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Peter Nedergaard

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Maximising policy learning in international committees: Lessons to be learned from the “hidden” committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers

Abstract:

In spite of their long history and extensive activities, the international committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers have not hitherto been subject to scholarly examination. This paper demonstrates that valuable lessons can be learned about policy learning in practise and theoretically by analysing the cooperation in the committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Using the Advocacy Coalition Framework as the starting point, fifteen hypotheses on policy learning are tested. Among other things, it is concluded that in order to maximise policy learning in international committees, committees should avoid fragmentation into coalitions, be open to public opinion, participants in committees should be driven by a sense of purpose rather than material interest, empirical data should be made available to committees, a neutral presidency should be present in order to act as an authoritative persuader, and neutral scientists should participate, although not necessarily scientists from consultancy firms.

1. Introduction

When is policy learning most likely among representatives in international committees? This paper points to the fact that some of the international committees that exist under the some thirty-year-old Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) display characteristics that are quite similar to other committees, such as those within the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with a much shorter history and often much less extensive activities. Hence, the paper argues that valuable lessons can be learned concerning how to arrange cooperation in international committees in order to achieve stated goals (i.e. maximise policy learning) from looking at the work that takes place in NCM.

Based on the responses to a questionnaire sent to all of the members of the international committees under the NCM, this paper will provide an indication of what conditions need to be present in international committees if policy learning is likely to occur.

The paper hereby represents a contribution to the new start in the research in comparative analysis of regional integration phenomena by analysing the Nordic case. This kind of research has been under way for some years, even though Nordic cooperation seldom even receives mention in the literature on regional integration (see Laursen 2003, Warleigh 2004).

Policy cooperation has existed among the Nordic countries (Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the three semi-autonomous areas: Greenland, the Faeroe Islands and the Aaland

Islands) since the beginning of the 1950s when the Nordic Council was established. In 1971, Nordic hard-law concerning, for example, the convention on a common Nordic labour market and the Passport Union was supplemented with “soft” forms of cooperation in connection with the establishment of the NCM. Over the years a large number of committees were gradually established in almost all policy areas.¹ The committees provided the organizational framework for regular meetings and discussions of experiences and best practices between officials and experts from different countries. The objective of the international committees was to facilitate mutual learning processes between the Nordic Countries, i.e. exactly the same goal that the committees under the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) attained in the EU approximately 30 years later. However, contrary to cooperation among the EU countries, the committees set-up by the Nordic countries were never combined with an overall strategic goal for Nordic cooperation.

I will focus on specific aspects of the policy learning processes in the Nordic committees, namely the degree of “mutual policy learning” that takes place, for which reason the important question becomes: When is policy learning most likely among representatives in committees in the NCM? In addition, I suggest that there are more general implications of these results for the organization of international committees in general (e.g. in the European Union).

2. The policy learning literature

Policy learning hardly constitutes a new research subject. On the contrary, the literature on policy learning is part of the policy diffusion literature dating back to the 1960s (Bennett 1997). For analytical purposes, the policy diffusion literature can be separated into the policy transfer and the policy learning literature, even though distinguishing instances of transfer from those of proactive

learning is methodologically complex (Stone 1999). In principle, whereas the policy transfer is a process by which a policy in one political system is used to formulate and implement a policy in another political system (Tavits 2003), the emphasis in policy learning is on cognition and redefinition on the basis of new knowledge affecting the fundamental ideas behind the policy approaches (Stone 1999). At the same time, policy transfer is analysed at the systemic level without any particular actors involved, whereas policy learning implies that actors are involved that are supposed to potentially learn something.

Further, policy learning can be separated into policy learning within committees and professional communities (e.g. Haas 1992); and further distinction can be made regarding policy learning in committees, such as between learning in the committees of various international organisations, cf.

< Figure 1 here >

As often mentioned (e.g. Bennett 1997; Stone 1999), the literature on policy diffusion is rife with concepts, hypotheses, and theories. What is most required is the empirical testing of the utility of these concepts, hypotheses, and theories regarding mutual policy learning in order to also make prescriptions for how cooperation ought to be conducted if one seeks to maximise the potential for learning. This is important, as mutual policy learning is still more often referred to in international forms of cooperation, from the EU to the OECD (Zeitlin 2005; Nedergaard 2005; Jacobsson 2003).

As mentioned above, policy diffusion represents an issue that has been dealt with from many theoretical perspectives, often with more or less solid empirical foundation. As far as policy learning in committees is concerned (which is part of the policy diffusion literature), the so-called Advocacy

Coalition Framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999) has attempted to strengthen its theoretical framework through the testing of hypotheses.

3. Hypotheses concerning policy learning: ACF sets the agenda for empirically founded research.

Based on deductions from the Advocacy Coalition Framework, several hypotheses have been suggested. I will present my interpretation of the theory and the hypotheses that this gives rise to before moving on to test the hypotheses.

Firstly, according to the Advocacy Coalition Framework, policy-oriented learning across belief systems is most likely when there is an intermediate level of informed conflict between the two coalitions. This requires that a) each have the technical resources necessary to engage in such debate and b) the conflict be between secondary aspects of one belief system and core elements of the other or, alternatively, between important secondary aspects of the two belief systems. From this, two hypotheses can be deducted:

H1: Policy learning is more likely when two coalitions with different points of view confront each other.

H2: Policy learning is more likely when coalitions have the technical resources necessary to engage in debate.

Secondly, a potential learning forum should meet at least a half dozen times over a year in order to be successful. In addition, learning is more likely the more times a forum meets. Hence, one hypothesis may be deducted:

H3: Policy learning is more likely the more times a forum meets.

Thirdly, actors within an advocacy coalition will show substantial consensus on issues relating to the policy core, although less so on secondary aspects. They will give up secondary aspects of their respective belief systems before acknowledging weaknesses in the political core. Within a single coalition, administrative agencies will usually advocate more moderate positions than their interest group allies. Actors are more likely to alter the policy core on the basis of information from others within the same coalition. These projections result in two concrete hypotheses. Note, however, that only hypothesis 4 will be tested in this paper.

H4: Policy learning is more likely on issues the longer they have formed part of the policy core.

H5: Policy learning is more likely on the basis of information from others within the same coalition.

Fourthly, significant perturbations external to the subsystem (e.g. changes in the socioeconomic conditions, public opinion, system wide governing coalitions, or policy outputs from other subsystems) are a necessary, but not sufficient, cause of change in the policy core attributes of a governmental program. Elites of purposive groups are more constrained in their expression of beliefs and policy positions than elites from material groups.

H6: *Policy learning is more likely in the case of shocks originating from outside of the system of coalitions.*

H7: *Policy learning is more likely if groups are experiencing policy failure.*

H8: *Policy learning is more likely among a group founded in material interest than among purposive groups.*

Fifthly, problems for which accepted quantitative data and theory exist are more conducive to policy-oriented learning across belief systems than those in which data and theory are generally qualitative, quite subjectively, or altogether lacking.

H9: *Policy learning is more likely when quantitative data is available.*

Sixthly, problems involving natural science data are more conducive to policy-oriented learning across belief systems than those involving purely the social science data because, in the former, many of the critical variables are not themselves active strategists and controlled experimentation is more feasible.

H10: *Policy learning is more likely when technical information from natural systems is involved.*

Seventhly, policy-oriented learning across belief systems is most likely when there is a forum that is a) prestigious enough to force professionals from different coalitions to participate and b) dominated by professional norms.

H11: *Policy learning is more likely when there is a prestigious forum.*

H12: *Policy learning is more likely when there is a forum dominated by professional norms.*

Finally, three additional hypotheses can be deduced from the theory on a more experimental basis. Among other things Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999: 146-150) suggest that a committee will be more successful as a learning forum if it is composed by both scientists clearly associated with each of the major coalitions and neutral scientists, where negotiations are led by a facilitator (policy broker) that is viewed as neutral and where conflicts are not purely normative.

H13: *Policy learning is more likely if an authoritative persuader or policy broker is present.*

H14: *Policy learning is more likely if neutral scientists participate.*

H 15: *Policy learning is more likely if discussions are empirical rather than normative.*

4. The dependent variable: When has policy learning taken place?

The central challenge one faces when attempting to test hypotheses concerning the degree of learning under different conditions is of course to conceptualize and operationalize the dependent variable. The “degree of learning” is notoriously difficult to capture; however, I argue that although learning is difficult to measure, it is not impossible.

First, learning must be defined. Again I draw on Sabatier (1993: 19; 1999: 123) who defines learning as “*a relative enduring alteration of thought or behavioral intentions that are concerned with the attainment (or revision) of the precepts of a policy belief system*”. According to the belief system approach that is attached to the Advocacy Coalition Framework, learning occurs in different forms depending to what degree the belief system thought or behavioural intentions are altered. Sabatier

and Jenkins-Smith distinguish between three different levels in the actor's or coalition's belief system. At the top level of the belief system, secondary aspects may be defined as technical learning about instruments – how the instruments may be improved to achieve set goals. This type of instrumental learning involves only a “single loop” seeing that fundamental policy designs and goals are not questioned. Changes at this level are expected to be rather frequent and unremarkable. At the intermediary level, learning at the policy core level is defined as seeing things from a different evaluative viewpoint (“in a new light”); this is when the outlook on a problem changes. This type of learning is expected to be characterized by a “double loop” as learning results in a rethink of existing “theories-in-use” and often entails an element of crisis. Finally, learning at the deep core level may be defined as learning about values and other “higher-order” properties such as norms responsibilities, goals, and the framing of issues in terms of causes and effects. This type of learning is also characterized by a “double loop” as the existing values and norms are put into questions. Changes are expected to be extremely rare.

Based on this nuanced conceptualization of learning, I will put forward two proxies that attempts to capture learning on two different levels. The first level is the committee level where a successful learning forum can be defined as one “in which consensus is reached among previously disagreeing actors on whatever technical or policy issue are placed before it” (Sabatier and Jenkins Smith 1999: 146).² I call this learning at aggregate level.

The second level is the actor level which concerns whether the individual participant in a committee has learned, meaning he or she has obtained new ideas during discussions in committee which has

led him or her to change recommendations to the national policymakers.³ This level I call the disaggregate level.

The relationship between the aggregate and disaggregate levels is that they are not necessarily expected to coincide. Rather, in a successful learning forum some actors may not have learned if consensus is reached on their initial position. Hence, the adding of a proxy at the disaggregate level reduces the risk of underestimating learning that is inherent if only a committee's degree of learning at aggregate level is analyzed.

The presented conceptualization is naturally not perfect in the sense that it eliminates all the existing problems that are attached to a measurement of learning. This conceptualization does not rule out that participants in a committee may be unaware or unwilling to acknowledge that they have learned. Also, no objective scale for learning which is not dependent on the individual's subjective experience of what is occurring in the committees is put forward. This is simply not possible as learning in a committee is an open-ended process without clear goals. Finally, of course, results are only as good as the proxies used. This section has developed proxies for the dependent variable. Proxies for the independent variables attached to each of the learning hypothesis will be presented as the analysis progresses.

In addition, please note that this framework does not examine whether learning actually results in policy change.

< insert table 1 here >

5. Description of Data.

This paper analyses the degree of learning as identified by the officials and experts in the Nordic international committees. The data for the paper stems from a questionnaire distributed to nearly 100 Nordic committees with the same characteristics as, for example, the European OMC committees.⁴

The questionnaire was distributed via email in November and December 2005. I initially attempted to contact some 1200 members, alternates, and observers from Aaland, Denmark, Faeroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.⁵ The members of these committees are mainly officials, although there are also independent experts present in some committees. Officials from the NCM secretariat present at the committee meetings are not included in this paper.⁶ By asking the committee members directly, it is possible to attain information about who learns what and how much from whom.

My contact strategy consisted of email and telephone communication. I initially dispatched an information email with an attached questionnaire, afterwards followed by several email reminders and telephone contacts. In this process, I gradually sorted out roughly 450 of the initial 1200 persons. Examples of typical reasons were “double” representation, because they were counted two or more times when only participating in one committee or group, they were former members who have not participated in any meetings within the last year, or members have not attended more than two meetings in total. The end result was a total of 754 members, alternates, and observers. 398 of the 754 members, alternates, or observers filled out the questionnaire, resulting in a total response rate of 52.8 percent. Some of the respondents did not answer all of the questions. All countries and

semi-autonomous areas were represented. However, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway were slightly overrepresented, and there were very few respondents from Greenland.

The advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of questionnaires to collect data are well known. If the response rate is high, it is possible to cover a large number of people. However, it is also difficult to ascertain the seriousness of answers and to avoid strategic answering. On the other hand, for reasons that I will discuss below, I do not think these difficulties are overly significant in this paper.

6. Testing hypotheses⁷

The following section tests the hypotheses put forward in section 4. Proxies for the independent variable are presented as the analysis progresses. As explained above, the dependent variable (the degree of learning) is tested at both the aggregate (whether or not a committee is a successful learning forum) and disaggregate levels (degree of learning for the individual participant).

H1: Policy learning is more likely when two coalitions with different points of view confront each other.

Hypothesis 1 is operationalized using three proxies for the independent variable, i.e. existence of coalitions with different points of view. The first proxy is the degree to which the participants in a committee are fragmented into coalitions.⁸ The second and third proxies seek to capture the level of conflict between coalitions' belief systems with regard to secondary aspects and policy core respectively.⁹

Statistical tests of hypothesis 1 show that the positive relationship between the degree of learning in a committee or the success of a committee as a learning forum and the degree of conflict cannot be confirmed. The reasons are several.

Firstly, tests applying the first proxy (fragmentation into coalitions) do not support confirmation of the hypothesis. Interestingly, the analysis indicates the opposite relationship. When the committee is not fragmented into coalitions, learning is slightly higher on the individual level, and the committee's likelihood to be successful as a learning forum is much stronger.

< insert table 2 here >

Secondly, analysis using the second proxy similarly does not support confirmation of the hypothesis. Again the opposite relationship is found between conflicts concerning secondary beliefs and policy core beliefs, on the one hand, and the committee's success as a learning forum on the other while no significant relationship is found with regard to the degree of learning for the individual. Exactly the same holds true for the third proxy regarding both a committee's success as a learning forum and disaggregate learning (no significant relationship).

< insert table 3 here >

Hence, the results from the analysis suggest that the hypothesis should be rejected. Instead a new hypothesis could be made concerning the opposite relationship:

Hypothesis 1New: Policy learning is less likely when two coalitions with different points of view confront each other.

The hypothesis is expected to apply strongly for the committee's success as a learning forum and only moderately for the level of learning for the individual.

H2: Policy learning is more likely when coalitions have the technical resources necessary to engage in debate.

Hypothesis 2 is operationalized in three ways. Firstly, I examine whether a positive relationship between learning and the amount of information available to the members of a committee can be found.¹⁰ Secondly, I test whether there is a relationship between learning and the degree of help committee members get when preparing for the meetings.¹¹ Thirdly, I test whether a positive relationship between learning and the amount of assistance committee members get preparing for the meetings exists.¹²

Tests using all proxies, however, do not reveal any significant relationships and the hypothesis must be suspended.

H3: Policy learning is more likely the more times a forum meet.

The seemingly simple hypothesis 3 is operationalized in the broadest possible way using three different proxies. Firstly, it is examined whether there is a positive relationship between meeting frequency in the committee and the level of learning.¹³ Analysis using this proxy does not support hypothesis 3 as only one significant correlation can be found between the frequency of meetings and

the degree to which the committee can be regarded as a successful learning forum. This correlation was, furthermore, the opposite of what was to be expected indicating a negative relationship between the frequency of meetings and the degree of learning at aggregate level.

Secondly, it is examined whether the number of times a committee meets in other settings affects the degree of learning.¹⁴ Tests based on this proxy also do not support hypothesis 3 as (almost) no relationships are significant.

Thirdly, the interesting findings are examined more thoroughly by investigating the impact of the level of attendance at committee meetings on the degree of learning that takes place.¹⁵ This examination does provide some support for hypothesis 3.

< insert table 4 here >

The analysis shows a positive correlation between the level of attendance to meetings and the degree to which a committee is successful as a learning forum in all tests. Furthermore, the relationship appears to be moderate to strong. However, no relationship is found between the level of attendance and the degree of learning at the individual level (i.e. whether the individual has changed his or her recommendations after returning to the national administration). Hence, the analysis indicates the need for a refinement of hypothesis 3.¹⁶

H3Ref: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely when there is a high degree of attendance among members of the learning forum.

H4: Policy learning is more likely on issues the longer they have formed part of the policy core.

Hypothesis 4 concerns the degree of learning on the different levels of the belief system. The hypothesis is tested directly on the dependent variable which is split up on the various levels of the belief system and subjected to univariate analysis. The hypothesis is tested on both the aggregate and the disaggregate levels.

The first part of the analysis focuses on the degree of learning at aggregate level (i.e. success of the committee as a learning forum) using separate questions as proxy (one for each level in the belief system). Values are expected to be lower (indicating a higher degree of success) at more concrete levels in the belief system.

< insert table 5 here >

Comparison of mean values shows that the average degree of learning on each level does seem to follow a pattern, as expected from Sabatier's theory. Accordingly, learning at the level of secondary aspects scores 1.89, policy core level learning scores 2.01, whereas learning at deep core level scores 2.05. The difference between the average degrees of learning concerning secondary aspects and policy core is larger than the standard error of mean which indicates that the hypothesis holds true. However, the standard error of mean does allow for (potential) overlap between the average degree of learning concerning the policy core level and the deep core level. Furthermore, the standard deviation around the mean allows for rather large overlaps, primarily on account of the low distance between the calculated averages. Hence, nothing solid can be concluded concerning hypothesis 4.

The second part of the analysis focuses on degrees of learning for the individual in a committee also using three separate questions as proxy. Values are expected to be lower (indicating a higher degree of learning for the individual) at more concrete levels in the belief system.

< insert table 6 here >

Where statistical analysis of the questions concerning the degree to which the committee was a successful learning forum in Sabatier's sense did not provide enough evidence to confirm hypothesis 4, analysis of learning at disaggregate level paints an even more confusing picture. The difference between average learning at deep core and policy core level does follow the hypothesized pattern to an extent that cannot be explained by standard error of mean. However, the average degree of learning of secondary aspects breaks the pattern. Furthermore, again the differences between mean values are small when compared with standard deviation which makes all numbers shaky. In conclusion, the proxy for learning at the disaggregate level suggests rejection of hypothesis 4 but the statistical foundation is too unstable to conclude anything concrete.¹⁷

H6: Policy learning is more likely in case of shocks originating from outside of the system of coalitions.

Hypothesis 6 is operationalized using three proxies. Accordingly, it is tested whether the committee's openness to a) changes in public opinion learning,¹⁸ b) changes in government,¹⁹ and c) changes in trading conditions affects degree of learning at aggregate and disaggregate level.²⁰

< insert table 7 here >

Analysis of the first proxy provides strong support for confirmation of hypothesis 6 with regard to the influence of degree of openness to the public opinion and learning at the disaggregate level. For example, it is highly likely that an individual will change his or her recommendations after returning to the national administration. All tests are significant and exhibit moderate correlations. However, examination of the second proxy does not provide support for a relationship between degree of openness to changes in government and degree of learning. No statistical tests of association are significant. Finally, analysis of the third proxy yields some support for hypothesis 6. Two tests of the relationship between openness to changes in trading conditions and learning for the individual are significant.

Hence, two of three operationalizations testing different dimensions partially support confirmation of hypothesis 6 indicating that the hypothesis should be confirmed. This only applies for the proxies for the dependent variable that covers the disaggregate level. Furthermore, the results of the analysis suggest that hypothesis 6 should be refined:

H6New: Policy learning for the individual is more likely in committees that are open to public opinion and fluctuations in trading conditions.

H7: Policy learning is more likely if groups are experiencing policy failure.

The proxies are devised to capture the methodologically difficult concept of “policy failure” which serves as the independent variable in this hypothesis. Firstly, the relationship between the participant’s degree of satisfaction with his or her country’s policies and likelihood for learning at

the aggregate and disaggregate level.²¹ The second proxy is the extent to which discussions in the committees are affected by benchmarks set by other countries.²² Finally, the third proxy is the inclination of individual participants to listen to countries when they are doing better.²³

Concrete tests of the hypothesis suggest a need for refinement of the hypothesis. Tests using the first proxy indicate that negative attitudes towards the performance of participants own country exert a positive, although weak, influence on the degree of success of a committee as a learning forum. However, no relationship with learning for the individual is revealed.²⁴

< insert table 8 here >

Hence, it is suggested that negative experiences increase the degree of success of the committee as a learning forum:

H7RefA: Negative experiences of policy failure in a participant's own country increase the degree of success of a committee as a learning forum.

Tests using the second and third proxy reveal only weak and tenuous evidence that other countries success affects the degree of learning. Furthermore, the weak traces of impact that are found only concern learning at the disaggregate level.²⁵

< insert table 9 here >

Hence, the following refined hypothesis could be formulated tentatively (which must however, be tested more to ensure solidity):

H7RefB: Other countries' success has some influence on the level of learning for the individual.

H8: Policy learning is more likely among a group founded in material interest than among purposive groups.

Hypothesis 8 is tested using two proxies for the independent variable. The first proxy attempts to examine the degree to which participants are driven by an ideological sense of purpose,²⁶ whereas the second proxy seeks to capture to what extent actors are motivated by material interests.²⁷

< insert table 10 here >

Interestingly, statistical test of the correlation between the first proxy and learning does not provide evidence to support confirmation of hypothesis 8 – rather the opposite relationship applies for all tests. Hence, it is indicated that a new and refined hypothesis should be formulated.²⁸

H8aNew: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely if participants in a committee are driven by a sense of purpose (i.e. sense of obligation)

Spurred by the results from the analysis of the relationship between the first proxy and the dependent variables, H8aNew includes the opposite relationship than the one outlined in the original

hypothesis. Furthermore, the hypothesis incorporates (in the parenthesis) the fact the unexpected result might stem from of the wording of the question.

A test using the second proxy also does not provide evidence to support confirmation of hypothesis 8. Additionally, in this test the opposite relationship is found for both tests of the relationship between the degree to which participants are driven by material interests and the degree to which the committee can be regarded as a successful learning forum. Hence, the second proxy also (albeit tentatively) indicates that a new and refined hypothesis should be formulated saying that discussions based on the national interests are likely to impair the potential for the committee being successful as a learning forum.

H8bNew: A committee's success as learning forum is more likely if its participants are not driven by material interests.

H8bNew is derived directly from the results of the analysis. Please note, however, that more tests should be carried out to confirm the hypothesis (only one of the proxies concerning learning at aggregate level was correlated with the independent variable).

H9: Policy learning is more likely when quantitative data are available.

The hypothesis is tested using two proxies. The first proxy is straightforwardly the degree to which discussions are based on quantitative data.²⁹ A test of this proxy does not provide evidence to support hypothesis 9. Two of the tests in fact show the opposite relationship. However, as these tests

are made of two different dependent variables (primary and secondary aggregate learning proxies) there does not seem to be enough data to support the formulation of a hypothesis on the opposite relationship.

< insert table 11 here >

In order to further examine the impact of the presence of empirical data in general, another proxy is added that seeks to capture the degree to which discussions are based on empirical data.³⁰

< insert table 12 here >

Statistical analysis using this proxy does yield some evidence in support of hypothesis 9 as three tests of the association between the degree of success as a learning forum and the usage of empirical data are significant. Hence, it is tentatively indicated that the hypothesis should be refined to concern empirical data in general rather than just quantitative data:

H9Ref: Policy learning is more likely when empirical data are available

It is also very interesting to examine the affect of where the data used in committee discussions is produced. In order to analyze this dimension a third proxy is used.³¹

< insert table 13 here >

Statistical analysis shows that committee members who receive their data from other sources than the ones mentioned in the questionnaire constitute the group with the highest average degree of learning. The group with the second highest average degree of learning has received data worked out by the committee's secretariat. Finally, and surprisingly, the data that seem to yield the smallest return seem to be the data that are bought from private consultancy firms. These conclusions can form the basis of the formulation of a new hypothesis.³²

H9NewSupplemental: The closer the source of the data is to the members of a committee the higher the degree of policy is expected to be.

The results should, however, be taken with some reservations for two reasons. Firstly, a (albeit unstable) Chi²-test shows that the relationship between who works out the data and the degree of learning is insignificant. Secondly, the category “other”, which represents the highest degree of learning, mainly reflects members of committees in which data are worked out by numerous actors and hence stem from a diverse array of sources.

H10: Policy learning is more likely when technical information from natural systems is involved.

The next hypothesis also concerns the use of empirical data. The hypothesis is tested using the degree to which discussions are based on natural science data as proxy.³³ Statistical analysis, however, reveals no significant correlation between the proxy and either aggregated or disaggregated learning. Accordingly, the analysis suggests that the hypothesis should be rejected.

H11: Policy learning is more likely when there is a prestigious forum.

Hypothesis 11 states that prestigious committees will exhibit a higher tendency to learning. This expected relationship is tested using the participants own impression of the degree of prestige that is attached to the work in their committee as a proxy.³⁴

Table 14. Results from analysis of hypothesis 11, proxy 1.

Dep \ Indep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
1	K	Insignificant	Insignificant	.123	Insignificant
	P	Insignificant	Insignificant	.159	Insignificant

A test of the hypothesis does indicate a positive relationship between impressions of prestige and the degree of learning at disaggregate level. However, no significant relationship is found with regard to a committee's degree of learning at aggregate level. Hence, tests suggest that prestige increases the degree to which discussion leads to changed policy recommendations (one might speculate as to the direction of causality), but not the tendency for consensus to arise in a committee. Hence the hypothesis could be reformulated:

H11Ref: The degree of learning for the individual in an international committee is likely to be higher when there is a prestigious forum.

H12: Policy learning is more likely when there is a forum dominated by professional norms.

In order to examine whether norms of professionalism exert a positive influence on the degree of learning in a committee, the degree to which discussions in the committee are dominated by neutral professional norms is used as a proxy.

Table 15. Results from analysis of hypothesis 12, proxy 1.

Dep \ Indep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
1	K	.185	.139	Insignificant	Insignificant
	P	.243	.184	Insignificant	Insignificant

Analysis using the first proxy reveals that all measures of association are positive with regard to the relationship between the dominance of neutral professional arguments and the degree of learning at the aggregate level. However, no significant relationship is found between the dominance of neutral professional arguments and the degree of learning for the individual. Hence, some evidence is found to support the hypothesis (learning forum) and some point in the direction that no relationship exists (individual learning).³⁵ On this basis the hypothesis could be reformulated:

H12Ref: A committee’s success as a learning forum is more likely when there is a forum dominated by professional norms.

H13: Policy learning is more likely if an authoritative persuader or policy broker is present.

Hypothesis 13 states that policy learning is more likely if an authoritative persuader is present. This hypothesis is difficult to test as it is not entirely clear who might function as an authoritative persuader. In order to make at least an initial analysis, the degree of neutrality displayed by the presidency is used as a proxy.³⁶

Table 16. Results from analysis of hypothesis 13, proxy 1.

Dep Indep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
		1	K	Insignificant	.099
	P	Insignificant	.160	Insignificant	Insignificant

Statistical tests using this proxy provide weak evidence of a positive relationship between the behaviour of the presidency and the learning at aggregate level as moderate to weak correlations are found for one proxy. However, no relationship is found between the behaviour of the presidency and

learning at the individual level. The test could thus be used to formulate a narrower hypothesis concerning the impact of the behaviour of the presidency and the degree to which a committee is successful as a learning forum. However, more tests should be made in order to test the importance of the presence of authoritative brokers (i.e. the presence of participants with high ranks, seniority or skills). One related proxy for the presence of authoritative persuaders might be the participation of neutral scientists. This proposition is included in hypothesis 14 below.

H14: Policy learning is more likely if neutral scientists participate.

The impact of neutral scientists on the potential for learning is tested straightforwardly using the presence of scientists as a proxy.³⁷ No direct evidence is found of a relationship between the presence of experts and the success of the committee as a learning forum or learning at the individual level. Accordingly, and quite surprisingly, the degree of expert participation does not seem to exert any influence on the degree of learning.

However, another test of the relationship between the presence of experts and the degree of learning *controlling* for the impact variance in the origin of experts³⁸ reveals a relationship between the presence of experts and the degree to which the committee may be regarded as a successful learning forum. The correlation becomes highly significant with regard to aggregated learning and shows weak to moderate strength, but it is not significant with regard to learning for the individual. Furthermore, analysis shows a rather limited variance between categories indicating that it does not make much difference whether experts come from research institutions or public administrations.

Interestingly, it is indicated that experts from private consultancy firms do not have the positive influence on learning as experts stemming from other places have.³⁹

Table 17. Results from explorative analysis of hypothesis 14. A low mean learning score indicates a high degree of learning.

Dependent		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
Independent					
<i>Public administration in member state</i>	N	107	105	141	122
	Mean	5.8879	9.6667	3.9362	6.5738
	Std. Dev.	2.00154	1.86396	1.47461	1.37821
	Std. err.	.19350	.18190	.12418	.12478
<i>Research institution</i>	N	114	107	137	123
	Mean	6.0351	9.7103	3.8613	6.4309
	Std. Dev.	1.81893	1.95231	1.19547	1.29995
	Std. err.	.17036	.18874	.10214	.11721
<i>Interest group</i>	N	8	8	9	8
	Mean	-	-	-	-
	Std. Dev.	-	-	-	-
	Std. err.	-	-	-	-
<i>Private Consultancy firm</i>	N	15	16	16	17
	Mean	6.7333	9.7500	4.325	6.5294
	Std. Dev.	2.49189	1.65328	1.62147	1.00733
	Std. err.	.64340	.41332	.40537	.24431
<i>Other</i>	N	13	10	17	14
	Mean	5.7692	9.9000	3.5882	6.4286
	Std. Dev.	1.73944	1.37032	1.12132	.93761
	Std. err.	.48243	.43333	.27196	.25059
<i>Total</i>	N	257	246	320	284
	Mean	5.9767	9.6707	3.8938	6.4789
	Std. Dev.	1.92218	1.85860	1.33952	.129810
	Std. err.	.11990	.11850	.07488	.07703

H 15: Policy learning is more likely if discussions are empirical rather than normative.

The final hypothesis is tested using the degree to which political arguments tend to dominate the discussions in a committee.⁴⁰ Tests using this proxy do not support the hypothesis but in fact tentatively show the opposite relationship: whether the domination of political arguments in a committee exerts negative influence on the degree of learning. Nevertheless, the test using the second proxy cannot confirm the hypothesis as no relationship is found.

7. Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper leads to the results presented in table 17.

Table 18. Results of the analysis.

Hypothesis	Result of test	Status (same, new, or refined hypothesis)
1	Rejection	<i>Hypothesis 1New: Policy learning is less likely when two coalitions with different points of view confront each other.</i>
2	Rejection	<i>No new hypothesis can be proposed on the basis of the analysis.</i>
3	Refinement	<i>H3Ref: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely when there is a high degree of attendance among members of the learning forum.</i>
4	Inconclusive	-
5	Not tested	-
6	Refinement	<i>H6Ref: Policy learning for the individual is more likely in committees that are open to public opinion and fluctuations in trading conditions.</i>
7	Refinement	<i>H7RefA: Negative experiences of policy failure in a participant's own country increase the degree of success of the committee as a learning forum. H7RefB: Other countries' success has some influence on the level of learning for the individual.</i>
8	Rejection	<i>H8aNew: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely if participants in a committee are driven by a sense of purpose (i.e. sense of obligation) H8bNew: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely if its participants are not driven by material interests.</i>
9	Rejection/Refinement The analysis also gave rise to a supplemental hypothesis.	<i>H9Ref: Policy learning is more likely when empirical data are available. H9NewSupplemental: The closer the source of the data is to the members of a committee the higher the degree of policy is expected to be.</i>
10	Rejection	<i>No new hypothesis can be proposed on the basis of the analysis.</i>
11	Refinement	<i>H11Ref: The degree of learning for the individual in an international committee is likely to be higher when there is a prestigious forum.</i>
12	Refinement	<i>H12Ref: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely when there is a forum dominated by professional norms.</i>
13	Refinement	<i>H13: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely if an authoritative persuader or policy broker is present (i.e. the presidency).</i>
14	Refinement	<i>H14: Policy learning is more likely if neutral scientists from public administrations or independent research institutions participate. (shaky statistical foundation)</i>
15	Rejection	-

The analysis suggests that a committee should have the following features in order to maximize the learning potential:

- The committee should not be fragmented into coalitions (contrary to the propositions usually put forward by Advocacy Coalition Framework).
- Participants should have a high attendance rate ensuring continuity in discussions.
- Committees should be open towards public opinion and trading conditions (although this should be tested against issue area).
- Countries that are doing well should be grouped with countries that are experiencing policy failure.
- Participants in committees should be driven by a sense of purpose rather than material interests.
- Empirical data (although not necessarily quantitative) should be made available to committees. Data should not be made by consultancy firms.
- The work in committees should be made prestigious in order to attract well qualified and engaged participants.
- A neutral presidency should be present to act as an authoritative persuader.
- Neutral scientists should participate, although not scientists from consultancy firms.

However, questions remain concerning matters such as the adequate number of times a year a committee should meet and the how the international dynamics of committees (e.g. the level of conflict between coalitions) should function in order to maximize learning. In addition, further analysis (quantitative as well as qualitative) is needed both in order to test the solidity of the hypothesis further and develop a more complete arsenal of hypotheses. I believe that the Advocacy Coalition Framework provides an excellent starting point and hope that this research will help to

encourage more systematic analyses of policy learning in international committees. I also hope that further attention will be given to the decades-old cooperation in the international committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers. There are valuable lessons to be learned for the more recent international committees, for example in relation to the Open Method of Coordination in the EU, from studying the mutual learning processes in older and more experienced international organizations.

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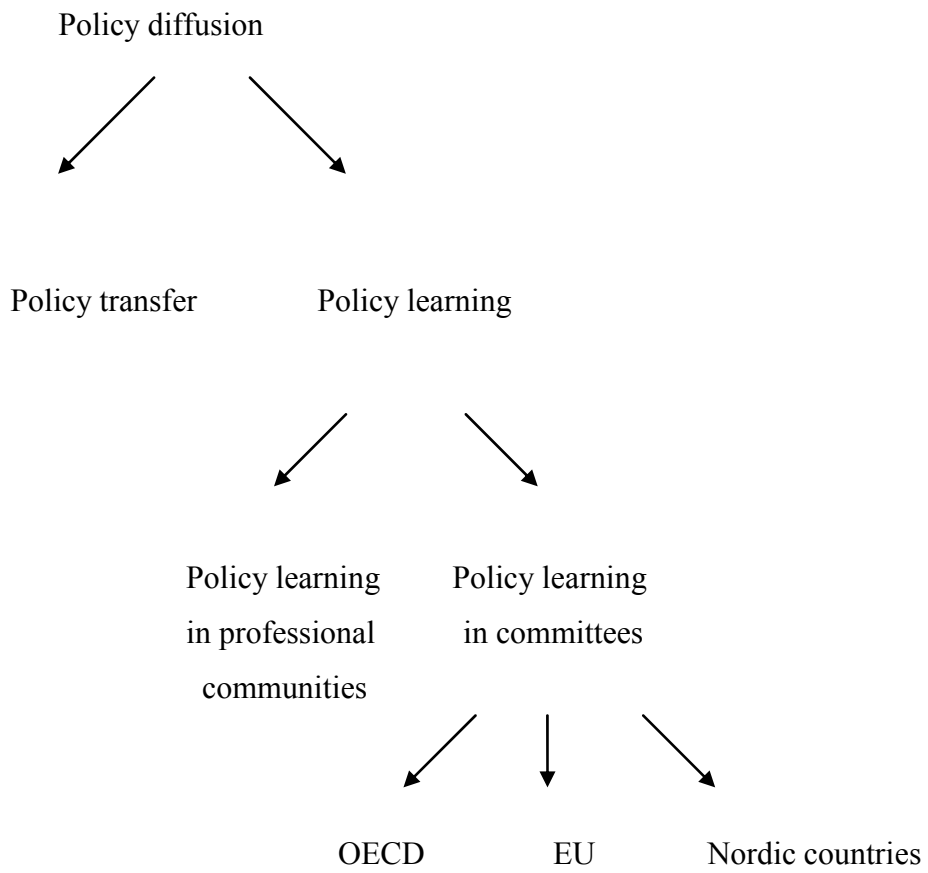
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Figure 1. The Policy Diffusion Literature: An Overview.



Source: Author's own compilation

Table 1. Various types of learning according to the Advocacy Coalition Framework

Level of belief system	Type of learning	Characteristic
Secondary aspects	Primarily instrumental (“technical”): <i>Technical learning about the effect of instruments – how the instruments may be improved to achieve set goals.</i>	Single loop: <i>Learning that does not question fundamental designs, goals, and activities of the organization.</i>
Policy core	Primarily conceptual learning or problem learning: <i>Seeing things from a different evaluative viewpoint (in a new light); this is when the outlook on a problem changes.</i>	Double loop: <i>Rethink leading to change in “theories-in-use”</i> <i>“crisis”</i>
Deep core	Primarily social learning: <i>Learning about values and higher order “higher-order” properties such as norms responsibilities, goals, and the framing of issues in terms of causes and effects.</i>	Double loop: <i>Rethink leading to change in “theories-in-use”</i> <i>“revolution”</i>

Source: Compiled from Sabatier and Jenkins (1999) and Kemp and Weehuizen (2005).

Table 2. Results from analysis of hypothesis I, proxy 1.

Depen.		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
Indepen.					
1	K	-.301	-.284	.128	.103
	P	-.363	-.346	Insignificant	Insignificant

Table 3. Results from analysis of hypothesis I, proxy 2 and 3.

Depen.		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
Indepen.					
2	K	.507	.478	Insignificant	Insignificant
	P	.590	.570	Insignificant	Insignificant
3	K	.435	.438	Insignificant	Insignificant
	P	.520	.513	Insignificant	Insignificant

Table 4. Test of hypothesis 3 using proxy 3.

Depen.		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
Indepen.					
3	K	.184	.179	Insignificant	Insignificant
	P	.225	.217	Insignificant	Insignificant

Table 5. Results from analysis of hypothesis 4, proxy I

	<i>Question (43). To what extent is agreement reached concerning technical solutions</i>	<i>Question (44). To what extent is agreement reached concerning concrete problems and goals</i>	<i>Question (45). To what extent is agreement reached concerning basic values</i>
N	360	361	280
Mean	1.89	2.01	2.05
Std. Error of Mean	.036	.041	.044
Std. Deviation	.677	.773	.734

Table 6. Results from analysis of hypothesis 4, proxy 2

	<i>Question (47). Changed recommendations concerning basic values</i>	<i>Question (48). Changed recommendations concerning problems</i>	<i>Question (49). Changed attitude towards technical solutions</i>
N	316	323	290
Mean	3.47	3.05	3.25
Std. Error of Mean	.041	.041	.045
Std. Deviation	.727	.740	.768

Table 7. Results from analysis of hypothesis 5, proxy 1 and 3.

Dep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
Indep					
1	K	Insignificant	Insignificant	.122	.145
	P	Insignificant	Insignificant	.161	.171
3	K	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant	.105
	P	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant	.145

Table 8. Results from analysis of hypothesis 7, proxy 1.

Dep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
Indep					
1	K	.115	.119	Insignificant	Insignificant
	P	.157	.166	Insignificant	Insignificant

Table 9. Results from test of hypothesis 7, proxy 2.

Dep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
Indep					
2	K	Insignificant	Insignificant	.108	Insignificant
	P	Insignificant	Insignificant	.162	Insignificant
3	K	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant
	P	Insignificant	Insignificant	.162	.062

Table 10. Results from test of hypothesis 8, proxy 1 and 2.

Dep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
Indep					
1	K	.152	.134	Insignificant	Insignificant
	P	.147	.121	Insignificant	Insignificant
2	K	Insignificant	-.115	Insignificant	Insignificant
	P	Insignificant	-.130	Insignificant	Insignificant

Table 11. Results from test of hypothesis 9, proxy 1.

Dep Indep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
		1	K	Insignificant	-.094
	P	Insignificant	Insignificant	-.126	Insignificant

Table 12. Results from test of hypothesis 9, proxy 1.

Dep Indep		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
		1	K	.131	.087
	P	.164	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant

Table 13. Results from explorative analysis of hypothesis 9. A low mean learning score indicates a high degree of learning.

Dependent		Primary aggregate learning proxy	Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Secondary disaggregate learning proxy
<i>The secretariat to the committee</i>	N	117	110	142	128
	Mean	5.7692	9.6364	3.7887	6.4531
	Std. Dev.	1.85874	1.84603	1.26508	1.31532
	Std. err.	.17184	.17601	.10616	.11626
<i>The national administration of the participants</i>	N	82	87	112	100
	Mean	6.3780	9.6667	4.0536	6.4600
	Std. Dev.	1.88326	1.82149	1.27229	1.28252
	Std. err.	.20797	.19528	.12022	.12825
<i>Private Consultancy firms</i>	N	19	19	25	23
	Mean	6.7368	10.3158	4.2800	7.0000
	Std. Dev.	2.15618	1.88717	1.45831	1.34840
	Std. err.	.49466	.43295	.29166	.28116
<i>NGOs</i>	N	3	3	4	3
	Mean	-	-	-	-
	Std. Dev.	-	-	-	-
	Std. err.	-	-	-	-
<i>Other</i>	N	39	29	51	37
	Mean	5.4359	9.5517	3.4902	6.2432
	Std. Dev.	1.94388	1.97459	1.28643	1.38254
	Std. err.	.31127	.36667	.18014	.22729
<i>Total</i>	N	260	248	334	291
	Mean	5.9731	9.6976	3.8593	6.4777
	Std. Dev.	1.93006	1.86196	1.29956	1.32171
	Std. err.	.11970	.11823	.07111	.07748

Brief presentation of the author

Dr. Peter Nedergaard is associate professor at the International Centre for Business and Politics at Copenhagen Business School in Denmark. He is the editor of the Danish social science magazine *Economy and Politics* and the author of several books on the administration of the European Union. He has recently been published in scientific journals such as *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Public Choice*, *Journal of European Integration*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, and *Policy Studies Journal*.

¹As of 2006, there are almost 100 different cooperation committees under the auspices of the NCM covering areas such as the following: the Arctic, sustainable development, [children](#) and youth, energy, [business](#), [fisheries](#), consumers, [research](#), higher education, agriculture and forestry, culture, foods, gender equality, legislation, the environment, economics, regional policies, school cooperation, social and health policies, language, transport, and further education.

² In the analysis this proxy is constructed by compiling an aggregated “learning score” (3 to 15) that results from computing answers to three questions (one directed at each level of the belief system). The questions are:

Question (43). To what extent, from your experience, does the committee reach agreement (consensus) after having previously disagreed over the technical solutions that should be used in order to reach the desired goals in your policy area?

Question (44). To what extent, from your experience, does the committee reach agreement (consensus) concerning what problems should be solved and which goals should be prioritized after having previously disagreed in your policy area?

Question (45). To what extent, from your experience, does the committee reach agreement (consensus) after having previously disagreed over the basic values and goals that should be prioritized in society?

Questions (43)-(45) are extracted from Sabatier’s hypothesis concerning the successful learning forum coupled with the different levels on which learning can occur. Question (46) is extracted from the criteria for a successful learning forum set up by Sabatier, but is, however, directed at the compliance dimension which might also indicate learning.

Univariate analysis reveals that with regard to questions (43), (44) and (46) around 48 percent of the respondents have answered the question. In addition, approximately 30 respondents have checked the box “don’t know / not relevant”. However, perhaps not surprisingly, only 37.7 percent of respondents have answered question (45) concerning the attitudes towards basic values in society, and furthermore an incredible 105 have checked the box “don’t know / not relevant”.

In order to create a learning variable to express the degree of learning at committee level Questions (43)-(45) are recoded into one variable (simple addition) as it is expected to measure the same dimension of learning in the forum. Bivariate correlation confirms the assumption.

Proxy	Expresses	Note
Primary aggregate learning proxy	Questions (43) + (44) + (45) No. of valid cases: 270	Might be unstable on account of irregularities in answers to question (45).
Secondary aggregate learning proxy	Questions: (43) + (44) No. of valid cases: 348	More stable but does not include the deep core level in the belief system

³ In the analysis this proxy is constructed by compiling a disaggregated “learning score” (3 to 15) that results from computing answers to three questions (one directed at each level of the belief system). The questions are:

47. *To what extent have you changed your recommendations with regard to what basic purposes and goals should be prioritized in your policy area?*

48. *To what extent have you changed your recommendations because you see the problems in your policy areas in a new light after a meeting in your committee?*

49. *To what extent have you changed your attitude towards the use of technical solutions to resolve concrete problems in your policy area on account of your work in the committee?*

Proxy	Expresses	Note
Primary disaggregate learning proxy	Questions (47) + (48)+ (49) No. of valid cases: 258	Might be unstable on account of irregularities in answers to question (49).
Secondary disaggregate learning proxy	Questions: (47) +(48) No. of valid cases: 305	More stable but does not include the deep core level of the belief system.

⁴ For example, the European Employment Committee (EMCO), the Advocacy Coalition for Vocational Training (ACVT), the Economic Policy Committee (EPC), and the Social Protection Committee (SPC).

⁵ I additionally received a few answers from members, alternates, or observers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in relation to the Nordic-Baltic Network on Public Health Nutrition. In relation to the answers of the latter, I have excluded them in this part of the survey.

⁶ There are also members from interest organisations in the EU Advisory Committee on Vocational Training, but neither are they part of the investigation.

⁷ Analysis is made using various statistical measures. For tests in which all variables are ordinal Kendall's tau b and Pearson's r (assuming equal distance between ordinal categories) are used. For test with nominal (independent) and ordinal (dependent) variables mean values are compared and analyzed. Results are presented tables where relevant. No values are shown for insignificant correlations.

Values for Kendall's tau b and Pearson's r, when correlations are significant, are interpreted as follows:

Interpreting correlations	
0.0-0.2	Weak
0.2-0.3	Moderate
0.3+	Strong

⁸ The following question in the dispatched questionnaire was used as a proxy for the independent variable: *Question (22) To what extent is it usual for two or more groups in the committee to disagree during discussions?*

⁹ *Question (24): What is the level of agreement with regard to how concrete technical problems in the policy area of the committee should be solved?*

Question (25): What is the level of agreement with regard to which goals and problems are most important/pressing in your policy area?

¹⁰ *Question (27): To what extent does the information available in your policy area allow you to engage in committee debates?*

¹¹ *Question (16): How much help do you get when preparing the meetings?*

¹² *Question (17): How many people assist you in preparing the meetings?*

¹³ *Question 13). How often does the group meet in ordinary meetings?*

¹⁴ *Question (14): How often does the group meet in other settings (seminars/conferences)?*

¹⁵ *Question (18): What is the level of attendance at committee meetings?*

¹⁶ Partial correlations have been performed testing for all independent variables without any further refinement being achieved.

¹⁷ However, it should be noted that there is an asymmetry in the questions which might influence the results. Question 49 is phrased inappropriately as the focus is change in attitude rather change in recommendations. Hence, lack of clarity in the operationalization might be (some of) the reason that it does not support the hypothesis.

¹⁸ *Question (33a): To what extent is your committee insulated from or sensitive to changes in public opinion?*

¹⁹ *Question (33b): To what extent is your committee insulated from or sensitive to changes in government?*

²⁰ *Question (33c): To what extent is your committee insulated from or sensitive to changes in the trading conditions?*

²¹ *Question (34): To what extent are you satisfied with your country's policies in your area?*

²² *Question (35): To what extent do you feel that discussions in the committee are affected by benchmarks set by other Member States?*

²³ *Question (36): Are you inclined to listen and learn more from other countries that are doing better than your own country?*

²⁴ From a statistical perspective, the operationalization lends support to the hypothesis as a positive relationship is found between the dissatisfaction of a participant and his or her impression of the committee's success as a learning forum. Furthermore, no relationship is found between degree of satisfaction and degree of learning for the individual. This leads to some support for the hypothesis.

However, from a theoretical point of view the relationship between the degree of satisfaction with one's national policies ought to be only indirectly correlated with the committee's overall success as a learning forum. The direct correlation should be found instead between the degree of satisfaction and learning at the individual level. Hence, the analysis only provides some (indirect) support for hypothesis 7.

²⁵ The reasons for the weak traces of impact might (logically) be spurious relationships between variables. Accordingly, it would be natural to test for the intervening influence of policy performance in one country on the openness towards learning from other countries' successes.

²⁶ *Question (37): How is your position in the committee determined? A) It is based on a sense of purpose?*

²⁷ *Question (37): How is your position in the committee determined? B) It is based on the economic interests of my country.*

²⁸ However, one might speculate as to whether the unexpected results of the statistical analysis occur because "sense of purpose" taken to mean "sense of obligation" or "sense of commitment" rather than "ideology" as intended.

²⁹ *Question (30): To what extent do committee discussions rely on quantitative data?*

³⁰ *Question (28): To what extent are discussions in the committee based on empirical data?*

³¹ *Question (31): Who works out the data used in your committee?*

³² One should, however, keep in mind that no solid statistical test has been run on the nominal variable.

³³ *Question (29): Is the technical information presented for discussion based on natural science data?*

³⁴ *Question (20): To what extent do you think that the work in your committee provides prestige?*

³⁵ However, one weakness in the operationalization of this proxy is that the answer to the question might reflect the respondent's general impression of the constructiveness of discussions.

³⁶ *Question (40): To what extent do you regard the presidency as neutral or biased towards specific interests?*

³⁷ *Question (38): To which extent do experts participate in committee discussions?*

³⁸ *Question (39): When experts participate do they usually come from?*

³⁹ Please note, however, that the standard deviation is high and that a very unstable Chi²-test shows that potential relationships are insignificant. Hence, conclusions are made solely on the basis of comparison of mean values.

⁴⁰ *Question (32a): Is committee debate dominated by political arguments or by neutral professional arguments?*