

NARRATIVES AND EVIDENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM: EXPLAINING CHANGES TO THE GOVERNANCE OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

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OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

Introduction

Evidence and narratives as tools for achieving change

Research questions

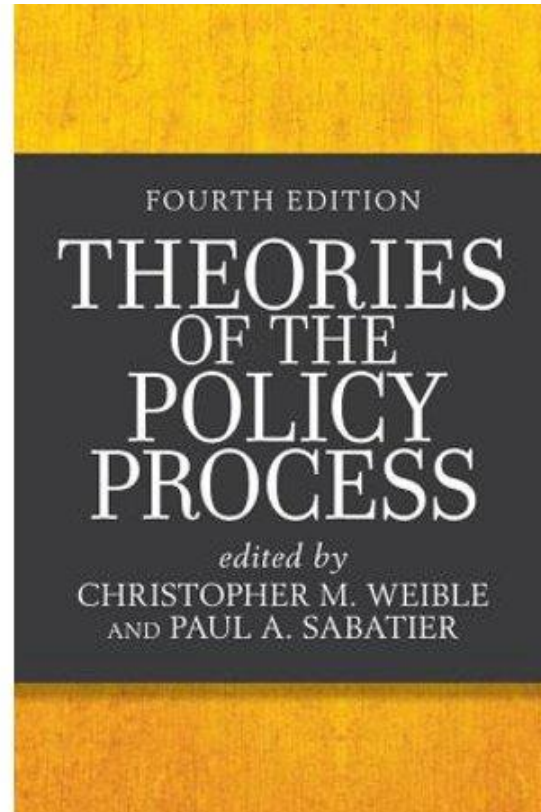
The case of P(F)CCs in England

Conclusions

MAX WEBER



IN HIS IRON CAGE



THE DIFFICULTIES OF IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATIONAL AND POLICY CHANGE

Organisational change - change in formal structure, organizational culture, and goals, program, or mission (DiMaggio and Powell 1991).

Organisations and individuals are trapped in 'iron cages' of bureaucratic rationality (Weber 1905; Ashworth et al 2007)

Policy change is also difficult, because previous initiatives create powerful client groups that benefit from existing arrangements and can 'lock-in' decision-makers (March and Olsen 1989; Pierson 2000)

Yet policy change *does* happen sometimes, and scholars have developed numerous theories to try and explain it (Weible and Sabatier (2018)

Which factors contributed towards change in our study? What strategies did key actors adopt to try and introduce their preferred policies?

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING (EBPM)

Role of EBPM: to keep politicians and policymakers honest by holding them to high standards of evidence and reason (The Reinforce school; French 2019)

The main factors affecting use of evidence: availability and access to information, costs, timing and opportunity, policymaker research skills, good relationships between researchers and research users (Oliver et al., 2014; Cairney 2016)

Comprehensive rationality	Bounded rationality
An objective and comprehensive account of the relevant evidence	The evidence is contested; scientific evidence is one of many sources of information
The policy process is centralised and power is held by a small number of policymakers	The policy process contains a large number of influential actors
Policymakers understand the evidence in the same way as scientists	Policymakers base their decisions on a mixture of emotions, knowledge, and shortcuts to gather relevant evidence.

Comprehensive rationality vs bounded rationality (Cairney 2016)

NARRATIVES

Narrative refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5).

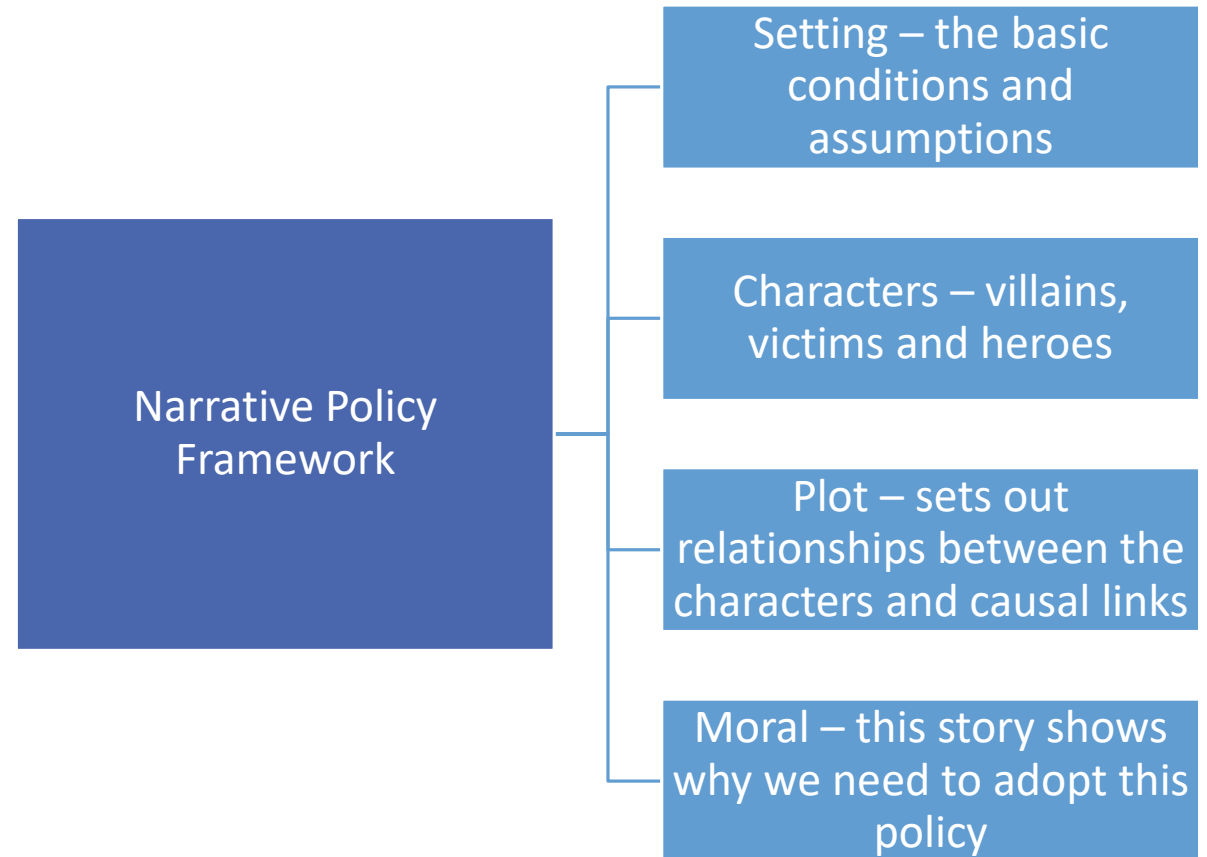
Narratives are especially likely to be of significance during times of strategic change (Dunford and Jones 2000). **Language is heavily impacted in this process.**

Narratives are **powerful mechanisms** for confirming actors' perceptions - they can create 'information shortcuts' or heuristics that support existing worldviews (Crow and Jones 2018)

Narratives may exhibit only tenuous links with objective reality (Llewellyn 2001), and often **involve the construction of a separate reality that simplifies the real-world situation.** But they can **have substantial power to influence and shape future developments** (Weiss 2018).

NARRATIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK

DISSECTS NARRATIVES TO ALLOW US TO ALLOCATE DIFFERENT ROLES TO PHENOMENA, INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS WITHIN THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS AND THEN ANALYSE THEM INDIVIDUALLY.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the evidence used to support changes to the governance of fire and rescue services?

What are the dominant policy narratives used to support these changes?

(a) What are the supporting change narratives?

(b) What are the opposing change narratives?

Why and how do policymakers seek to deploy these narratives?

What does this tell us about the role of politics in policymaking?





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
the business cases,
results of public consultations,
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

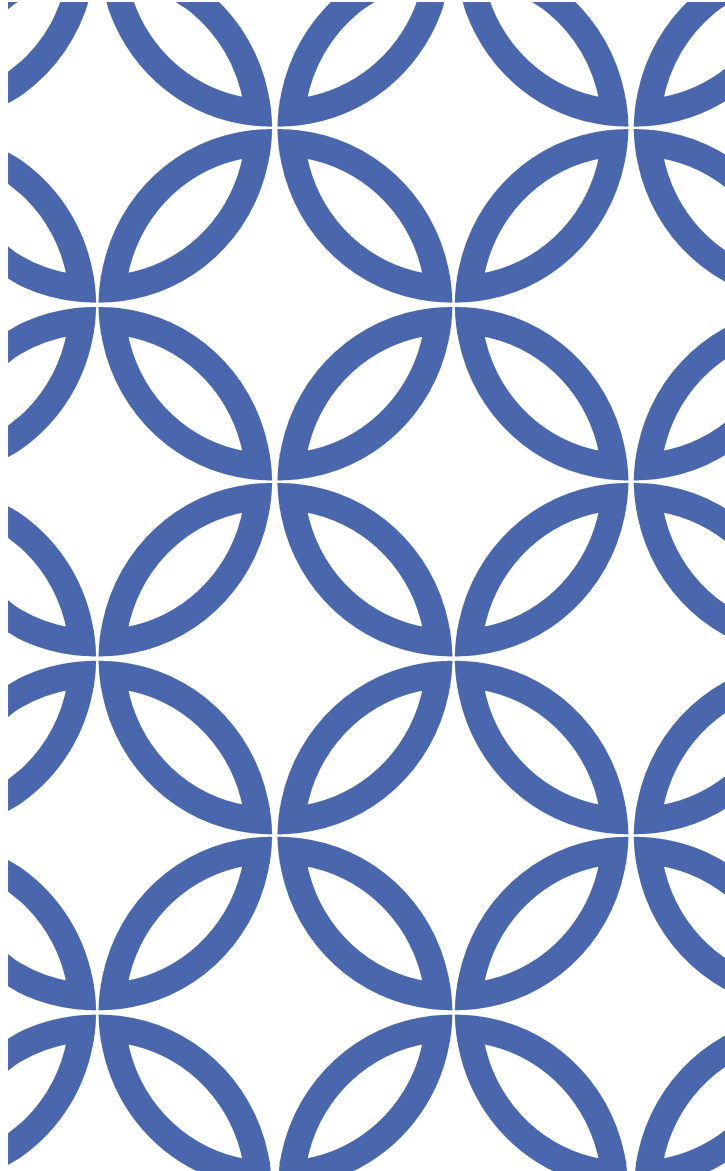
Consultations to seek approval for PCC decision to opt for Governance model: i.e. no other options presented

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/VCS	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 judicial reviews (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and West Mercia)

CIPFA reviews of business cases were inconclusive: due to a lack of robust evidence, they neither corroborated the arguments for reform nor dismissed them

Hertfordshire PCC abandoned his proposal (along with seven other PCCs who considered change)

So, given that there was substantial opposition to change in some areas, how did PFCCs try to convince other actors to support their reform proposals?

	Finance		Democracy		Performance	
	"Savings" narrative (supportive)	"Cuts" narrative (opposed)	"Accountability" narrative (supportive)	"Power grab" narrative (opposed)	"Collaboration" narrative (supportive)	"Ain't broke" narrative (opposed)
Setting	Insufficient resources	Insufficient resources	Lack of scrutiny and accountability	PCC wants more power	Lack of coordination	Problem 'invented' by PCC
Villains	Not specified	Central govt	Current governance arrangements	PCC	Current structural arrangements	PCC
Victims	The public	The public	The public	The public	The public	The public
Heroes	PCC	Front-line public servants	PCC	None: there is no problem to fix	PCC	None: there is no problem to fix
Plot	Governance model will save money	Better funded public services	Elected PFCC will make services more accountable	Think about who should be in charge of public services	Governance model will improve joint working	Improved joint working
Moral	PFCC	Trust your public servants	PFCC	Many heads are better than one	PFCC	There are more important issues facing fire and police services

WHAT IS THE NARRATIVE/STORY
AROUND POTENTIAL CHANGE?

PROBLEM NARRATIVES

*“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

*“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)*

CONCLUSIONS

Narratives were often much more powerful than 'evidence' in shaping decision-making - and easier to deploy to win arguments

Narratives are more about *politics*, evidence is more about *policy*

We found that elected representatives can exercise significant influence over policymaking. This may be particularly relevant to smaller policy subsystems

Policymaking is not a purely technocratic exercise. This could mean the resulting policy is badly designed and difficult to implement, because it may be based on a simplified version of reality. But is it a more democratic way of deciding what government does?

THANK YOU

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