



Legitimation capacity: System-level resources and political skills in public policy

J.J. Woo^{b,*}, M. Ramesh^a, M. Howlett^a

^a *LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, Singapore*

^b *School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*

Abstract

This paper conceptualizes political competences at the system level of capabilities to function as “legitimation capacity” in a policy context. It identifies trust in the political, social, economic, and security spheres as the key element driving this capacity. Trust ensures that state actions and institutions are perceived as legitimate and receive public support, which in turn allows political skills to be exercised, preventing political or institutional decay and policy ineffectiveness. Conceptualization of legitimation capacity as comprising trust across political, social, economic, and security dimensions offers a useful framework for analyzing and estimating a government’s capacity in different policy spheres. It provides a practical tool for estimating any deficiencies in legitimation capacity that a government may face. While governments may be endowed with different levels of legitimate capacity when they first attain office, they may over time work on building up capacity by focusing on the spheres in which they may be lacking. Conversely, they may lose legitimacy if their efforts in these areas are counter-productive.

© 2015 Policy and Society Associates (APSS). Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Persistent issues surrounding political and economic development and instances of high profile government failures, particularly during the 2008 global financial crisis, have prompted a continuing high level of interest in improving the quality of government, governance and policy-making. However, as the introductory essay in this special issue pointed out, *ceteris paribus*, the quality of policies and their implementation depends on the level of a governments’ ‘policy capacity’. Recognizing that ‘capacity’ is a complex multi-level phenomenon with numerous components – classified into nine capabilities in this special issue – the purpose of this paper is to examine a single aspect of policy capacity, that existing at the systemic level and involving political competencies, or what is referred to below as “*legitimation capacity*”.

Legitimation capacity is a high level phenomenon related to the intersection of system-level resources and political skills which serves as the outermost constraint or pre-condition for other kinds of capacity examined in this issue; ranging from analytical to administrative and other types (see Fig. 1). As shall be argued below, the extent of legitimation capacity enjoyed by a government is closely linked to the level of trust and authority enjoyed by the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jjwoo84@gmail.com (J.J. Woo).

<i>Level</i>	SYSTEM Resources (A)	ORGANIZATIONAL Resources (B)	INDIVIDUAL Resources (C)
<i>Dimension</i>			
POLITICAL Skills (1)	Legitimation Capacity	Authorization Capacity	Political Strategy Capacity
MANAGERIAL Skills (2)	Governance Capacity	Administrative Capacity	Managerial Capacity
ANALYTICAL Skills (3)	Information System Capacity	Technical Capacity	Analytical Capacity

Fig. 1. Policy capacity.

system-level political institutions, processes, actors and ideas found at this level of the policy environment which in turn affects the ability of a government to exercise its political skills in the course of policy-making. Generally-speaking governments typically enjoy some level of political competences, such as the ability of their different branches of government to co-operate and attain agreement on policy goals and legislative agendas.

However, these competencies need to be matched with the appropriate systemic resources, in this case social and political trust, in order for governments to build up legitimation capacity. This requires government efforts at fostering and maintaining social and political trust within the four spheres of policy action in which states typically operate – the social realm, the political environment, the economic sphere and with respect to national and local security (Chapman, 1971). In identifying the role of trust in these four spheres of policy action as determinants of legitimation capacity, we provide a potentially useful metric for identifying and assessing the adequacy (or deficiency) of the specific contributing factors to the extent of legitimation capacity enjoyed by governments.

In addressing political competencies at the systemic level, this article deals with policy capacity at the broadest and most abstract level of conceptualisation. We argue that establishing legitimation capacity at this systemic level is crucial, though neither essential nor sufficient, for building up policy competences and capabilities at other levels of activity. And while we address the importance of societal actors in contributing to trust and legitimacy in the various spheres of policy action, this article remains focused on how governments can build up legitimation capacity and hence contribute to positive policy outcomes. The many ways in which state and societal actors can and do interact in these efforts is a complex subject and worthy of further research. However a more comprehensive and in-depth explication of the role of non-state actors in building policy capacity is well beyond the scope of this article. This issue's focused conceptualisation of state policy capacity nevertheless forms a useful foundation for future studies on the role of non-state actors in policy capacity-building.

This is also in keeping with historical practice whereby policy capacity at this political-systemic level has thus far been referred to as 'state capacity' in the existing literature. At its most fundamental level, the existing conceptions of state capacity involve the institutional and relational preconditions that affect the ability of a government to formulate and implement policies as well as enact and enforce laws (Fukuyama, 2004, 2013). Defining and measuring the concept, however, poses several difficulties which has resulted in many different notions of 'state capacity' co-existing uneasily in the literature on the subject. An early World Bank (1997) report dealing with the subject, for example, focused on "state capability" as the "ability to undertake and promote collective action efficiently". Much of the existing work on state capacity as a matter of public administration, however, arose from attention paid to the state's 'strength' in managing economic development (Evans, 1995; Weiss & Hobson, 1995) which often involved an exclusive focus on economic performance as a measure of state effectiveness accompanied by broad brush treatment of the sources of that effectiveness.

The notion that there is a significant political aspect to policy capacity is not new, of course. For instance, Mann (1984) conceptualized capacity as "infrastructural power", or the state's ability to establish territorial boundaries around social relations and hence implement its political decisions within a regulated civil society. Evans (1985) took a similar approach in framing capacity in terms of the state's power vis à vis domestic elites. Polidano (2000) has also

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1061485>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1061485>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)