Avoiding Blame – a Comprehensive Framework and the Australian Home Insulation Program Fiasco

Markus <u>HINTERLEITNER</u> and Fritz <u>SAGER</u>

ABSTRACT

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that the study of blame avoidance behavior (BAB) exhibited by public officials is scattered and unconcentrated, and that, for the most part, it neglects both contextual factors and comparative research. These deficits inhibit the production of the kind of generalized findings necessary to better understand potential consequences for the policy process and the workings of political systems. We address these deficits by developing a framework that takes stock of blame avoidance research, clarifies the explanatory potential of contextual factors and allows for a systematic context-sensitive cross-case analysis. For illustrative purposes, the framework is applied to the Home Insulation Program in Australia as a critical case. This case reveals the explanatory potential of contextual factors for the understanding of BAB and the consequences thereof. We conclude by stating the advantages of our framework and explain how it can be used for comparative research.

KEY WORDS: Blame Avoidance Behavior, Political Behavior, Context-Sensitive Framework, Home Insulation Program, Literature Overview

INTRODUCTION

Blame avoidance behavior (BAB) displayed by public officials is a complex phenomenon. Rather than being a consistently defined term, BAB is generally regarded as all kinds of integrity-protecting activities by politicians and bureaucrats in the face of (future) accusations. Since modern policymaking is increasingly characterized by the rapid pace of change on the political agenda and by the media-induced politicization and scandalization of events, the pressure for public actors to engage in BAB is on the rise. In an often polarized political climate, this can not only "generate cynicism and disgust on the part of the electorate", but also create policy stalemate (Weaver, 2013, p. 2). A better understanding of BAB should therefore become increasingly important for the study of public policy. The work presented in this article rests on the assumption that the question which predominantly justifies the widespread scientific interest in BAB – if and how this phenomenon influences essential areas of the political science discipline, such as policy formulation and success, policy change, policy learning, or public accountability in the political process – has not yet been sufficiently and systematically answered.[1] In the literature, three related and generally acknowledged deficits of blame avoidance research are held responsible for this: An unconsolidated base of knowledge spread over numerous disciplines; a neglect of contextual factors; and insufficient production of findings that can be generalized.

In this article, we aim to address these challenges by proposing a three-step approach: Based on the actor-centered institutionalism (ACI) heuristic by Mayntz and Scharpf (1995; Scharpf, 1997), analytical categories relevant for the comprehensive analysis of BAB and its consequences are developed. Drawing on these analytical categories and their respective interrelations, existing research on BAB is assessed and structured. The arrangement of analytical categories acts as a 'vessel' in which extant work can be situated and blind spots become evident. The result is a preliminary framework that allows for the systematic assessment of various cases of BAB in a context-sensitive way. The framework is intended to

facilitate the systematic context-sensitive cross-case analysis of BAB and thereby help to come to more generalized findings about the impact of BAB on essential areas of the policy process and on the workings of political systems in general. The paper thus aims to contribute to the ongoing theory-development in policy process research (cf. Schlager & Weible, 2013).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: We first outline three interrelated and widely-acknowledged deficits of blame avoidance research. Based on these deficits, we assess BAB in its entirety and complexity and develop a preliminary framework. In order to assess its empirical value, we apply it to the case of the Home Insulation Program (HIP) in Australia under the Rudd Administration. The HIP is a critical 'most-likely'-case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) that exemplifies critical aspects revealed by the framework and demonstrates the systematic and comprehensive character of our approach. As a major political fiasco held responsible for tragic loss of life, the HIP represents a particularly salient case that contains all the aspects of a typical BAB case with regards to which existing blame avoidance research should not have any difficulties in explaining the sequence of events. Instead, the HIP case demonstrates that the comprehensive consideration of contextual factors is highly critical for understanding observed BAB, offers explanatory potential that has so far not been fully utilized for the study of blame avoidance and underscores the need for a context-sensitive framework. We conclude by stating the various benefits of the framework for future comparative research on BAB.

THE THREE DEFICITS OF BLAME AVOIDANCE RESEARCH

A comprehensive review of the literature on BAB reveals three related and generally-acknowledged deficits of blame avoidance research: an unconsolidated base of knowledge; a neglect of contextual factors; and insufficient production of findings that can be generalized. These deficits need to be addressed in order to better understand the potential implications of BAB for the adoption of policies and the workings of political systems.

First, according to Hood (2011, p. 15), the literature on BAB "consists of a diffuse body of writing and analysis that is scattered across numerous disciplines including psychology, political science, philosophy, sociology, and institutional economics, and indeed tends to live at the edges of each of those disciplines". In this wide area of research, it is important to bridge the streams of scholarship in order to systematically consider, test, and modify the findings made by others. Therefore, there is an established need to structure and situate existing research, to explicate implicit assumptions as well as antagonisms, and reveal blind spots that have hitherto been ignored, but which are likely to be relevant if a blame avoidance case is to be assessed and understood in its entirety.

The non-inclusion of contextual factors in the analysis of BAB is the second deficit of blame avoidance research. Although scholars have mentioned a wide range of contextual factors that seem to stimulate or restrict BAB, such as the degree of decentralization of the political system (Weaver, 1986) or the networks within which actors are situated (Moynihan, 2012), these factors are usually not included in the analysis from the outset. Instead, they are only partially enumerated and their likely importance for the case under study is addressed only in the conclusion. For instance, Brändström and Kuipers (2003, p. 305) encourage scholars to "begin to look into the factors – individual, institutional, cultural, situational – that may help explain why certain patterns of blaming occur in a political context". Moreover, the importance of each factor's influence is discussed only *ceteris paribus*, which means that factors held to be relevant are not regarded in their entirety and interplay (McGraw (1990, p. 129) and Boin et al. (2009, p. 98, p. 100) use this term explicitly). The fact that BAB by public officials occurs in a causally relevant and interrelated environment is generally not taken into consideration. Given the neglect of context, it is unsurprising that the results in the field are to some extent ambiguous and difficult to generalize (McGraw, 1990; 1991; Bovens et al., 1999; Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2006; Hood et al., 2009). In other words, we cannot really find out why things happen as they do in the blame game arena(s), why actors behave in certain

ways in specific situations and environments and which outcomes their behavior effectively produces if context is underappreciated. To date, the systematic and comprehensive assessment of institutional, situational, and cultural contextual factors has offered explanatory potential that has not been fully utilized for the study of blame avoidance.

The third deficit evident from the literature on BAB is the generalization of inductively attained preliminary findings about BAB which is often cited, but rarely undertaken. Brändström and Kuipers (2003, p. 305) are not alone in stating that "additional comparative research is needed to test the robustness of [their] findings". Analogous postulations can be found throughout the literature on BAB (Bovens et al., 1999, p. 17; Hood et al., 2009, p. 716; Boin et al., 2010, p. 720).

Taken together, these deficits explain why implications regarding the consequences of BAB largely have to remain hypothetical and fragmentary. Scholars studying the topic are well aware of this: The claims that "[f]urther research should also examine the relation between the process and outcomes of blame games" (Boin et al., 2010, p. 720) and that "it is worthwhile to open up the political systems and actually study blame and credit attribution within different political systems" (Mortensen, 2013a, p. 247) stress the need for comparative, context-sensitive research. The *consequences* emanating from BAB in specific environments should be at the center of this undertaking, since scholars have consistently argued that BAB can be responsible for considerable political change and policy change and can even damage the workings of democracy. For instance, it is suggested that BAB causes policy change when public actors deliberately limit their leeway in decision-making in order to avoid potentially blame-generating situations (Weaver, 1986). Moynihan has argued that BAB can undermine intra-network trust and cooperation, a fact deemed to be a "significant threat to the implementation of public policy" (2012, p. 568). Political consequences in the form of forced resignations or electoral consequences are also likely (McGraw, 1990; 1991). Finally, Weaver (1986) and Hood (2002; 2011) have discussed consequences for the working of democratic

political systems in general. On the one hand, with political entrepreneurs collecting information during the blame game, the public obtains an insight into the workings of the political system that it otherwise would not have privy to. On the other hand, in most cases "this information will be biased toward the negative, and may contain substantial distortions" (Weaver 1986, p. 395). The point of the matter here is that there is no consensus in the literature as to whether positive or negative consequences prevail and which or whom the latter really damage, in both the short-term and the long run.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF BAB

To develop analytical categories suitable for the comprehensive study of blame avoidance, we draw on the actor-centered institutionalism (ACI) developed by Mayntz and Scharpf (1995; Scharpf, 1997) and adapt it to the phenomenon of blame avoidance. The ACI is particularly well-suited to serving as the basis on which our preliminary framework will be built in the next section, as it allows all the aspects that the diffuse literature on BAB considers more or less relevant to be brought together, arranged in analytical categories and linked with one another. The ACI allows us to fully grasp the "interaction of individual and corporate actors endowed with certain capabilities and specific cognitive and normative orientations, within a given institutional setting and within a given external situation" (Scharpf 1997, p. 37). Institutions are seen to both stimulate and constrain, but not to determine actors' behavior. This leaves room for actors' orientations and predispositions, which evidentially are relevant for the explanation of BAB (Weaver, 1986; Boin et al., 2010).

We conceive of the BAB process as a sequence of stages, thereby following Hood et al.`s (2009) staged retreat model. After a problem or crisis is discovered and moves up the political agenda, blamed actors react in stages and apply a 'trial-and-error'-like approach, adopting the most convenient and advantageous strategies before they are forced to make more painful moves. As in the policy cycle's stage heuristics, this understanding of the BAB process allows

for feedback loops. However, in contrast to the policy cycle, the BAB process has a distinct – in the words of Mayntz and Scharpf (1995), 'external' – beginning: the revealed problem or crisis and the respective blame. While thus the BAB process may follow a linear logic of sequences, this is not true for the causal mechanisms in our framework. As for causal explanations, we have a more nuanced view following Mayntz and Scharpf's (1995) notion of actors in constellations and interactions.

The analytical categories adapted from the ACI are the following: (1) the institutional and (2) non-institutional context surrounding actors; (3) actors with orientations and resources; (4) actors in specific constellations; and (5) interactions. Figure 1 depicts the various analytical categories and the interrelations with regard to BAB.

Figure 1: Analytical categories for the study of blame avoidance
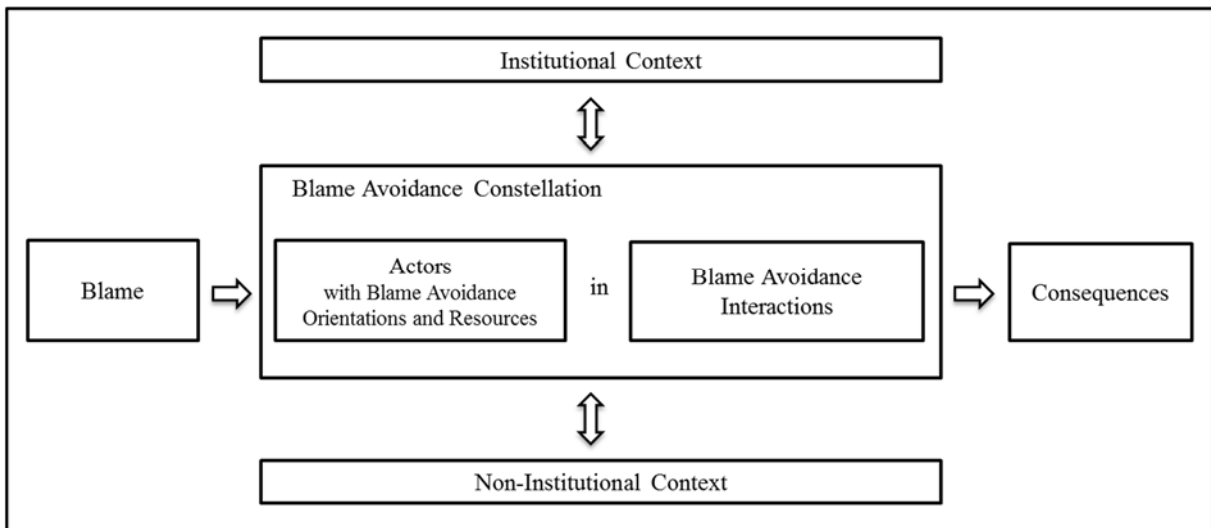
We develop the different analytical categories from the literature in the following and derive directional expectations as to the likely influence of a factor. Our intention is not to develop a model consisting of singular hypotheses but a framework allowing for different emphases in the analysis of BAB. This framework implies combined rather than single effects. We suggest these combinations may change depending on the presence of different institutional and non-

institutional factors. Such heuristic may help solve the current inconsistency in the literature where there is no consensus yet as to which and how different factors in a causally relevant and interrelated environment are explanatory for BAB.

1. Institutional Context

When taking stock of the considerable amount of contextual factors mentioned in the diffuse literature on BAB, the question arises of how these factors can be sensibly categorized without predefining the range of potentially relevant aspects. Our starting point in this regard is the differentiation between institutional and non-institutional factors that can be found in the ACI. This differentiation implies a rather narrow definition of institutions as rules that define relationships between actors, influence actors' orientations and resource endowment, as well as important aspects of the situation in which actors interact (e.g., occasions for interaction and arenas where interactions take place) (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995, pp. 48-49).[2] Hence, institutions play a major role in the framework within which BAB occurs. Mayntz and Scharpf (1995) emphasize two distinctive advantages of such a narrow definition, which we deem fruitful also for the study of BAB: First, a narrow definition of institutions implies that context frames actors' behavior, but does not predetermine it as opposed to views sometimes found within sociological neo-institutionalism (cf. Hall & Taylor, 1996). This allows actors' behavior to be considered as an independent explanatory variable (Weaver 1986; McGraw 1991). Second, a narrow definition of institutions also means that actors can theoretically influence and shape their (institutional) environment (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995, p. 45). As will be shown in the following sections, by e.g. prior commitments or framing strategies, actors caught in a blame avoidance situation try exactly that. We now name the institutional factors relevant for BAB.

Institutional factors presumed to be relevant for BAB have been first discussed by Weaver (1986) under the umbrella term of 'political system'. It encompasses institutional factors that

primarily influence the arenas in which BAB takes place, the distribution of power between actors, and the effectiveness of certain strategies. First, the *degree of centralization* in a political system is thought by Weaver (1986) to influence the opportunity to delegate or diffuse blame: more blaming opportunities exist in decentralized systems with a wide variety of actors involved in the political process than in comparatively centralized systems. Mortensen (2013b, p. 163) in a study of health care issues finds decentralization of formal authority to have a blame deflection effect in media coverage. Second, the more governments are *involved* in specific policy issues such as unemployment protection, the higher the probability that "they are to be held liable for poor performance or for policy changes that impose losses" (Weaver, 1986, p. 390).[3] A third point emphasized by Weaver (1986) and also by Jensen & Mortensen (2014) revolves around the role and significance of parties within the political system: In *parliamentary systems* where the personalization of politics is comparatively lower, individual actors have fewer incentives to blame others and deviate from the party line in order to appeal to their voters. Instead, strong party images and party discipline result in more government- and party-centered BAB (Weaver 1986).

2. Non-Institutional Context

We distinguish between the sets of factors *nature of the problem*, *media/informational factors*, and *temporal factors*.[4] The combination with the institutional factors described above provides a first impression of how different contextual factors hypothetically interact and form a type of 'blame frame' that enables and constrains the events, interactions, and results of the 'blame game'.

Nature of the problem. The nature of the problem or crisis has been identified as one of the decisive factors that shape BAB. There is significant consensus that BAB cannot be understood without considering the specific character of the events that actually trigger and lie at the heart of a blame game. Failure can mean many things: a policy can fail in achieving

its goals or in sticking to its granted means or both, an actor can fail in complying with the ethical code of his or her office or in reacting appropriately to a given crisis situation.

McGraw for instance has suggested that the effectiveness of political accounts may depend on "the nature of the cited mitigating circumstances" (1991, p. 1149), which means that the nature of the situation predetermines the content and type of (presentational) strategies that actors can realistically apply. Brändström and Kuipers discuss this point in terms of 'threatened core values' and state that the "degree to which political actors frame a series of events as violations of core public values determines to what extent these events become a matter of political and societal debate" (2003, p. 290). If the nature of the problem implies that core values are threatened, the situation becomes politicized and actors see themselves exposed to blame in public arenas. A related factor that is arguably useful for assessing a specific blame avoidance constellation is the *type of policy failure* or crisis that has occurred. McConnell (2010) distinguishes between political failure, program failure, and process failure. This distinction is relevant for the study of BAB, since the type of failure determines the types of actors who may potentially be blamed. For instance, we presume that in the case of program failure, politicians are more likely to succeed in blaming bureaucrats for their wrongdoings, whereas in the case of political failure, the politicians themselves will be most affected.

An illustrative example for this category has been discussed by Weaver (1986) who pointed out that 'fiscal stress' increases BAB, since public policies have to compete for funds and are much more critically scrutinized and their originators blamed by adversaries than in times of fiscal catharsis. With regard to the future of the welfare state, Pierson (1996) has made a similar point and argued that the politics of retrenchment are influenced to a significant degree by BAB. Pierson (1996) argued that the factors and theories used to explain the expansion of the welfare state cannot be automatically applied to the study of welfare state retrenchment, as the goals of policymakers have shifted from expansion to cutbacks and the

context in which policymakers have to compete for voters has profoundly changed. As social policy retrenchment causes immediate and tangible losses for specific (usually well-organized) interest groups and voters that are only partly offset by uncertain and diffuse future benefits, interest groups and voters mobilize and push politicians in a passive blame-avoiding position. In other words, while "expanding social benefits was generally a process of political credit claiming" (Pierson, 1996, p. 144), in situations of *fiscal stress*, policymakers change their strategy and resort to BAB instead. It follows from this argument that the extent to which political actors engage in BAB not only depends on different fiscal settings, but also on some of the institutional settings outlined in the previous section: In decentralized political systems policymakers should have more possibilities to lower the visibility of retrenchment reforms to diffuse blame, while in more centralized political systems governments should "have a greater capacity to develop and implement strategies that obscure cutbacks" (Pierson 1996, p. 177). What is more, in political systems where party discipline is high, in moments of budgetary crisis it should be easier to form a blame-decreasing political consensus that justifies welfare-state cutbacks (Pierson, 1996, Jensen & Mortensen, 2014).[5] A number of studies have analyzed the risk of electoral retribution that goes with welfare cutbacks and the governments' BAB when facing this risk (Cox, 2001; Vis, 2009; Vis & van Kersbergen, 2007). In general, *fiscal stress* may be an especially relevant contextual factor in an 'age of austerity' (Lodge & Hood, 2012).

Media/informational factors. Contextual factors widely considered to be relevant are the role and behavior of the media and the related diffusion and interpretation of information. In a transparent environment where events and public action is easily observable, also blame games should proceed differently, with important implications for the available wiggle room of blamed actors.

In an examination of this point, Twight (1991) has argued that information costs, which can be interpreted as a proxy for the public's effort to follow and understand public action, are

relevant for BAB: High information costs for constituents are thought to increase the leeway for political actors. In a situation where information costs are already high or can be deliberately increased by political actors, the latter should be better able to autonomously shape the blame game in their interest and dominate the course of events. The bigger issue that has not been addressed thus far in this context concerns the transparency of the public arena in general, and the likely influence of social media on information diffusion and negativity bias of constituents. The functioning and behavior of the media therefore is of particular relevance in this category.

As Boin et al. (2009) have stated, the role of the media in the aftermath of a revealed problem is disputed: Scholars disagree as to whether the media simply follow the frames put forward by savvy crisis communicators or whether they do in fact follow their own agenda, uninfluenced by the presentational strategies of blamed actors. Supposedly, what is important is how "willing the media are to apportion blame directly to individual office-holders" (Boin et al., 2009, p. 96) and what exactly the media identify as the source or origin of the problem. If the media emphasize endogenous (i.e. government-made) reasons, the more likely it should be "that government actors will suffer negative political consequences in its aftermath" (Boin et al., 2009, p. 96). Finally, it should be far more difficult for political actors to avoid media attention than for bureaucrats (Bovens et al., 1999). One can conclude that the significance and role of the media, as well as the specific behavior of different components of this 'quasi-group' (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995, p. 51), deserves greater attention in the analysis of BAB.

Temporal factors. Finally, temporal elements of a specific blame avoidance situation supposedly influence the blame game. This category captures the context information that relates to the position and general standing of actors – but cannot be influenced by them – and that therefore is not directly connected to, but can be relevant for the explanation of BAB. McGraw (1990) and Boin et al. (2009) have noted that *trust in government* and, accordingly, the *popularity of actors* prior to a blame avoidance situation can influence public opinion. A

government that enjoys public confidence will arguably be more successful in advancing its own interpretation of the facts at hand. Another temporal factor has been discussed by Boin et al. (2009, p. 96), who suggest that if a crisis unfolds shortly before a planned *election*, so-called change advocates will significantly aggravate the blame situation for incumbent actors and can thereby help to tip the scales in favor of adversaries. Additionally, the *career path* of individual actors should also be considered: Public officials who are in office for just a short time and still enjoy their 'honeymoon period' (Hood 2011, p. 160) when a blame avoidance situation occurs are thought to receive less criticism than actors with a long public career (Bovens et al., 1999; Boin et al., 2009). Finally, if present, a *growing climate of public distrust* (Hood, 2011, p. 161), be it in general or with regard to a specific issue of public enragement (e.g., the widely held public belief in some countries that their political class is notoriously corrupt), should not be neglected when a BAB case is assessed, as this could have a negative impact on the success of blame avoidance strategies of blamed actors.

3. Actors with orientations and resources

Actors can be characterized by their action orientations and their action resources. Action orientations include the individual perception and interpretation of a specific blame avoidance situation, but also preferences, and motivations. Action resources or capabilities "allow an actor to influence an outcome in certain respects and to a certain degree" (Scharpf, 1997, p. 43), such as argumentative skills to frame a public debate. As both latent and unconscious orientations in combination with deliberately applied resources seem to be relevant for the observed phenomenon, the perception of BAB as the intentional handling of political risk may be too narrow (Hood, 2007). Instead, we propose that BAB be conceived as a type of consciously and unconsciously occurring immunization behavior displayed by actors in different public environments. Orientations relevant for BAB and discussed in the following are the aim to protect one's reputation, loss-aversion, and values and norms. Resources

comprise specific leadership styles, enjoyed institutional advantages, and available information to interpret the present situation.

Orientations potentially capable of explaining an actor's disposition to show BAB have attracted the most attention in the literature. Why do actors have a motivation to avoid blame before, but also after a potentially damaging event? Many authors presume that politicians primarily seek *re-election* and *advancement* (Weaver, 1986), try to increase their *institutional power* (Béland, 2007), or more generally, aim to protect their *reputation* (Moynihan, 2012). Well into the 1980s, scholars believed that the dominant strategy of political actors to reach these goals is to claim credit for their actions whenever possible (Twight, 1991, p. 155). In a seminal work on the topic, Mayhew (1974) differentiated between politicians' credit claiming for real benefits achieved by them for their constituents, and simple 'position taking', i.e. advancing opinions capable of winning a majority in situations when credit claiming is not credible or possible. The common denominator of these strategies is that political actors tend to create positive connotations with regard to their public standing, either by pointing to achieved effects or solely by speaking out. However, as politicians – like most individuals – show a certain degree of *loss-aversion*, it is plausible to assume that they also try to avoid every potential blame-generating situation. They are thought to anticipate that dissatisfaction among voters "is often said to produce proportionately higher levels of activity and changes in allegiance than corresponding levels of satisfaction" (Hood, 2011, p. 10). Weaver (1986) was the first to link this *negativity bias* (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Lau, 1985) of constituents to the preference of politicians to favor avoiding blame over claiming credit. Since then risk aversion in combination with negativity bias has become well-established in the study of BAB (Hood, 2007). An aim of public officials related to negativity bias is that of avoiding a '*politicized failure*', since blame-generating situations may "attract the attention of actors who are willing and able to politicize them by coupling them to critical values and by naming culprits" (Brändström & Kuipers, 2003, p. 281; Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2006).

Orientations that to date have been presupposed rather than explicitly discussed are the culture-dependent *values and norms* that drive actors' behavior. Do we indeed presume a selfish, utility-maximizing individual or an individual influenced by a 'counterweight', e.g. in the form of moral values regarding the public good and behavior on behalf of the public (Brändström & Kuipers, 2003, p. 305)? Is solidarity towards potential 'adversaries' a motivation that needs to be considered in certain political contexts? Moreover, if several motivational factors conflict, which influence is strongest and ultimately determines behavior? Definite answers to these questions are yet to be found.

With regard to resources, Boin et al. (2010) have discussed the specific *leadership style* shown by an actor caught in a blame avoidance situation. The authors broadly distinguish between different leadership styles along the two dimensions 'need for control/involvement' and 'sensitivity to context' and illustrate how a specific leadership style translates into a respective pattern of behavior. For instance, "leaders widely seen as having a controlling style may find it impossible to successfully deny personal knowledge and responsibility for controversial acts" (Boin et al., 2010, p. 717).

A resource factor that has not yet been explicitly discussed in the blame avoidance literature is the *information available* for overviewing the present situation. When a crisis or problem moves up the agenda, it becomes vital for blamed actors to quickly assess their situation and oversee the consequences of their opportunities for action. As Mayntz and Scharpf (1995, pp. 59-60) have stated, the *perceived* situation and environment are relevant for behavior, but it is the *real* situation and environment that codetermine success or failure. An actor's ability to *interpret* the available information is therefore important; this is where experience acquired in comparable situations becomes relevant. As the information available and the subjective meaning making based on this information influence the specific form of an actor's strategy, a comprehensive analysis of BAB needs to consider that situations, the (institutional) context, and the actions taking part in this context have objective and subjective dimensions. What is

more, Brändström and Kuipers have mentioned the importance for the outcome of blame games of institutional advantages that "some actors enjoy when it comes to dispersing and withholding information" (2003, p. 305), such as access to media or allowance for personal idiosyncrasy.

Although the main body of BAB research has studied individual actors on the micro-level, recent work has emphasized the importance of corporate actors in the form of networks for the understanding of BAB (Moynihan, 2012). Individual and corporate actors have an 'inclusive' relationship, as the former can act on their own or on the instruction of the latter. Groups of individuals that share one or more orientations, but cannot be modeled as corporate actors, such as the media or the twitter community, are also relevant for the study of BAB in the actor-section. Although scholarship on blame avoidance originally concentrated on politicians (Weaver, 1986; McGraw, 1991), the range of analysis has since been extended to include bureaucrats and public managers (Hood, 2002; 2011; Moynihan, 2012). The persisting focus on politicians found in the literature can be explained by the fact that politicians are considerably more exposed to public scrutiny than bureaucrats, making BAB more accessible for scientific analysis. Moreover, politicians generally bare ultimate responsibility for political actions and consequently find themselves at the center of blame games. Quite obviously, politicians and bureaucrats have different motivations and different resources. For instance, Moynihan (2012) has illustrated that public officials face a trade-off between protecting intra- and extra-network reputation. For politicians, extra-network reputation is more important, as voters decide about reelection. For bureaucrats meanwhile, intra-network reputation is comparatively more important for professional advancement.

4. Actor Constellations

The actor constellation comprises all relevant individual and corporate actors and 'quasi groups' and all interdependencies between the actors (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995, pp. 60-65) in different blame game arenas. First of all, when assessing a specific blame avoidance constellation, one has to distinguish between '*anticipatory blame avoidance*' aimed at keeping problems and pitfalls off the agenda, and '*reactive blame avoidance*', displayed after a problem has moved on the public agenda and related blame has to be dealt with (Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2006). This distinction is important not only because of the different motives at work, but also because it predefines the range of possible strategies. 'Reactive blame avoidance' has received the most scholarly attention, since a blame-generating event triggers BAB and makes it 'visible'. Political crises in particular provide an "ideal setting to investigate blame" (Moynihan, 2012, p. 7).

Boin et al. (2010) have pointed to the fact that in the aftermath of crisis actors need to 'forge pathways' through a variety of *blame game arenas,* such as public inquiries or public criticism. The distinction of arenas gives important information about what types of actors are involved and in what (institutional) environment interaction occurs. For instance, a minister allegedly responsible for a political failure might be called on to justify her actions (or inactions) in a public inquiry (Sulitzeanu-Kenan, 2006), in parliament, or in the media. Differentiating between several blame game arenas not only helps to account for the possibility that actors deliberately show different forms of BAB in relation to different audiences, but also allows to consider the fact that arenas may be influenced by specific conventions and institutionalized rules that guide the course of events and predetermine the range of appropriate behavior. Moreover, the nature of the problem can influence the intensity in which blamed actors have to defend themselves in different arenas. For instance, it can be presumed that public criticism in cases where core values are threatened is much more intense than in cases concerning the inefficient use of resources.

5. Interactions

This category captures all relevant interactions of actors involved in the actor constellation and describes the sequence of events. Interactions activate latent orientations and offer options for action (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995, p. 59). This category has attracted the most scientific interest in the study of BAB thus far, a fact that comes as no surprise, as the specific blame avoidance interaction represents the most 'observable' analytical category in which BAB becomes manifest. First of all, the *forms of interaction* between involved actors have to be determined. This takes account of the fact that adversary actors in most cases are not 'passive bystanders', but react defensively and make counteraccusations (Moynihan, 2012). Hood (2002) and Boin et al. (2009) have demonstrated how strategic interaction in a BAB case can be modeled with the help of game theoretic tools. Scholars assessing a BAB case can draw on a wide variety of *strategy descriptions* and *categorizations*, largely based on the interpretation of blame-avoidance interactions as discursive contests involving framing processes with a view to shaping public opinion (Edelman, 1971). Applied strategies result from actor-specific orientations and resources, but are also influenced by contextual factors and the behavior of other involved actors.

Weaver has distinguished eight different strategies that policymakers can employ to "respond to potential blame-generating pressures" (1986, p. 384), ranging from argumentative tactics like 'agenda limitation' or 'redefining the issue' to passing responsibility and blame to others. A particularly useful classification is Hood's (2002; 2007) categorization of blame avoidance strategies based on three broad types of behavior: *agency strategies* intended to shift responsibility to others (e.g. buck-passing, blame-shifting, blame-diffusing); *presentational strategies* aimed at avoiding blame by e.g. denying the existence of a problem, offering excuses or shaping public opinion; and *policy strategies* intended to limit formal responsibility and liability (e.g. limit discretion by protocolization or automaticity). Hood's typology is not terminatory, encompasses both anticipatory and reactive blame avoidance

strategies and allows for the integration of strategies that have not yet been described in detail. This can be considered an advantage, as the various strategy descriptions found in the literature cannot claim conclusiveness due to limited empirical insight into different forms of BAB. Complementing the typology of Hood, we propose to add a fourth category called *inaction*, since the three categories described above all transport a certain activity of the actor concerned, or imply at least a publicly discernible response to a specific issue (or crisis). It is also likely that actors will simply try to do and say nothing and deliberately ignore allegations and accusations until the 'storm has passed'. For instance, we can imagine a situation in which a chancellor or president manages to remain uninvolved by staying completely silent on a problem and let the responsible minister do the 'crisis management' instead.[6]

In addition to the description of strategies to avert blame, scholars have explored factors that can explain the *choice of a certain strategy*. In this area of research, the sequencing of strategies or 'staged-retreat hypothesis' figures among the most influential explanations (Schütz, 1996; Bovens et al., 1999; Brändström & Kuipers, 2003; Hood et al., 2009). The assumption that actors apply a 'trial-and-error'-like approach and adopt the most convenient and advantageous strategy (e.g. problem denial) before they are forced to make more painful moves (e.g. admitting responsibility) is central to this explanation. The leadership style of an actor is also considered relevant for the choice of strategy (Boin et al., 2010), as is the anticipated behavior of adversaries (Hood, 2002).

Two straightforward implications emerge from this preliminary framework: First, a considerable amount of factors is thought to be relevant for BAB and needs to be considered in the empirical analysis of a BAB case. Second, as we have seen, actors' orientations and resources as well as actor constellations in specific interactions are exposed to the influence of contextual factors at nearly every turn. These implications have to lie at the heart of a "fully developed theory of blame-avoidance behavior [that] has yet to be developed" (Hood et al.,

2009, p. 696). Unless the phenomenon of blame avoidance is analyzed in a more comprehensive and context-sensitive manner, the development of such a theory may not even be possible, as the feedback loops between potentially explanatory contextual factors and the phenomenon of blame avoidance as well as the significance of BAB for a wider public policy context could run the risk of being neglected. Below we aim to illustrate how the developed preliminary framework could be of assistance in this undertaking.

THE FRAMEWORK APPLIED

In this section we apply the framework developed above to the case of the Australian Home Insulation Program (HIP), which ran from February 2009 until February 2010 under the Rudd Administration. This illustrative case study serves several purposes: First, it demonstrates the applicability of the framework and its explanatory power with respect to the events at hand. Second, the case of the HIP emphasizes the explanatory potential of a comprehensive consideration of contextual factors and thereby contributes to the general understanding of the ways in which context influences and restricts BAB. Third, by pointing to contextual factors so far neglected in the literature, it offers starting-points for future research aimed at exploiting the explanatory potential of contextual factors for the study of blame avoidance. The HIP is a critical 'most-likely'-case that allows generalizations to be made in the form: "If it is valid for this case, it is valid for all (or many) cases" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). The interpretation of the HIP as a critical case is justified, since it is widely seen as a 'classical' example of government failure (Kortt & Dollery, 2012) that contains all the aspects of a typical BAB case with regards to which existing blame avoidance research should not have any difficulties in explaining the sequence of events. However, it will become evident that the comprehensive consideration of contextual factors is highly critical for understanding the HIP case.

The present case study draws on a vast amount of qualitative data: The two official reports examining the administration and the reasons for the failure of the HIP (Auditor-General, 2010; Hawke, 2010) and the original transcripts of parliamentary debates form the empirical basis of the study. In addition, existing literature analyzing the course of events from a political science perspective (Dollery & Hovey, 2010; Lewis, 2012; Mulgan, 2012; Kortt & Dollery, 2012) has been considered as background information but not as a substitute for primary data. Due to its prominence in the literature and for reasons of space, we concentrate on essential information, describe the actors involved, and go through the events necessary to understand the blame game.

The Home Insulation Program

The HIP was part of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, a package of fiscal stimulus measures devised in February 2009 by the Rudd Administration to avert the negative consequences of the global financial crisis. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) under its minister Peter Garrett held the main responsibility for the implementation and management of the HIP. States and Territories were practically uninvolved, with State and Territory Fair Trading Organisations handling solely consumer complaints (Auditor-General, 2010, p. 80). The program had two main goals: "to generate economic stimulus and support jobs and small business; and to improve the energy efficiency of homes" (Hawke, 2010, p. 6). The government originally provided a total amount of $2.8 billion for the program and offered financial assistance of up to $1600 for homeowners and up to $1000 for landlords and tenants if they decided to install home insulation material. In a first phase (running from February 2009 until June 2009), households had to pay installers themselves and request (partial) reimbursement from the government. During the second phase (running from July 2009 until February 2010), the process was accelerated and installers received the rebates directly from the government. This procedural change quickly

increased the number of claims and resulted in over one million newly-insulated properties by the time the program was preliminarily terminated in February 2010. Almost from the outset, the HIP was overshadowed by safety, quality and compliance concerns from unions and members of the industry, primarily pointing to an inflow of inexperienced installers, the risk of fire due to deficient imported material and faulty installation, and the risk of electrocution during installation. Only in October 2009, when the first of a total of four installers had died installing insulation materials did safety and material requirements as well as installer registration requirements gradually become more stringent. Responding to mounting public pressure fed by dozens of house fires and further fatalities, in February 2010 the prime minister decided to prematurely terminate the HIP. DEWHA was discharged from administrative duties and remaining tasks concerning the phase-out of the HIP were transferred to the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (DCCEE). Minister Garrett remained in cabinet, but was demoted and could only keep ministerial responsibilities for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts, with energy efficiency programs reshuffled to the stand-alone DCCEE.

The reasons for failure are numerous and well documented: a tight timeframe for the delivery of the program; the underestimation of program risks; the under-resourcing of the administration of the program; and inadequate governance arrangements and advice to Minister Garrett (Auditor-General, 2010, pp. 32-37). It only became known afterwards that between August and October 2009 Garrett had written to the prime minister several times to inform him about the dire state of the HIP (ABC, 2010). It also transpired that the organization of the HIP was essentially top-down and dictated by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Cassidy, 2010). For instance, a proposal by DEWHA to roll-out the program over a period of five years was effectively rejected by Rudd and replaced by a two and a half year roll-out plan (Auditor-General, 2010, p. 69).

Garret's BAB: A diffident minister?

The events that are relevant for the analysis of the case from a blame avoidance perspective began in November 2009, when Garret was attacked in Parliament by opposition members, (25 November 2009 *House of Representatives* Hansard, 12873-12877). The opposition attacked Garrett "with all available parliamentary weapons" (Mulgan. 2012, p. 185), concentrated on establishing a direct link between actions of the Minister and the ill-fated HIP and repeatedly demanded the minister's resignation or demission. Criticism from the opposition was excessively focused on the personal involvement and responsibilities of Minister Garrett (11 and 22 February 2010, *House of Representatives* Hansard, pp. 1196-1216, pp. 1305-1331). Analyzing Garrett's respective responses to these questions and allegations, it is striking that the minister acted very passively and limited his justificatory efforts to a mix of presentational strategies, focused essentially on trying to reframe the context in which the HIP was discussed in public, emphasizing successes in job creation and home insulation, pointing to other achievements made by the Government regarding energy efficiency goals and consistently claiming that risks and safety issues had been dealt with accordingly and had always been the Government's priority. Only very cautiously did Garrett point out that state safety authorities were responsible for occupational health and safety issues and that part of the blame should be attributed to unprofessional insulation companies. In addition, he rejected the Opposition's demand to immediately launch an inquiry by the Auditor-General and stated that the HIP would be dealt with in the normal course of business (25 November 2009 *House of Representatives* Hansard, pp. 12877-12881).

Given what we know about Garrett's actual responsibility for the badly designed and poorly implemented HIP, this passivity is very striking. The Minister did not show any sign of true (policy) activism and in particular did not blame others, despite disposing over a quite remarkable number of potential scapegoats: officials in his own department who failed to adequately inform him; an industry that was partly corrupt and did not comply with quality

and safety standards; state authorities that did not conduct proper safety inspections; or even his own prime minister, who had pressed for a rapid roll-out of the program. What we do not see is some kind of staged-retreat strategy, according to which the Minister should have resolutely denied the responsibility for the grave consequences of the HIP when downplaying the extent of the crisis had become implausible and the existence of a problem had finally to be admitted (Hood et al., 2009, p. 697). In a nutshell, Garrett did not fully exploit the repertoire of blame avoidance strategies theoretically available to him, making only use of *rudimentary* presentational strategies, standing by these even when the course of events had already revealed a major government failure.

Analysis: Garrett caught in the middle

How can the opposition's excessive concentration on the minister's personal responsibility and Garrett's ensuing passivity be explained? Contextual factors provide an answer.

Institutional Factors. The constitutional convention of *ministerial responsibility* in Westminster systems as a part of the institutional structure of the Australian political system explains the focus on the minister and the role of the media as an amplifier of negative events, but it also defines the strategy applied by the opposition to attack the minister and demarcates the blame game arenas. Ministerial responsibility is a convention that obliges ministers to publicly support their government and to "take responsibility for their portfolios, answering to parliament for the conduct of their departments and resigning in the case of failure or impropriety" (Mulgan, 2012, p. 178). However, resignation "without any personal blame at all is not, and never has been, a binding obligation on ministers" (Mulgan, 2012, pp. 180f). It follows from these observations that an opposition willing to increase its electoral prospects needs to concentrate on establishing a *personal link* between the minister and the government failure in order to seriously damage his reputation or even force him to resign. In this regard,

ministerial responsibility explains why the opposition largely neglected the role and potential responsibility of the federal administration, insulation companies or state authorities.

Another contextual factor that needs to be considered is the top-down approach of the HIP (Lewis, 2012, p. 157), which concentrated large portions of responsibility in the hands of the prime minister himself, with the formally responsible Minister Garrett being actually a rather sidelined actor from the outset.

<u>Non-Institutional Factors</u>. The role of the media in this case is also influenced by ministerial responsibility, as they usually uncritically follow the opposition in their attacks on the minister and amplify negative coverage on the topic (Mulgan, 2012; see also Béland, 2007). This observation confirms Hood's (2007) supposition that the media's interpretive autonomy is low and that it concentrates, in lockstep with the opposition, on the most visible actor in the blame game arena, and that is the minister. This amplifier function of the media seems to be particularly strong when core public values are threatened, as is the case when hundreds of properties have caught fire and lives have been lost.[7]

<u>Actors with Orientations and Resources</u>. Ministerial responsibility can also partly explain Garrett's passive blame avoidance efforts, as constant attacks by the opposition most likely "strike fear into the minds of ministers" (Mulgan, 2002, p. 126). Garrett, acting as a shield for his own government, had to face an overly aggressive opposition eager to hunt him as long as necessary, and the question seems justified if a more active stance would not have even further intensified public outrage. Further to the fact that from October 2009 until his demotion Garrett had permanently come under fire, the top-down approach of the HIP (Lewis, 2012, p. 157) mentioned above made it particularly difficult for Garrett to rely on agency strategies and to blame practically uninvolved or side-lined actors like states and territories. His range of possible scapegoats was in fact much smaller than his theoretical options.

Quite obviously, context cannot explain everything in this case. As described in the theory section, a comprehensive analysis of BAB needs to consider an actor's ability to *interpret* the available information, which influences the subjective meaning making and the specific form of an actor's strategy. In this regard, it is important to note that Garrett was not a classical 'career politician'. As former lead singer of the Australian rock band *Midnight Oil* and left-of-center political activist, he can be considered a newcomer from (partly) related, but decidedly different professions. Therefore, it seems justified to assume that a more experienced politician could have more skillfully used his action resources to better play the blame game – despite an overwhelming institutional disadvantage.

<u>Actor Constellation</u>. Ministerial responsibility also shielded the prime minister for taking responsibility himself. Knowing that Garrett was not personally responsible and that ministers resign only when personal blame is revealed, Prime Minister Rudd was able to use Garrett as a shield until public pressure became too great and made the minister ultimately untenable. Ministerial responsibility therefore contributes in an important way to our understanding of the characteristic actor constellation with the opposition, which can be modeled as a corporate actor, flanked by the media on the one side, and the minister, acting as a shield for the government, 'caught in the middle' (see figure 2). In other words, the analysis of the actor constellation reveals that Garrett was at a clear institutional disadvantage.

The arenas within which interaction takes place are also influenced by the constitutional convention of ministerial responsibility. As described in the theory section, arenas may be influenced by specific conventions and institutionalized rules that guide the course of events and predetermine the range of appropriate behavior. Ministerial responsibility in this regard explains the characteristic adversarialism of Westminster style parliaments, which is also common in Australia. However, it has to be noted that this will still vary in tone and intensity with the leadership of the day. With regard to the HIP, the Leader of the Opposition, Tony

Abbott, has been unusually aggressive, single-minded, vociferous, relentless and ultimately successful in exploiting the arena to an unparalleled extent in recent Australian history.[8]

Consequences. Ultimately, examining ministerial responsibility as a contextual factor influencing the blame game also provides insights into how BAB driven by contextual factors can have an impact on policy learning in the aftermath of a crisis (Dekker & Hansén, 2004; Keeler, 1993). Personalized blame attribution often distracts from the real causes of failure and thereby inhibits the creation of policy learning opportunities. In this context, Mulgan (2012) has stressed the importance of other accountability mechanisms that need to exist alongside ministerial responsibility, as they contribute to a less politicized and more fact-based examination of events and reasons for failure. Figure 2 depicts the framework adapted to the case of the HIP.

Figure 2: The framework applied to the HIP
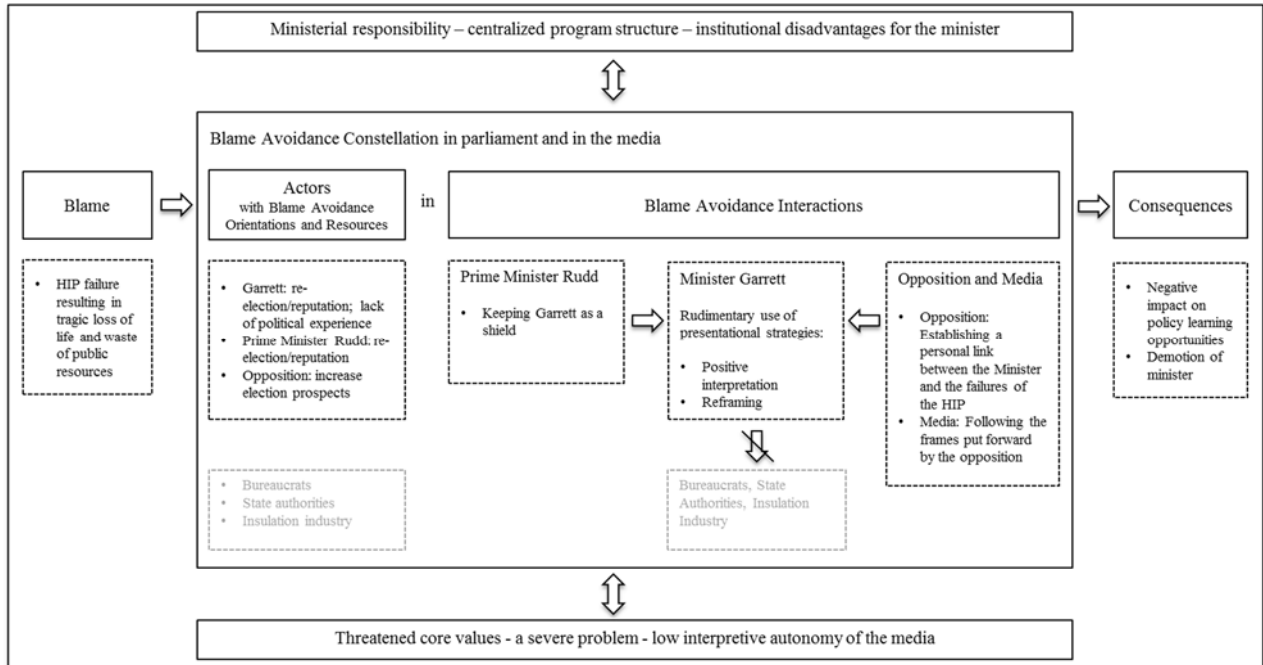
What implications can be drawn from this case study? It clearly demonstrates that contextual factors exhibit significant explanatory power regarding the observed BAB. Contextual factors to a large extent explain the focus on the minister, the actor constellation with Minister

Garrett 'caught in the middle', the strategies applied by the prime minister and the opposition, the arenas within which interaction occurred, but also the role of the media and Garrett's passivity and choice of strategy. The case also reveals how the inclusion of institutionalized rules in the analysis can further our understanding of the consequences of BAB, since a predominantly personalized blame attribution process can have a negative impact on policy change. Furthermore, we have retrieved information concerning additional contextual factors relevant for BAB: A comprehensive analysis of a BAB environment needs to take into account the various accountability mechanisms institutionalized in the political system. From this insight, future research trajectories and starting-points for empirical investigation can be derived. For instance, the absence of institutional conventions such as ministerial responsibility in systems like the United States would imply that blame is more often directed to the president himself than to the non-elected secretaries nominated by him. The related difference in the location of blame games within the institutional structure could be investigated for its potential impact on the influence of executive political actors on the policy process.

The empirical section of this paper has demonstrated that the study of blame avoidance can benefit from a framework that allows to better exploit the explanatory potential of contextual factors, not least to refine existing models, such as the staged-retreat hypothesis. Below we summarize our work and formulate a comparative research agenda for the study of blame avoidance.

CONCLUSION

Modern policymaking is increasingly characterized by the rapid pace of change on the political agenda and by the media-induced politicization and scandalization of events. The fact that these developments have an impact on the behavior of the people at the center of public affairs and media interest, i.e. politicians and public officials, is hardly surprising.

Modern democratic societies have a vital interest in knowing how public actors cope with this and what consequences for the policy process and the workings of political systems emanate therefrom. The observation made by Hood that "having become alerted to blame avoidance as a phenomenon, you start to see it everywhere" (2011, p. IX), is indicative of the importance of BAB for the study of public policy.

The preliminary framework developed in this article addresses three generally acknowledged deficits in the literature on blame avoidance. With regard to the first deficit of an *unconsolidated base of knowledge*, the framework has allowed us to bridge different streams of blame avoidance research and to consolidate the diffuse literature on BAB. In this way, implicit assumptions as well as antagonisms were explicated and hitherto neglected blind spots were revealed. The framework helps to situate and guide future research: Scholars can assess which analytical categories to study without losing sight of other categories relevant for a comprehensive understanding of BAB.

Concerning the second deficit of a *neglect of context*, our framework emphasizes context-dependency and structures contextual factors. As we have demonstrated with the HIP, context-sensitive analysis of BAB may be crucial for the understanding of a case and sheds light on the consequences of this phenomenon. The framework helps scholars to take into account contextual factors in a much more informed and transparent way. However, due to the lack of comparative research, an analytical hierarchy that helps scholars to decide which contextual factors primarily need to be considered has yet to be developed. The introduced framework can help in this undertaking, as it brings presumably relevant contextual factors together and touches upon directional expectations as well as presumed interrelated effects. Further research may take our categorization of contextual factors as a starting point for the development of a typology of 'blame worlds'.

Finally, our framework, if empirically applied, can also help to tackle the third deficit, the *insufficient production of generalized findings*. The latter can be obtained only if several cases

of blame avoidance are compared in a systematic and sensible way. Contrary to a *ceteris-paribus* context-excluding fashion, the focus needs to be on the *relative* importance of different contextual factors in different blame avoidance situations. The framework can contribute to this claim in two ways: First, it facilitates the conscious construction of a most-similar or most-different systems design of contextual factors (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Second, it can help to avoid an omitted variable bias, since it decreases the likelihood of not controlling for causally relevant contextual factors. Overall, our framework should prove useful both for comprehensive context-sensitive case analysis, as well as for systematic and sensible cross-case comparison.

---

[1] To take only one example: According to Hood (2007, p. 198), the relationship between BAB and innovation generation in public organizations remains 'curiously obscure'.

[2] To avoid redundancy, actors' orientations and resource endowments, as well as actor constellations and situations will be explained in sections 3, 4, and 5.

[3] This 'crisis proximity' argument also holds for individual political actors and their prior commitments and statements regarding a political problem or crisis.

[4] This distinction is not terminatory and disjunctive in nature, but should merely be seen as a means to classify the different factors that do not fall under the category *institutional context*.

[5] This point exemplifies the interdependence of different contextual factors included in the framework.

[6] An illustrious example of this kind of inaction is frequently given by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has made a habit of simply not commenting on scandals and problems for which her government bore ultimate responsibility.

[7] It is noteworthy in this context that *threatened core values* aroused far more attention and criticism (in the media as well as in parliamentary debates) than the significant depletion of public resources. The interesting question in this regard is whether this applies for other countries as well, or rather represents an Australian peculiarity, where the contextual factor *fiscal stress* arguably is of minor importance than in other developed countries, where 'austerity' is a far bigger issue.

[8] Source: Emails by [blinded for peer review], 18 January 2014, and [blinded for peer review], 10 January 2014.

REFERENCES

Auditor-General. 2010. "Home Insulation Program: Audit Report No. 12 2010–11."

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). 2010. "Rudd admits insulation scheme mistakes." May 28.

Béland, Daniel. 2007. "Insecurity and Politics: A Framework." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 32 (2): 317–340.

Boin, Arjen, Paul 't Hart, and Allan McConnell. 2009. "Crisis exploitation: political and policy impacts of framing contests." *Journal of European Public Policy* 16 (1): 81–106.

Boin, Arjen, Paul 't Hart, Allan McConnell, and Thomas Preston. 2010. "Leadership Style, Crisis Response and Blame Management: The Case of Hurricane Katrina." *Public Administration* 88 (3): 706–23.

Bovens, Mark, Paul 't Hart, Sander Dekker, and Gerdien Verheuvel. 1999. "The Politics of Blame Avoidance: Defensive Tactics in a Dutch Crime-Fighting Fiasco." In *When things go wrong: Organizational failures and breakdowns*, ed. Helmut K. Anheier. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 123–48.

Brändström, Annika, and Sanneke Kuipers. 2003. "From 'Normal Incidents' to Political Crises: Understanding the Selective Politicization of Policy Failures." *Government & Opposition* 38 (3): 279–305.

Cassidy, Barrie. 2010. "The killing of Tyrannosaurus Rudd." *ABC The Drum*, October 18.

Cox, Robert H. 2001. "The social construction of an imperative: Why welfare reform happened in Denmark and the Netherlands but not in Germany." *World Politics* 53: 463–498.

Dekker, Sander, and Dan Hansén. 2004. "Learning under Pressure: The Effects of Politicization on Organizational Learning in Public Bureaucracies." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 14 (2): 211–30.

Dollery, Brian, and Martin Hovey. 2010. "Australian Federal Government Failure: The Rise and Fall of the Home Insulation Program." *Economic Papers* 29 (3): 342–52.

Edelman, Murray. 1971. *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence.* Chicago: Markham Publishing Company.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 12 (2): 219–45.

Hall, Peter A., and Rosemary C. R. Taylor. 1996. "Political Science and Three New Institutionalisms." *Political Studies* 44 (5): 936–957.

Hawke, Allan. 2010. "Review of the Administration of the Home Insulation Program."

Hood, Christopher. 2002. "The Risk Game and the Blame Game." *Government & Opposition* 37 (1): 15–37.

———. 2007. "What happens when transparency meets blame-avoidance?" *Public Management Review* 9 (2): 191–210.

———. 2011. *The blame game: Spin, bureaucracy, and self-preservation in government.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hood, Christopher, Will Jennings, Ruth Dixon, Brian Hogwood, and Craig Beeston. 2009. "Testing times: Exploring staged responses and the impact of blame management strategies in two examination fiasco cases." *European Journal of Political Research* 48 (6): 695–722.

Jensen, Carsten, and Peter B. Mortensen. 2014. "Government Responses to Fiscal Austerity: The Effect of Institutional Fragmentation and Partisanship." *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (2): 143–170.

Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky. 1984. "Choices, values, and frames." *American Psychologist* 39 (4): 341–50.

Keeler, John T. S. 1993. "Opening the Window for Reform: Mandates, Crises, and Extraordinary Policy-Making." *Comparative Political Studies* 25 (4): 433–86.

Kortt, Michael A., and Brian Dollery. 2012. "The Home Insulation Program: An Example of Australian Government Failure." *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 71 (1): 65–75.

Lau, Richard R. 1985. "Two Explanations for Negativity Effects in Political Behavior." *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (1): 119–38.

Lewis, Chris. 2012. "A Recent Scandal: The Home Insulation Program." In *Ministerial careers and accountability in the Australian Commonwealth government*, eds. Keith M. Dowding and Chris Lewis. ANZSOG monograph series. Acton, A.C.T: ANU E-Press, 153–76.

Lodge, Martin, and Christopher Hood. 2012. "Into an Age of Multiple Austerities? Public Management and Public Service Bargains across OECD Countries." *Governance* 25 (1): 79–101.

Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mayntz, Renate, and Fritz W. Scharpf. 1995. "Der Ansatz des akteurzentrierten Institutionalismus." In *Gesellschaftliche Selbstregelung und politische Steuerung*, eds. Renate Mayntz and Fritz W. Scharpf. Schriften des Max-Planck-Instituts für Gesellschaftsforschung, Köln 23. Frankfurt, New York: Campus, 39–72.

McConnell, Allan. 2010. *Understanding policy success: Rethinking public policy.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

McGraw, Kathleen M. 1990. "Avoiding Blame: An Experimental Investigation of Political Excuses and Justifications." *British Journal of Political Science* 20 (1): 119–31.

———. 1991. "Managing Blame: An Experimental Test of the Effects of Political Accounts." *American Political Science Review* 85 (4): 1133–57.

Mortensen, Peter B. 2013a. "Public sector reform and blame avoidance effects." *Journal of Public Policy* 33 (2): 229–253.

———. 2013b. "(De-)Centralisation and Attribution of Blame and Credit." *Local Government Studies* 39 (2): 163–181.

Moynihan, Donald P. 2012. "Extra-Network Organizational Reputation and Blame Avoidance in Networks: The Hurricane Katrina Example." *Governance* 25 (4): 567–88.

Mulgan, Richard. 2002. "On Ministerial Resignations (and the Lack Thereof)." *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 61 (2): 121–27.

———. 2012. "Assessing Ministerial Responsibility in Australia." In *Ministerial careers and accountability in the Australian Commonwealth government*, eds. Keith M. Dowding and Chris Lewis. ANZSOG monograph series. Acton, A.C.T: ANU E Press, 177–93.

Pierson, Paul. 1996. "The New Politics of the Welfare State." *World Politics* 48 (2): 143–179.

Przeworski, Adam, and Henry Teune. 1970. *The logic of comparative social inquiry*. Comparative studies in behavioral science. New York: Wiley–Interscience.

Scharpf, Fritz W. 1997. *Games real actors play: Actor-centered institutionalism in policy research*. Theoretical lenses on public policy. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Schlager, Edella, and Weible, Christopher M. 2013. "New Theories of the Policy Process." *Policy Studies Journal* 41 (3): 389–396.

Schütz, Astrid. 1996. "Selbstdarstellung in der Devensive - Reaktionen in politischen Skandalen." In *"Wir, die wir gut sind": Die Selbstdarstellung von Politikern zwischen Glorifizierung und Glaubwürdigkeit*, eds. Lothar Laux and Astrid Schütz. Munich: DTV.

Sulitzeanu-Kenan, Raanan. 2006. "If They Get It Right: An Experimental Test Of The Effects Of The Appointment And Reports Of UK Public Inquiries." *Public Administration* 84 (3): 623–53.

Twight, Charlotte. 1991. "From Claiming Credit to Avoiding Blame: The Evolution of Congressional Strategy for Asbestos Management." *Journal of Public Policy* 11 (2): 153–86.

Vis, Barbara. 2009. "Governments and unpopular social policy reform: Biting the bullet or steering clear?" *European Journal of Political Research* 48: 31–57.

Vis, Barbara, and Kees van Kersbergen. 2007. "Why and how do political actors pursue risky reforms?" *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 19: 53–172.

Weaver, R. Kent. 1986. "The Politics of Blame Avoidance." *Journal of Public Policy* 6 (4): 371–98.

Weaver, R. Kent. 2013. "Policy Leadership and the Blame Trap: Seven Strategies for Avoiding Policy Stalemate." *Governance Studies*, Brookings Institution, March 2013.