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The Case of the Civil Servant Committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers

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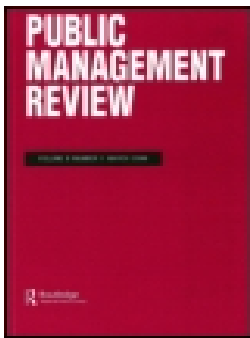
Abstract

In spite of their long history and extensive activities, the international committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) have not hitherto been subject to scholarly examination. This article analyses for the first time policy learning among civil servants and experts in this international organization. Using the Advocacy Coalition Framework as the starting point, a number of exploratory hypotheses on policy learning in the NCM committees are tested. The aim is to investigate the processes of policy learning between countries in international committees, a subject which has hitherto only been dealt with in very few studies. In this analysis, a methodology for measuring policy learning is also proposed. Among other things, it is concluded that policy learning in these international committees increases when they avoid fragmentation into coalitions, are open to public opinion, when participants in committees are driven by a sense of purpose rather that material interest, when empirical data are made available to committees, when a neutral presidency is present in order to act as an authoritative persuader, and when neutral experts participate, although not experts from consultancy firms.

POLICY LEARNING PROCESSES IN INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEES

The case of the civil servant committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers

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INTRODUCTION

When is policy learning most likely among representatives in international committees? This article 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 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with a much shorter history and often much less extensive activities. Hence, the article argues that valuable lessons can be learned concerning how to arrange co-operation in international committees in order to achieve stated goals (i.e. maximize policy learning) from looking at the work that takes place in NCM, even though there are also limits to what can be learned from the Nordic experiences due to the fact that they might have to do with the particularities of these countries.

Based on the responses to a questionnaire sent to all of the members of the international committees under the NCM, this article will provide an indication of what are the best conditions for mutual learning in the international committees. International organizations are increasingly playing a role in the spread of ideas, programmes, policy recommendations, etc. (Dolowitz and March 2000: 11). There have been some scholarly studies of policy learning between countries in the EU and OECD, but almost none of these studies analyse and explain the processes involved (Meseguer 2005; Nedergaard 2006a). This article, however, seeks to explain exactly these learning processes in a broader conceptual framework.

The article hereby represents an emperical founded contribution to the scholarly studies of processes of mutual learning between countries which have been in demand for a long time (Stone 1999; Meseguer 2005), using the Nordic co-operation as a case.

Policy co-operation 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 co-operation in connection with the establishment of the NCM. Over the years a large number of civil servant committees were gradually established in almost all policy areas. As of 2006, there are ninety-seven co-operation committees, working groups, ad-hoc groups, networks, etc. 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 co-operation; social and health policies; language; transport; and further education.

The committees provided the organizational framework for regular meetings and discussions of experiences and best practices between officials and experts from different Nordic countries. The objective of the international committees was to

facilitate mutual learning processes between the Nordic countries, that is, exactly the same goal that the committees under the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) attained in the EU approximately 30 years later. However, contrary to co-operation among the EU countries, the committees' set-up by the Nordic countries was never combined with an overall strategic goal for Nordic co-operation. The aim of the Nordic committees has always been 'pure' voluntary policy learning (cf. Dolowitz and March 2000).

In this article, I will focus on specific aspects of the policy learning processes in the Nordic committees, for which reason the important question becomes: When is policy learning most likely to take place among representatives in committees in the NCM?

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 potentially to learn something.

Further, policy learning can be separated into policy learning within committees and within 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 organizations.

As often mentioned (e.g. Bennett 1997; Stone 1999; Meseguer 2005), policy learning is an overtheoreized but also underapplied concept, and the literature on policy learning is rife with concepts, hypotheses, and theories. However, what is most required is the empirical testing of the utility of these concepts, hypotheses, and theories regarding mutual policy learning in order also to make prescriptions for how co-operation ought to be conducted if one seeks to maximize the potential for learning. This is important, as mutual policy learning is still more often referred to in international forms of co-operation, from the EU to the OECD (e.g. Jacobsson 2003; Nedergaard 2005; Zeitlin 2005). In this article, however, I will not go into a thorough reflection on what policy learning actually is as I have done so elsewhere (Nedergaard 2005).

As mentioned above, policy learning 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, the so-called Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999) has attempted to strengthen its theoretical framework through the testing of hypotheses concerning policy learning in committees. This coherent framework is therefore the point of reference for my explorative empirical-analytical analysis of policy learning in Nordic committees in the rest of the article.

The ACF was originally formulated by Paul A. Sabatier in 1988 as an exponent for the post-positivist tradition in policy analysis (Fenger and Klok 2001: 158). In part, it was a response to the apparent complexity and uncertainty in environmental policy subsystems of the United States (Elliott and Schlaepfer 2001: 259).

The ACF drew on institutional rational choice (Ostrom 1990) inasmuch as its inventor agreed that institutional rules affect individual behaviour. It also followed works in social psychology claiming that actors perceive the world and process information according to a variety of cognitive biases which provide heuristic guidance in complex situations (Kübler 2001: 624). The ACF is generally judged to be among the most successful 'synthetic' accounts of the policy process from the 1990s (John 2003).

The ACF is based on two basic assumptions (Zafonte and Sabatier 2004: 78–9). First, it is assumed that 'policy elites have well-integrated policy belief systems that link fundamental substantive and distributional values, perceptions of severity and causes of policy problems, and perceptions of proper approaches to be used in addressing those problems.' These policy belief systems result from the individual's socialization, education, and organizational and institutional experiences.

Second, in order to manage the potential complexity of elite belief systems, the ACF distinguishes between three levels of beliefs: deep core beliefs; policy core beliefs; and secondary beliefs. It is assumed that the policy core beliefs espoused by individuals and organizations will be more stable over time than secondary aspects and those deep core beliefs will be more stable than policy core beliefs.

The ACF predicts that major policy learning within a subsystem requires exogenous perturbations to alter significantly the resources or beliefs of coalitions within the subsystem. Examples of such perturbations are changes in the socioeconomic conditions, for example, a recession, shifts in public opinion, changes in the system-wide governing coalition, or outputs from other subsystems. However, the opportunity provided by a perturbation must be skilfully exploited by a policy broker on behalf of the minority coalition if it is to gain power (Sabatier 1998: 118–19; Zafonte and Sabatier 2004: 79).

As mentioned above, the ACF was originally applied to environmental policy in the United States. Various scholars (e.g. Kübler 2001: 627) have questioned the generalizability of the ACF to other policy subsystems and other political systems.

One of the aims of this article is to evaluate this question. Surel (2000: 501) raises the criticism that the ACF is unable to explain 'why a particular category of actors succeeds in playing the role of mediator or policy broker'. In this article, I point out some of the characteristics of a successful policy broker in the Nordic learning processes.

HYPOTHESES CONCERNING POLICY LEARNING: THE ADVOCACY COALITION FRAMEWORK SETS THE AGENDA FOR EMPIRICALLY FOUNDED RESEARCH

Based on deductions from the Advocacy Coalition Framework, several hypotheses have been suggested. The set of hypotheses is carefully selected in order to cover most aspects of the functioning of the NCM committees. First, I will present my interpretation of the theory and the hypotheses. Second, I will present the dependent variable of the analysis. Third, I will desribe the data. Fourth, I present the result of the test.

According to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999), 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 has 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.[1] From this, a hypothesis can be deducted:

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

Second, actors within an advocacy coalition will show substantial consensus on issues relating to the policy core, although less so on secondary aspects. According to the ACF framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999), 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 hypothesis 2.

> H2: Policy learning is more likely on issues the longer they have formed part of the policy core.

Third, 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 programme. Elites of purposive

groups are more constrained in their expression of beliefs and policy positions than elites from material groups. This is an explicit statement of both the ACF (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999) and in the wider policy learning literature (e.g. Dolowitz and March 2000). Three hypotheses can be projected from this:

> H3: Policy learning is more likely in the case of shocks originating from outside of the system of coalitions.
> H4: Policy learning is more likely if groups are experiencing policy failure.
> H5: Policy learning is more likely among a group founded in material interest than among purposive groups.[2]

Fourth, 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 subjective or altogether lacking according to the ACF (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999). This comes close to Meseguer's (2005: 74) concept of rational (or Bayesian) learning. Hence, one hypothesis may be deducted:

> H6: Policy learning is more likely when quantitative data are available.

Fifth, according to the ACF (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1999), 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. Two hypotheses can be deducted from this:

> H7: Policy learning is more likely when there is a prestigious forum that attracts knowledgeable people.
> H8: Policy learning is more likely when there is a forum dominated by professional norms

Finally, two additional hypotheses can be deducted from the theory on a more experimental basis. Among other things Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999: 146–50) suggest that a committee will be more successful as a learning forum if negotiations are led by a facilitator (policy broker) that is viewed as neutral and where conflicts are not purely normative. Two hypotheses can be deducted from this:

> H9: Policy learning is more likely if an authoritative persuader or policy broker is present.
> H10: Policy learning is more likely if discussions are empirical rather than normative.

The hypotheses mentioned above cover issues with regard to participants (H1, H7, H9), discourses within the committees (H2, H5, H6, H8, H10), as well as the external circumstances of the committees (H3, H4). Hence, most aspects of potential relevance to mutual policy learning within the committees seem to be covered by the hypotheses.

THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE: WHEN HAS POLICY LEARNING TAKEN PLACE?

According to Dolowitz and March (2000: 8), policy learning can be treated as either a dependent or an independent variable: we can seek to explain the process of policy learning, or we can use policy learning to explain policy outcomes.

In this article, policy learning is treated as the dependent variable. In consequence, 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), and on Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999: 123) who define 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 is altered.

As mentioned above, 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 questioned. Changes are expected to be extremely rare at the deep core.

Based on this nuanced conceptualization of policy 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 issues are placed before it' (Sabatier and Jenkins Smith 1999: 146).[3] I call this learning at the 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 with the committee which has led him or her to change recommendations to the national policymakers.[4] I call this learning at 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 analysed.

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 hypotheses are presented in the concrete testing of the hypotheses in Nedergaard (2006b).

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

DESCRIPTION OF DATA

This article analyses the degree of learning as identified by the officials and experts in the Nordic international committees. The data for the article stem from a questionnaire distributed to nearly 100 Nordic committees with the same characteristics as, for example, the European OMC committees.[5]

The questionnaire was distributed via e-mail 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.[6] The members of these committees are mainly civil servants, although there are also independent experts and scientists present in some committees. Civil servants from the NCM secretariat present at the committee meetings are not included in this article.[7]

My contact strategy consisted of e-mail and telephone communication. I initially dispatched an information e-mail with an attached questionnaire, afterwards followed by several e-mail 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. Of the 754 members, alternates, or observers, 398 filled in 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, in order to avoid these kinds of answers, the respondents were given anonymity.

HYPOTHESES, RESULTS AND WIDER IMPLICATIONS

This article has analysed a number of hypotheses concerning what conditions increase the potential for policy learning in the Nordic OMC committees. Based upon the hypotheses mainly deducted from the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the results have led to confirmation of none, rejection of some, and refinement of most hypotheses.[8] The analysis presented in this article leads to the results presented in Table 1.

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

- The committee should not be fragmented into coalitions (contrary to the propositions usually put forward by the Advocacy Coalition Framework).
- 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 experts from consultancy firms.

The results mentioned above are in accordance with the results in a parallel investigation among the members of some of the Open Method of Co-ordination committees in the European Union (Nedergaard 2007). This is an indication of the validity of the results.

However, questions remain concerning how the international dynamics of committees (e.g. the level of conflict between coalitions) should function in order to

Table 1: Results of the analysis

Hypothesis	Result of test	Status (same, new, or refined hypothesis)
1	Rejection	–
2	Inconclusive	–
3	Refinement	H3Ref: Policy learning for the individual is more likely in committees that are open to public opinion and fluctuations in trading conditions
4	Refinement	H4RefA: Negative experiences of policy failure in a participant's own country increase the degree of success of the committee as a learning forum
		H4RefB: Other countries' success has some influence on the level of learning for the individual
5	Rejection	H5aNew: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely if participants in a committee are driven by a sense of purpose
		H5bNew: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely if its participants are not driven by material interests
6	Rejection/Refinement. The analysis also gave rise to a supplemental hypothesis	H6Ref: Policy learning is more likely when empirical data are available
		H6NewSupplemental: The closer the source of the data is to the members of a committee the higher the degree of policy is expected to be
7	Refinement	H7Ref: The degree of learning for the individual in an international committee is likely to be higher when there is a prestigious forum
8	Refinement	H8Ref: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely when there is a forum dominated by professional norms
9	Refinement	H9: A committee's success as a learning forum is more likely if an authoritative persuader or policy broker is present (i.e. the presidency)
10	Refinement	H10: Policy learning is more likely if neutral scientists from public administrations or independent research institutions participate (Shaky statistical foundation)
11	Rejection	–

increase learning. In addition, further analysis (quantitative as well as qualitative) is needed both in order to test the solidity of the hypothesis further and to develop a more complete arsenal of hypotheses.

I hope to have demonstrated 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 even though (or because) most of the hypotheses deducted from this framework need refinement. I also hope that further attention will be given to the decades-old co-operation in the international committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers. There might be valuable lessons to be learned for the more recent international committees from studying the mutual learning processes in older and more experienced international organizations even though they are outside the spotlight of media and scholarly attention.

In general, the international relations (IR) literature seems to have overlooked smaller or less publicly well-known international organizations in spite of the fact that they are often organizations with routinized processes of policy learning. Instead, for many years, the IR literature has focused on high profile international organizations like the UN, NATO, and the EU. However, the fact that organizations are not well known to the general public does not mean that they are not important for policy learning and, hereby, for decision making in the member states. By overlooking less well-known organizations, scholars might not be able to come up with the right advice for decision-makers. Probably, the most appriate way of demonstrating the importance of the less well-known international organizations is through studying the work of the participating civil servants in these organizations.

The reason is simple: as there are few spectacular events to be studied in connection with the work of the less well-known international organizations, the daily work of participating civil servants should be at the focus of attention. In other words, public administration scholars become important investigators in establishing the importance of these international organizations, exactly because of the fact that the needed focus of attention is a research object of particular interest for public administration scholars. Public administration has therefore become a key discipline in bringing the organizations into focus for the benefit of other social science desciplines, not least in the field of IR and comparative politics.

As far as the ACF is concerned, the most direct fundamental theoretical implication of this study is that the hypothesis in the ACF about the positive policy learning effects of two coalitions in a committee confronting each other should probably be revised. At least in this study, policy learning seems not to be more likely when two coalitions with different point of views confront each other. Perhaps adherents of the ACF should give op the 'dialectical' two coalition assumption as far as successful policy learning is concerned and instead regard it as a matter of an empirical test whether or nor one, two, three, or more coalitions enhance policy learning in committees. In addition, this would make the ACF even

more suitable for more widespread application in order to analyse policy learning processes in committees.

In this study also another hypothesis in the ACF was rejected: policy learning is not more likely among a group founded in material interests than among purposive groups. This means that the ACF theoretical framework probably tends to underestimate the policy learning impact of deliberation, but also this issue needs further investigation. In general, the ACF should be combined with findings based on the voluminous literature on deliberation. The ACF has a contribution to make as this literature is normally at a high level of abstraction due to its offspring in philosophy and pedagogical sociology. In this resepct, the ACF can be an appropriate way to off balance the abstract theories about learning with testable hypotheses about the same. This would improve our understanding of policy learning which (as mentioned in the section on the policy learning literature) is so often hampered by 'overtheorization' and 'underapplication'.

Yet another implication of my study is that it seems as if it is not quantitative data, but empirical (quantitative and qualitative) data that underpin policy learning the most in international committees. In addition, my study shows that it seems as if data produced close to members of a committee result in the highest degree of policy learning. This result might also be a new road to follow as far as further investigations are concerned. Hitherto, the character of the data material used by international organizations has not been subject to independent research even though it seems to play a major role for the possibility of policy learning to take place.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe that the Advocacy Coalition Framework provides an excellent starting point in the scholarly studies of the policy learning processes if policy learning is to be optimized in the still more international committees in international organizations where policy learning is the very raison d'etre. However, the hypotheses of the ACF need to be constantly refined when confronted with empirical tests. As shown in this article this is strongly recommended as most of the hypotheses based on the ACF are either rejected or refined. At the same time, none of the proposed ACF hypotheses are confirmed.

In order to streamline research in policy learning in international committees, and hereby, avoid too much 'double work', the ACF should be in constant contact with the policy learning literature in general as I have done in this article. I have also recommended that not least public administration scholars have the appropiate research focus in order to discover the importance of policy learning stemming from international organizations.

I think that the steps taken in this article actually to test hypotheses concerning policy learning in international committees could potentially be important in order to come up with a more general framework of policy learning in international

committees that is interesting from both an analytical and a normative perspective. This would be a framework most needed and relevant for both the practical and scholarly world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

1 The key concepts of the ACF are all defined later in the article.
2 A group founded in material interests is, for example, a group based upon a policy within economic policy whereas a purposive group is, for example, a group based upon policy learning within language policy.
3 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) to (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 forty-eight percent of the respondents have answered the question. In addition, approximately thirty 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) to (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.

The content of the proxy:
The primary aggregate learning proxy is based on questions (43) + (44) + (45). The number of valid cases here is 270; however, this proxy might be unstable on account of irregularities in answers to question (45).

The secondary aggregate learning proxy is based on questions (43) + (44). The numbers of valid cases here is 348. The proxy is more stable, but it does not include deep core level of the belief system.

4   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?

The content of the proxy:

The primary disaggregate learning proxy is based on questions (47) + (48) + (49). The number of valid cases here is 258; however, this proxy might be unstable on account of irregularities in answers to question (49).

The secondary disaggregate learning proxy is based on questions (47) + (48). The number of valid cases here is 305. The proxy is more stable, but it does not include deep core level of the belief system.

5   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).

6   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.

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

8   The testing of the hypotheses is dealt with in a working paper (Nedergaard 2006b), which is available at www.cbs.dk/staff/pne and ir.lib.cbs.dk/paper/ISBN/(/1690359

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