Learning from policy failure and success
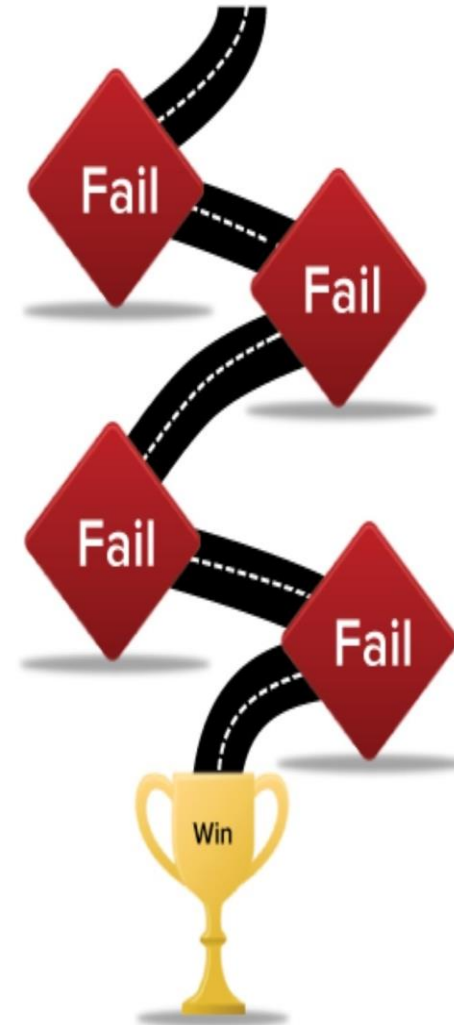
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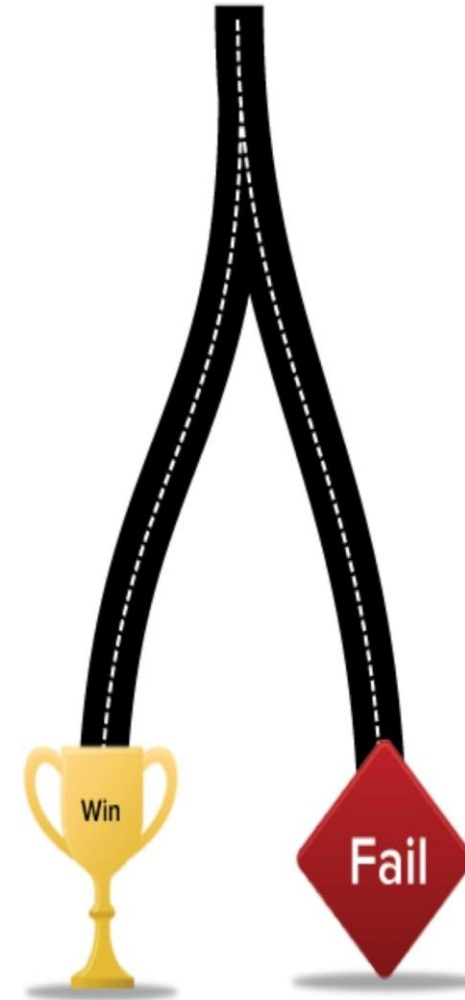
Policymaking as learning

- Policy T1: design, adopt, implement

- Observe T2-x: monitor & assess

- Analyse Tx: what, how, why – draw inferences, identifydriving factors/mechanisms

- Policy T2: redesign, modify, transplant, terminate

Questions about the Home Insulation Case

- **Outcome Q**: Was this indeed an instance of policy failure?

- **Explanatory Q**: How did this happen?

- **Responsibility Q**: Who is/are accountable for this?

- **Policy Q:** What can/needs to be learned from this?

And the flip side…

Questions about purported policy successes

○ Outcome assessment: how good?

○ Explanatory analysis: achieved how?

○ Responsibility analysis: credit where?

○ Policy analysis: lessons to learned?

Studying policy success and failure (I)

- **Objectivist-positivist accounts**: *verifiable facts*

  (observable performance against set standards/criteria)

- **Subjectivist-constructivist accounts**: *perceptions and constructions*

  (eyes of different beholders, with different vantage points, values, interests)

Studying policy success and failure (2)

- **Snapshot**: in the moment – 'peak performance'
  - Example: 'In Search of Excellence' (Peters and Waterman, 1982)

- **Film**: across time – 'enduring performance'
  - Example: 'Built to Last' (Collins and Prottas, 2001)

Objectivist accounts - examples

- Cost-benefit analysis – 'net impact minus total costs'
  - Example: environmental Impact assessment

- Performance measurement – 'achieving targets'
  - Example: Balanced scorecards

Balanced Scorecard Fundamentals

Financial Perspective

Measures the Ultimate Results the Business provides to its Shareholders

Internal Perspective

Focus on the Performance of the Key Internal Processes which Drive the Business

Customer Perspective

Focus on Customer Needs and Satisfaction

Employee Perspective

Focus on employees and Infrastructure

The purpose of the Balanced Scorecard is to translate Strategy into Measures that uniquely Communicate the organization's Vision...

Sample Balanced Scorecard

Goal Area 1 – Student Achievement

	Performance Measure	Metric	✔	Zone	Responsible	Cycle
11	Completion rates	% completing high school		Exceptional	Assistant Superintendent	one year behind in AEIS reporting
			✔	Within Range		
				Below Range		
12	Dropout Rates	% dropping out at middle school level		Exceptional	Assistant Superintendent	Annually
			✔	Within Range		
				Below Range		
13	Army Youth Programs in Your Neighborhood (AYPYN)	Monthly average # of students		Exceptional	Deputy Superintendent	Annually
			✔	Within Range		
				Below Range		
14	Dual Enrollment Participation	# Enrolled % Passing # Classes		Exceptional	Assistant Superintendent	2x Annually
			✔	Within Range		
				Below Range		

Subjectivist accounts (see Handbook chapter)

- The *politics* of evaluation: interests at stake, values inevitable

- Choice of criteria, standards, measurement tools not value-free, and thus contestible

- Outcome assessments are framed, and thus prone to bias (temporal, goal-based, institutional etc.)

- To explain is to confer blame/credit

- 'Programmatic' logic does not equal 'political' logic

Finding and mining successes: positive evaluation

- **Appreciative Inquiry**   **Inquiring into, identifying, and developing best practices**

- **Success Case Method**   **Linking success and positive learning through identifying best cases**

- **Most Significant Change directions**   **Facilitating program improvement by focusing on value**

- **Positive Deviance**   **Finding existing solutions, assets, and strengths**

- **Developmental Evaluation**   **Supporting innovation while guiding adaptation to change**

Finding policy failures?

Mechanisms?

Assessing public policies: a heuristic

o Programmatic assessment: it it valuable

o Process assessment: is it done smartly and fairly?

o Political assessment: is it broadly supported?

o Endurance assessment: does it last?

POST - 9/11 GI BILL
A NEW BILL FOR A NEW CENTURY

Paradoxes of assessment

Programmatic Political	++	– –
++	Complete success	Hidden failure
– –	Underrated achievement	Complete fiasco

Let's revisit the HI case, applying thisheuristic

Let's focus on learning now

○ The 'lessons' of HI?

○ Learning from 'failures': processes, challenges, flaws?

○ Learning from 'successes': processes, challenges, flaws?

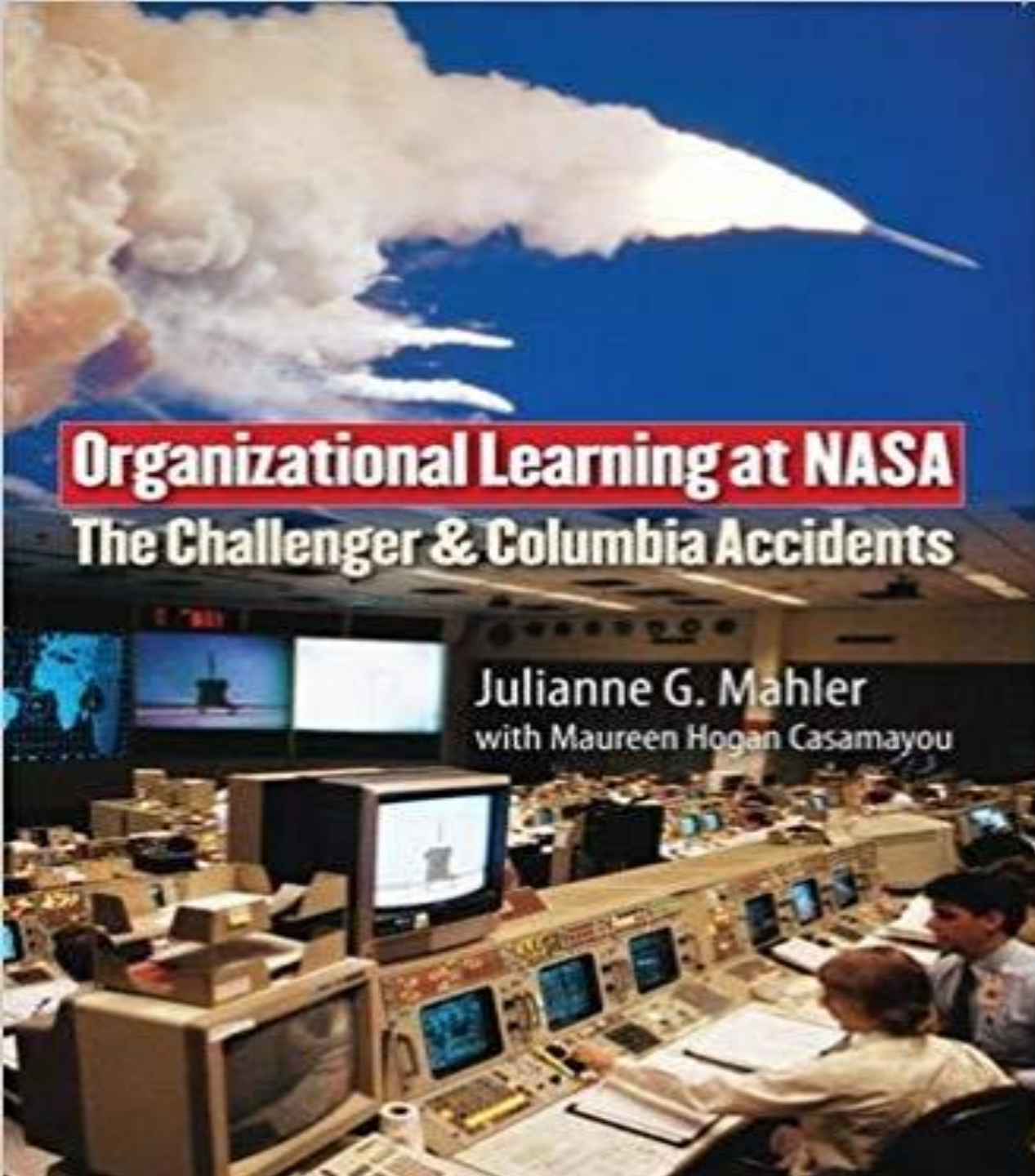## Learning from failure opportunities and levers

- <u>Rich feedback streams</u>: Incidents and crises generate intense scrutiny of past actions

- <u>Momentum to avoid repetition</u>: Temporary 'unfreezing' of otherwise taken for granted features of the status quo, pressure to demonstrate improvement

- <u>Mature professionalism</u>: in some professions negative feedback is valued, even sought, as key to self-improvement

- <u>Institutional patience</u>: methodical research, trialling and piecemeal institutionalisation of 'lessons learned'

Learning from success: opportunities and levers

- <u>Professional pride</u>: Mobilisation of energy to capitalize on own achievements and 'do even better' (for clients, in rankings etc.)

- <u>Vicarious learning</u>: building upon from others' achievements without the opportunity costs of getting to that point

- <u>Epistemic communities</u>: Production and propagation of positive lessons and 'best practices' through professional forums and international platforms

SYSTEMIC FLEXIBILITY

ABLE AND COMMITTED TEACHERS

COMPETENCE-DRIVEN

CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT

THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH

ASSESSMENT OF AND FOR LEARNING

SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Learning from success: opportunities and levers	Learning from failure opportunities and levers
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Organizational Learning at NASA
The Challenger & Columbia Accidents
Julianne G. Mahler
with Maureen Hogan Casamayou

Learning from failure
Challenges and blockages

- <u>Defensive learning</u>: self-justification and self-preservation instincts crowd out space for double-loop lessons

- <u>Aborted learning</u>: Momentum fades once political accountabilities are settled, public spotlight shifts, and chief sponsors move on

- <u>Shopping-list learning</u>: Disjointed implementation of multi-item 'shopping lists' provided by inquiries

- <u>Opportunistic learning</u>: cherry-picking inquiry recommendations to implement only the 'low hanging fruit'

Learning from success:
Challenges and blockages

- Hasty learning: Overenthusiastic 'rolling out' of programs and practices that have proved successful in the past or elsewhere

- Mindless learning: copying of whatever is 'hot' without due attention to context and conditions

- Not-invented-here syndrome: professional jealousy or institutional rivalry preventing due consideration of successful practices of other units, agencies or jurisdictions

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Learning from failure:
Paul Light's meta-analysis

○ Think about policy effectiveness from the start

○ Provide the funding, staff, and collateral capacity to succeed

○ Flatten the chain of command and cut the bloat

○ Select political appointees for their effectiveness, not connections

○ Sharpen the mission

Learning from failure:
The Shergold report (post HI)

- Providing robust advice
- Supporting decision-making
- Creating a positive risk culture
- Enhancing program management
- Opening up the public service
- Embracing adaptive government

Learning from success:
UK Institute for Government, 'The S Factors'

- Understand the past and learn from prior failures
- Open up the policy process
- Be rigorous in analysis and use of evidence
- Take time and build in scope for iteration and adaptation
- Recognise the importance of individual leadership and strong personal relationships
- Create new institutions to overcome policy inertia
- Build a wider constituency of support