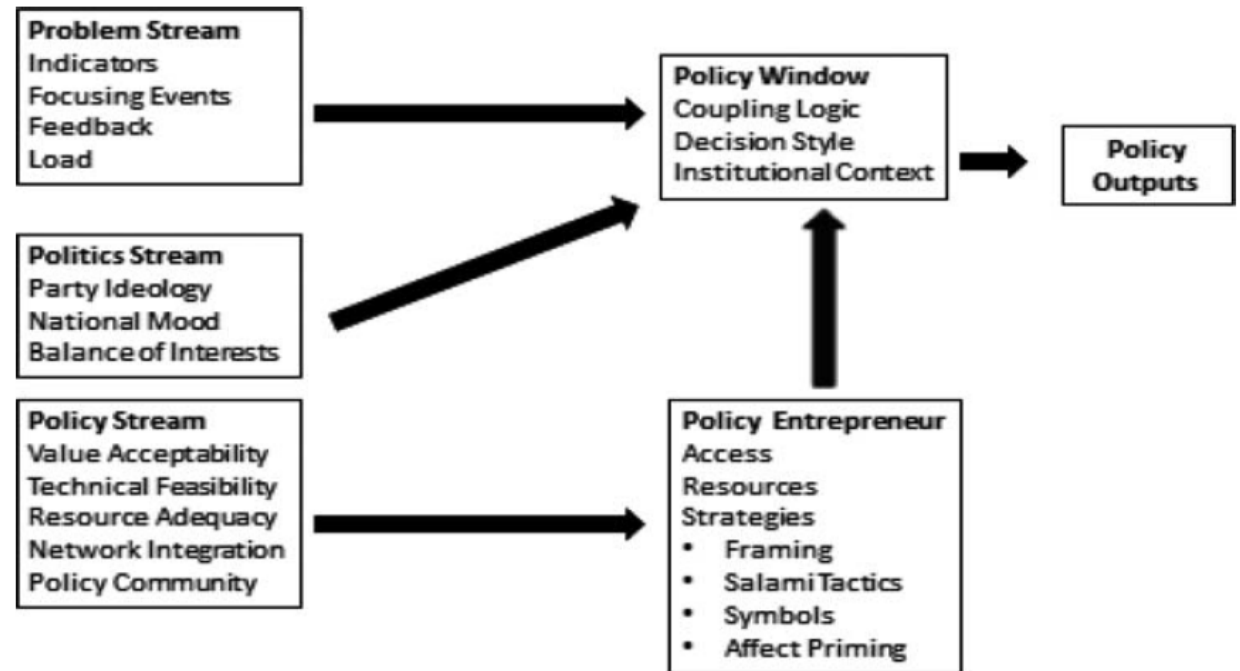
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Multiple Streams Approach (MSA)

Kingdon (1984) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*



Taken from Jones et al 2016



Limitations and evolution of MSA

- Criticism that it is random and unpredictable with no clear power dimension (Sabatier 2007; Robinson and Eller 2010)
- Focus largely on **reactive problem-solving** rather than **proactive policymaking**
- Although the streams may be analytically distinct, actors can be involved in more than one simultaneously – and policy entrepreneurs can also be endogenous to the process (Ackrill and Kay 2011)
- Some have combined it with narrative approaches to help explain how policymakers try to effect change (e.g. Jones and McBeth; Cairney 2018)



Research Questions

- How might proactive policymakers try to couple the streams and implement their preferred solutions?
 - If policy entrepreneurs are endogenous to the policymaking processes, does this help to explain power dynamics within the MSA?
 - Could proactive policymakers try to *straddle* the different streams to increase their chances of *coupling* them?
 - What strategies do proactive policymakers adopt to try and open policy windows?

The case of P(F)CCs

- Since 2017, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) have been able to make a case to assume responsibility for the governance of fire and rescue services within their force areas and become Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (PFCCs)
- The 2017 Act requires an assessment (i.e. a business case submitted and approved by the Home Secretary) of why this reform
 - (i) is in the interests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, **or**
 - (ii) is in the interests of public safety

Methods

- 7 business cases (Essex, Northamptonshire, West Mercia, North Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, Staffordshire and Hertfordshire)
- *Ex post* inductive coding exercise of publicly-available documentation results of public consultations,
 - the business cases,
 - independent analyses by the CIPFA,
 - local media reports,
 - the minutes of local council and Fire and Rescue Authority meetings



Consultation responses I

| Force area | Agree | | | | | Disagree | | | | |
|-------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|----------|
| | Residents | Elected reps | FRS staff | Police staff | Councils | Residents | Elected reps | FRS staff | Police staff | Councils |
| Northants | 57% | 63% | 92% | 62% | | 35% | 30% | 4% | 5% | |
| West Mercia | 64% | 33% | 37% | | 0 | 36% | 67% | 67% | | 8 |
| Cambs | 53% | 3 | n/a | n/a | 0 | 39% | 1 | n/a | n/a | 2 |
| Herts | 52% | 11 | n/a | n/a | 1 | 34% | 0 | n/a | n/a | 3 |

Consultations to seek approval for PCC decision to opt for Governance model: i.e. no other options presented

Consultation responses II

Essex

| | 1 – no benefit | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 – significant benefit |
|-----------------|----------------|------|------|------|-------------------------|
| Representation | 42 % | 18 % | 15 % | 11 % | 14% |
| Governance | 34% | 8% | 10% | 18% | 30% |
| Single employer | 45% | 13% | 15% | 12% | 15% |


| | Staffordshire | | | | | | North Yorkshire | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| | Elected reps | FRS staff | Police staff | Residents | Public Sector/CVS | Overall | Online | Residents | FRS staff | Police staff | Overall |
| No change | 42% | 60% | 41% | 49% | 34% | 49% | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Representation | 12% | 19% | 5% | 10% | 13% | 11% | 40% | 22% | 27% | 48% | 29% |
| Governance | 32% | 12% | 26% | 23% | 30% | 22% | 48% | 61% | 59% | 27% | 55% |
| Single employer | 14% | 9% | 28% | 18% | 23% | 17% | 12% | 17% | 14% | 25% | 15% |

| | In favour | Opposed |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Cambridgeshire & Peterborough | 1 Conservative-controlled district council 3 Conservative MPs 1 Conservative combined authority mayor | Cambridgeshire CC (Conservative-controlled) Peterborough Council (Conservative-controlled) 1 then-Conservative MP (who now sits with Change UK) Cambridgeshire & Peterborough FRS |
| Essex | Essex CC (Conservative-controlled) Southend Council (Conservative-controlled) Thurrock Council (No overall control) 2 Conservative-controlled district councils 17 Conservative MPs | |
| Hertfordshire | 1 Conservative-controlled district council 11 Conservative MPs | Hertfordshire CC (Conservative-controlled) 2 Conservative-controlled district councils 1 Liberal Democrat-controlled district council |
| North Yorkshire | 1 Conservative-controlled district council | North Yorkshire CC (Conservative-controlled) City of York Council (no overall control) 5 Conservative-controlled district councils 2 district councils with no overall control North Yorkshire FRS |
| Northamptonshire | 3 Conservative-controlled district councils 4 Conservative MPs | Northamptonshire FRS 1 Labour-controlled district council |
| Staffordshire | 2 Conservative-controlled district councils 6 Conservative MPs | Staffordshire CC (Conservative-controlled) Stoke-on-Trent Council (no overall control) 2 Labour-controlled district councils 1 district council with no overall control 2 Labour MPs Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent FRS |
| West Mercia | | Worcestershire CC (Conservative-controlled) Herefordshire Council (Conservative-controlled) Shropshire Council (Conservative-controlled) 2 Conservative-controlled district councils 2 Labour-controlled district councils 1 district council with no overall control Hereford and Worcester FRS Shropshire FRS |



Current state of play

- Two PFCCs approved without much controversy (Essex and Northamptonshire). In both cases there were clear local problems that needed to be addressed
- Two PFCCs approved in the teeth of local opposition (Staffordshire and North Yorkshire)
- Two PCCs got the Home Office's approval after the judicial review (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and West Mercia)
- Hertfordshire PCC abandoned his proposal (along with seven other PCCs who considered change)



So, given that there was limited public support for change, how did some PFCCs manage to introduce their reform proposals?



Problem narratives – supportive

(finance, public accountability and performance)

- *"There would be direct benefits from adopting this [governance] option realised through **accelerating estate consolidation opportunities**" (PCC for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough)*
- *"I would suggest that **democracy and accountability** is improved by having a directly elected Fire Commissioner rather than appointed local councillors acting as an FRA." (PCC for West Mercia)*
- *"The change to single governance will enable new ways of working that **will benefit our communities and our emergency services alike.**" (PCC for West Mercia)*
- *"More opportunities for **early intervention and prevention** work. Greater value coming from **quicker and easier sharing of information.**" (Northants)*

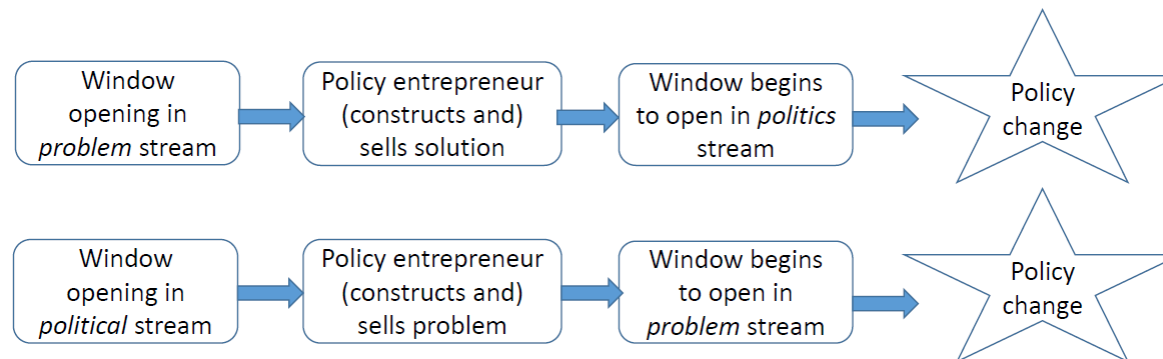
Counter-narratives - opposed

(finance, public accountability and performance)

- ▶ *"I am deeply concerned about the proposals for 'estate rationalisation'. This clearly indicates **the closure of local police stations and locating the services in Fire Stations.**"*
(Councillor, Staffs)
- ▶ *"**Both need more money.** No need to work together" (West Mercia)*
- ▶ *"Services provided by the **Fire Brigade have been operating effectively.** Therefore why risk this?" (Cambs)*
- ▶ *"The Commissioner's Local Business Case **does not make a compelling argument** as to why it is necessary to adopt the Governance Model to address the stated shortcomings in the pace and scope of collaboration between the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service."*
(Member of the public, North Yorks)
- ▶ *"The two work together at the moment and **if something is not broken why change.**"*
(Northants)

How can the MSA help to explain this?

- PCCs were involved in all three streams in each case: they helped to frame and broker *problems* that needed addressing; as endogenous policy entrepreneurs they championed a *policy* solution; and they were key *political* actors
- There was a window open in the *political* stream in each case
- However, only in Essex and Northamptonshire were windows open in the *problem* stream
- Attempts to construct a problem in the other force areas met with opposition from other local actors. This might mean the window in the political stream closes more quickly





Conclusions

- Policy entrepreneurs previously seen as exogenous to the process: if they are endogenous, and able to straddle all three streams, they are well-positioned to couple them
- The ability of policymakers to straddle the streams in this way introduces a power dynamic into MSA perspectives
- Relevant in small policy subsystems
- Coupling may be much easier if windows are open in both the problem and political streams
- Endogenous policy entrepreneurs can use narratives to construct and broker problems and thereby open a window in this stream – but this is not a foolproof strategy



Thank you

Peter.Eckersley@ntu.ac.uk

Katarzyna.Lakoma@ntu.ac.uk

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