

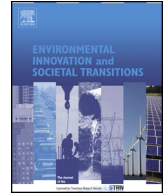


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Policy entrepreneurs in sustainability transitions: Their personality and leadership profiles assessed

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the theoretical development and empirical evaluation of an instrument to assess the personality and leadership profiles of policy entrepreneurs in sustainability transitions. Using insights from psychology and leadership theory, the study aims to identify personality and leadership characteristics that predispose an individual's involvement in policy entrepreneurship. The instrument was evaluated by comparing the personality characteristics of a group of policy entrepreneurs working on sustainability transitions in the field of health care, water management and regional development with a group of policy professionals involved in related policy fields. The distinct personality and leadership profiles found for these groups supports the validity of the assessment instrument. The instrument paves the way for more comprehensive research into the relation between personality structure, contextual variables and entrepreneurial behaviour and success.

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1. Introduction

The importance of policy entrepreneurs as a source of policy innovations, societal transitions and radical change has been recognized since long (Cohen, 1988; King and Roberts, 1992; Roberts, 1998; Currie et al., 2008; Loorbach, 2010). Currently the interest in the role of entrepreneurs in policy innovation is fuelled by the encouragement of public-sector entrepreneurship in the New Public Management literature and the related discussion on their accountability (Borins, 2000; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; Bernier and Hafsi, 2007). Bakir (2009) extended the relevant actions of policy entrepreneurs beyond the governmental agenda by including their multiple roles in various stages of policymaking, such as in facilitating legislative adoption and executing bureaucratic implementation of policy ideas. This extension of the roles of policy entrepreneurs fits the interpretation of the policy entrepreneurs found in the societal transitions and radical change literature and is adopted for this study. In this literature sustainability transition are defined as transformation processes in which existing structures, institutions, culture and practices are broken down and new, more sustainable ones, are established (Loorbach, 2007)

Our interpretation of policy entrepreneurs in sustainability transitions and this research complements the work of Taylor on champions in the Australian water sector. Taylor grounded his research on theories and research on environmental leadership, champions of innovation and connects to organizational leadership and leadership development theories (Taylor et al., 2011, 2012). This research is rooted in theories on policy entrepreneurship (Kingdon, 1984, 1994; Mintrom and Vergari, 1996; Mintrom, 1997; Roberts, 1998), connects to the policy sciences and last but not least connect to the long tradition of research and application of the personality trait approach in psychology.

In the literature on policy innovations, policy entrepreneurs are described as political actors who promote policy ideas, articulate policy innovations onto government agendas and energize the diffusion process (Mintrom, 1997). According to the policy literature, skilful leadership by policy entrepreneurs can help navigate coalitions towards policy victories (Kingdon, 1984) and can help to proactively solve problems before they become crises (Borins, 2000). Transition Management hypothesizes that societal transitions stem from a collective of policy entrepreneurs (Loorbach, 2010). These policy entrepreneurs have their own perception of the issue at stake and participate on a personal basis and not as a representative of their institution or based on their organizational background. They do not necessarily need to be experts; they can also be networkers or opinion leaders and are prepared to invest time and energy in the process of innovation and commit themselves to sustainability transitions (Loorbach, 2010). In the radical change literature policy entrepreneurs are depicted as agents of radical change employing rhetoric, symbols, and analysis to frame the policy problem in a way that promotes their views and their preferred solution. They are students of the policy process and the way bureaucracies, courts, legislatures, and interest groups function so they can introduce and promote their ideas in different institutional arenas enabling them to protect and shepherd their innovative ideas all the way through the policy process, leaving less to chance in the hands of legislators, administrators, implementers, and evaluators (Roberts, 1998).

In his treatment of agenda setting, Kingdon (1984) recognized the skills of entrepreneurs required to bring about actual policy change (Kingdon, 1984), suggesting that personality profiles of policy entrepreneurs matter. His hypothesis is bolstered by numerous observations by prominent policy scientists. For example Mintrom (1997), emphasized their networking abilities and political savviness.

Earlier research on the personality profiles of business entrepreneurs in the management sciences, yielded several interesting conclusions yet has not been very convincing (Bernier and Hafsi, 2007). In the policy sciences, however, King and Roberts (1992) found relevant differences between executive and policy entrepreneurs in interpersonal style, expression of power and actualization of values and ideas, between executive and policy entrepreneurs (King and Roberts, 1992). References to the personality and leadership characteristics of individuals involved in incremental policy change are scarce. However, some maintain that public entrepreneurs in government tend to be incrementalists (Sanger and Levin, 1992).

The state of affairs of research on the personality of policy entrepreneurs sketched above sets out the puzzle for this research. In both the policy and the Transition Management

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