A conceptual framework for elucidating how agency shapes destabilization of socio-technical systems

Mert Duygan*, Aya Kachi ‡ & Adrian Rinscheid §‡

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* University of Basel
‡ University of St.Gallen
§ Swiss Competence Center for Energy Research (SCCER-CREST)
Destabilization policies to foster sustainability transitions

- Socio-technical transitions require changes in technical, socio-economic and institutional structures.

- Strong path dependence of established socio-technical regimes => technological innovation alone unlikely to overcome inertia.

- Destabilization policies = public policies that aim at destabilizing / transforming socio-technical regimes.
  - Examples: CO₂ tax, removal of subsidies, phase-outs.

- Policy enactment is contingent, among other things, on politics, interests and agency.

- We conceive adoption of destabilization policies as major institutional change and propose a framework to analyze actors’ ability in impacting such change.
# Insights and Limitations of Literature on Agency

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<th><strong>Institutional Theory</strong> (New Institutionalism &amp; Organizational Institutionalism)</th>
<th><strong>Political Economy</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Insights</strong></td>
<td>Understanding <em>institutional entrepreneurship</em>; i.e.: how do actors manage to change institutions? (e.g., through framing, coalition-building, resource mobilization, etc.)</td>
<td>Emphasizing resource endowments that determine “successful” agency (e.g., finance, network positions, structural factors)</td>
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<td>Centrality of <strong>institutional work</strong> concept =&gt; focus on <em>practices</em> relevant for creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions</td>
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| **Limitations**          | 1) What enables agents to conduct institutional work practices?  
2) How do institutions in turn constrain actors’ institutional work practices, and how does this vary from one setting to the other? | 1) Lack of comprehensive analysis revealing the relative importance of various resources  
2) Limited insights into translation of resources into political influence (what are the mechanisms?) |
Conceptual Framework (Version 1.0)

Individual/organizational endowments

- Resources
- Discursive abilities
- Network

Institutional work

- Successful conduct of practices
- Effectiveness of institutional work
- Relevance of practices

Institutional structures

- Regulative
- Normative
- Cognitive
Factors that determine successful conduct of institutional work practices

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<tr>
<th>Categories of resource endowments associated with policy goal attainment in Political Economy literature</th>
<th>Classification of means of successful institutional work practices (Hampel et al., 2017)</th>
<th>Conceptualization of resource endowments relevant for institutional work practices (as used in this framework)</th>
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</table>
| Financial assets | Material & technological artefacts (to conduct material work) | Resources  
- Material resources (financial assets, physical, technological artefacts)  
- Non-material resources (political-judicial expertise) |
| Organizational capacity: Mobilization of motivational and material resources | Skills of using signs, language and identities (to conduct symbolic work) | Discursive abilities: Narratives, frames generated to influence collective meaning systems & public opinion. |
| Conflict capacity: “system-relevance” strengthens actors’ bargaining position & creates (re)electoral pressure through structural power | Interaction with other actors (relational work) | Social Networks: Actors’ relational ties and position in the networks |
| Networks: Position of actors within a network | | |

Individual/organizational endowments
Significance of different institutional work practices is context dependent and might depend on several factors:

- **Actors’ goals**
  - Different goals (creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions) requires different institutional work practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).
    - undermining beliefs and assumptions => disrupting institutions
    - mythologizing => maintaining institutions

- **Type of institutions targeted**
  - Depending on the institutions targeted (normative, cognitive or regulative), institutional work practices are more likely to lead to success than others (C et al., 2017)

- **Broader institutional setting**
  - Governance arrangements, decision-making rules may also influence the significance of different practices (e.g., covert vs. overt work)
Conclusion

• Interdisciplinary framework to analyze political challenges and micro-level processes of institutional transformation in the realm of destabilization policies (and beyond).

• Bridging Political Economy and institutional work literature; theory advancement

• Ultimate objective: incite systematic empirical research to illuminate the role of agency and politics in destabilization of incumbent socio-technical regimes

• Uncovering of causal effect and mechanisms pertinent for disrupting institutions may have practical relevance for initiating phase-out policies.

• What’s next:
  – [this paper??] Exploring possible operationalization strategies by mini case studies
  – Identification of suitable methods and analytical techniques
  – Data collection & analysis for 4 cases: Australia, Canada, Germany & Japan