Steering by accident: unintended governance strategies in action

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In 2005 the Japanese government introduced 'Cool Biz' as part of a wider effort to reduce CO2 emissions. Cool Biz, which was an initiative designed to persuade organisations to use less air-conditioning, proved to be remarkably successful. Many companies took heed, letting indoor temperatures rise to 28 degrees C. and modifying dress codes so that it was no longer normal to wear a jacket and tie during the summer months. Energy consumption and C02 emissions dropped as a result.

Following this one bit of climate change policy from its formulation within government through to its consequences for the tiny details of daily life provides some insight into processes involved in deliberately steering energy demand.

As well as being an interesting case in its own right, the Cool Biz example highlights a handful of issues that are of wider relevance to a discussion of how policies are framed, situated, translated and enacted, and for how they come to matter for what people do. As the 'accidental' aspect referred to in the title suggests, policy initiatives can have unintended consequences, and anticipated consequences that arise as a result of unexpected processes. The following account is based on 16 interviews with people in business and in environmental policy, undertaken in Tokyo in summer 2010 with Takashi Otsuka as co-interviewer and interpreter.

Framing policy interventions

Cool Biz was a particular type of policy intervention. It did not involve pricing, taxation or regulation – instead it was framed, from the start, as an instrument of persuasion. The suggestion of turning down the air conditioning was one of a handful of 'tips' included in a broader programme of awareness raising and advice that together constituted the 'Team minus 6' campaign (the figure refers to the goal of reducing carbon emissions to 6% below the level in 1990).

The concept of cool business – meaning modern, go-ahead, and literally cooler – was actively developed and promoted by Yuriko Koike, the then minister of Environment. The Cool Biz strategy had several related parts: one was a media campaign and a programme of events, fashion shows and photo-opportunities cleverly designed to attract further news coverage. These were successful in establishing the Cool Biz brand.[1] Other parts of the same persuasive programme were more unconventional. For example, the prime minister at the time, Junichirō Koizumi, led the 'no tie' policy by example: ties were not allowed in cabinet meetings or anywhere else in government during the summer months. There was a further ruling that no government buildings were to be heated or cooled between 20 and 28°C.

Although Cool Biz represents a policy that impacts on other policies[2] – it was not conceptualised in this way. Instead, and as part of the Team minus 6 initiative, it was defined and understood as an exercise in eco-consciousness raising. Those involved were firmly of the view that more knowledge of environmental issues would lead individuals to change their behaviour, and to turn down the air conditioning (Shove 2010). Follow up surveys showed that although the Cool Biz programme was widely recognised, it had little or no impact on peoples' reported environmental awareness and commitment. The expected mechanism was mostly missing but the 'steering' was happening anyway. Figures vary but compared with estimated impact in 2005, savings for "2006 were even better, resulting in an estimated 1.14 million-ton reduction in CO_2 emission, the equivalent to the CO_2 emissions by about 2.5 million households for one month".[3]

Despite failing as a method of spreading environmental knowledge, Cool Biz was accidentally effective, feeding into a range of social and cultural processes, cascading through multiple policies, and taking hold via shifting, situated and also variable relations between practices of clothing, office working and cooling. As described below, Cool Biz policy was unquestionably part of these processes, and of the subtle reconstitution of meanings and situations.

Situating policy interventions

Policy interventions and attempts at steering are introduced at specific moments– e.g. 2005 in the case of Cool Biz. This is important in that the significance of 2005 plays out differently across parallel but relevant histories: including the history of Japanese climate change policy, the history of a particular government, of office life, of fashion, of gender and age relations and more. Cool Biz entered these coexisting flows of events, and was consequently caught up in a range of trends, for instance towards a more casual, international approach also occurring at a moment when cultural differences between younger and older generations and or between business sectors like the media or banking were evidently in flux. It is worth commenting on three of these trajectories, starting with how Cool Biz fitted into the cultural history of the business suit.

Timing, cooling and clothing

According to Toby Slade, a fashion historian, wearing a Western business suit in 1870s Japan signified being 'modern' and being part of a rapidly changing world (Slade 2009). These garments replaced other types of Japanese shirt and light kimono and it is not by chance that the word 'Sebiro' - Japanese for suit - is derived from Saville Row. But as our respondents explained, it was not so common to actually wear a jacket and tie in the period before air conditioning became normal. However, with mechanical cooling in place, it was usual for men to wear a 'traditional' European business suit, including jacket and tie, partly to counter the effects of cooling set at 22°C. Several respondents recalled this change:

> "it is only after air conditioning came into the business scene then people started to wear their ties and jackets all the time" ; .. "when you have a tie on the jacket comes together"; "the ties and jackets usually go together, but just not strict written rule, but just how it is."

In 2005 Cool Biz – no tie and jacket, and air conditioning set at 28°C – represented a temporal step back, re-normalising what had in any case been common prior to mechanical cooling. This involved some re-thinking not only of social codes and cues, but also of buttons.

Shirt collars had evolved along with jackets and ties. So what makes a good shirt when these items are missing and in particular how should the neck area be designed? Following Cool Biz, in 2005, the clothing industry was reported to have developed "many new designs to have the people not to have the tie on, so the design is changing for example you have the design on this side, the collar is higher. Then some buttons are different for example on the neck." In some sectors, the fashion industry cottoned on to Cool Biz as part of a wider trend: as one put it "Japanese working society is becoming more used to casual wear". Whether 'traditional' Japanese outfits might make a come-back, or oust Western inspired Cool Biz styles remains to be seen,[4] but the point is that the policy happened at a specific moment in the meanings of suit, tradition, modern and cool.

Timing and sartorial politics

In 2005, wearing an open necked shirt, and doing so in public (and as part of Cool Biz/climate change policy) had a two-way effect, positioning the prime-minister Koizumi as, go-ahead and modern and positioning him in contrast to traditional shirts, ties, people and policies. "Koizumi was - opposing people who oppose the breakthrough of the bad old arrangements, they [the old guard] wore the

ties – and then when Koizumi won the election heavily that also gave support to cool biz fashions". As another explained, Cool Biz stood for the future: "are you a new, go with the times kind of guy, or are you an old guard, sticking with a tie." [5] At the time, the no-tie policy was part of a much wider cultural rejection of certain traditions.

Timing and climate change politics

Cool Biz – as a policy – has another history within the discourse and politics of climate change, and within a family of policy strategies which focus on individual behaviour and choice, often associated with a limited role for government regulation. In terms of policy design, Cool Biz was officially situated as a policy instrument through which to influence if not the market then at least the cooling choices of individuals and businesses. Now, more than a decade later, the scope for this kind of policy action has shifted. It seems that the success of Cool Biz has limited Japan's capacity for demand reduction in this area. "In 2005, less than a third of 2,000 poll respondents said that Cool Biz had been implemented in their workplace. In 2007, the figure had risen to 47%, and in 2009 it had reached 57%."[6] According to one report, by 2011, "more than 62 percent of Japanese had adopted the Cool Biz air-conditioning goal".[7] A fresh campaign, called, 'Super Cool Biz' was launched in 2011, after the tsunami and Fukushima disaster. Super Cool Biz promoted sandals and shorter trousers, but by that point many office workers and companies had already become accustomed to the basic idea.

A further observation is that the realm of policy options is itself fluid, situated in a sequence of past interventions, which variously create or foreclose future opportunities. In this sense, 'steering' such as that represented by Cool Biz 2005 (revitalised as Super Cool Biz in 2011), has a lasting effect – it was not a one-off policy, but something that entered the field of practices and that consequently continues to shape what people do, in part defining the situations to which future policies respond.

Policies in practice

As already mentioned, Cool Biz was conceptualised as a simple behavioural campaign and was designed and evaluated in these terms. The outcome was achieved (considerable energy saving) but not through the anticipated process/route (consumer awareness, personal persuasion, information about C02 emissions). Closer investigation of how Cool Biz took hold, and of the experiences of business people from a range of different sectors reveals many more complex currents and domains of steering than any model of governance via behaviour change could ever accommodate.

Reconfiguring the fabric of daily life

The Cool Biz programme had two aspects, one focused on advertising and promotion – the other on direct action and doing. As already mentioned, government buildings were not heated or cooled between 20 and 28 degrees C, and the no-tie policy was in place (initially from June to September; now from May to October) and widely observed across the public sector. The government is not only a major employer it is also an institution with which many others interact on a daily basis. As we learned, resistance to new and to old conventions and methods of handling dilemmas entailed in actually implementing Cool Biz were bound up with the details and the social organisation of respect, politeness and hierarchy.

If it was to take effect at all, Cool Biz had to transform established codes of interaction, and with them the markers of social distinctions including categories of age, gender and seniority. In this case, as in many others, the policy had to become *part of* daily practice. This was clearly not a matter of policy somehow impacting from the outside. Instead, and as described, aspects both of

difference (respect, hierarchy) and conformity (respect, hierarchy) were redefined through Cool Biz and enacted within existing social networks.

With Cool Biz, it was quite obvious when the policy was being enacted. This visibility was important: one could literally see that the prime minister had no tie. However, the real bite or purchase of Cool Biz came through processes of interaction. For example, one respondent described the excruciatingly difficult situation of deciding what to wear for a job interview at the ministry of Finance. On the one hand a jacket and tie was quite simply required for such a formal occasion. On the other hand, wearing such an outfit would flout the Cool Biz code and leave the candidate wearing more formal attire than those who were doing the interview. Doing Cool Biz changed a whole range of situations and interactional politics. In this next extract, a computer technician explains that it made life easier.

> "The tie provides the atmosphere that is official, so that having no tie situation makes the circumstances quite unofficial, and so it is easier for him to work" (as computer technician).

In some contexts, Cool Biz represented a casualization and a levelling of office life and related hierarchies. Equally there was more uncertainty about what to wear, and more complications than before – as one explained: "So you have to get the right shirt as well, just in case it needs a tie." and you have to keep your tie in your pocket just in case. Responses to Cool Biz and interpretations of the scale and type of adjustment involved differed from one business sector to another: for example adapting to Cool Biz was reportedly more challenging for people employed in financial companies and banks, as compared with those involved in the media.

Cool Biz policy also had different implications for the daily practices of female office workers. As described, 'normal' clothing – prior to 2005 and after – was typically light weight, meaning that women were often cold and sometimes "freezing" when air conditioning was set at 22°C. Respondents talked about using blankets under the desk and slipping on cardigans when no one was looking in an effort to cope with conditions designed for men in suits. For women in these situations, Cool Biz entailed a welcome return of warmer temperatures but had no further consequences for the meaning or symbolic significance of office wear.

Rather than removing established hierarchies and distinctions, Cool Biz modified the ways in which these were enacted. It is at this level that policy has effect 'on the ground' – and without such effect, that is without being reproduced in and through practice, it is nothing. More fundamentally, it is through resolving these dilemmas and it is within these arrangements that the need for energy is constituted and negotiated.

Policy limits

Cool Biz focused on offices and widespread adoption of the policy in that context did nothing to limit the use of air conditioning in shops, cinemas or transport systems. In addition and since it was conceptualised as a behaviour change programme, there was no further attempt to embed Cool Biz conventions into office design. This was a major flaw in that one part of government (dealing with building codes) ended up reproducing a convention of 22°C as normal, whilst another part (the ministry of environment) called this convention into question. The focus on clothing and style - rather than infrastructures and systems of provision – reinforced this compartmentalised approach to policy making. Rather than being discussed and evaluated as a serious intervention in the energy system as a whole, Cool Biz represents what looks like a momentary and somewhat eccentric effort to harness fashion to the cause of climate change. It was demonstrably more effective than other subsequent initiatives, also promoted by the Japanese government, including 'cool' hair styles and 'cool' food. But as its association with these and other lifestyle campaigns[8] suggests, there was

limited policy understanding of how Cool Biz worked in practice. In policy terms, it has remained an outlier and an accidental success.

This makes the relative failure of 'Warm Biz', a parallel programme promoting warmer clothing and reduced heating during the winter months, all the more intriguing. How come such similar forms of policy steering, introduced at the same time and targeting the same sector of the population, had such different consequences? It is true that Warm Biz didn't get anything like the same attention, there were no winter fashion shows, and the cultural adjustment is different: no one can see the vest under the shirt and 20°C is only two degrees lower than 22.

More importantly, Cool and Warm Biz were never connected together and never designed as a strategic response (and as a systemic challenge) to established engineering conventions, to methods of conceptualising the dynamic relation between the body, clothing, heating cooling and outdoor temperatures, or to related social practices.

There have been attempts to diffuse Cool Biz as a policy idea to other countries in Asia and to the USA. For example, in 2008, temperatures were allowed to rise (and fall) in the United Nations building.[9] But there has not been a wholesale, international rejection of the bizarre arrangement of wearing warm clothing to counter the effect of mechanical cooling, or of wearing light clothing and using energy to provide additional heating. It is in any case obvious that introducing Cool and Warm Biz policies into other countries would not have a uniform[10] effect. As in Japan, the impact of such policy would be co-constituted by multiple, situationally specific histories of clothing, office work, gender relations, commercial and public sector distinction, etc.

Insights for steering demand

In this final section I highlight four observations based on the Cool Biz case, but of wider relevance to a discussion of how energy demand might be steered.

1. Timing

The conclusion that policy makers intervene in ongoing streams of social practice echoes the suggestion that steering is essentially about modulating these flows. It is now clear that there are multiple strands and timings: for example, the effect of Cool Biz reflected the state of play in office wear *and* in Japanese politics in 2005. A related point is that the evaluation of policy is also temporally specific. Over what period would it make sense to quantify the effect of Cool Biz? How do present forms of intervention and steering build on, or overlay these previous efforts? Within DEMAND we are expected to make a 'measurable' contribution to carbon reduction – but over what period? There are some interesting questions to pursue about how, in what terms and over what periods it might be possible to evaluate the impact of policies in practice.

2. The relation between policy process and social practices

It is an obvious point, but there are significantly different ways in which government policies are designed to impinge on individual practices and relations between them. For example, taxes are expected to have certain types of effect whereas regulation and persuasion are typically used in other situations and to achieve other ends. There is relatively little understanding of how these different modes translate in, and into practice. For example, Cool Biz is still seen as a marketing exercise yet it arguably took hold in much more direct ways: the government changed thermostat settings on a massive scale. Ideas of 'leadership' and hierarchy are potentially important[11] – but as indicated above, the routes through which influence travels are immensely complex, and situationally differentiated. In any event there is more to explore about how different types of policy impinge on different forms and types of social practice, each caught at a particular moment in their own development.

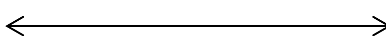
3. Jointed and disjointed policy making

Cool Biz is an interesting example of ambitious and unusual policy innovation in which new connections were made between the fashion industry and climate change politics, and between modernity and energy demand reduction. At the same time, and because the policy was situated as a behaviour change programme, it was totally disconnected from other potential areas of influence, for instance in building regulation, or in the standards of office design. Its impact, in practice, has been limited by virtue of this particular combination of associations and consequent disconnections. Again a simple point, but policies are positioned in relation to each other, and this is important for how they are framed, and with which other forms of intervention they do or do not connect.

4. Unintended and accidental steering

Looking back at Cool Biz more than ten years on it is possible to differentiate between imagined, actual and potential relations between policy and practice. The table below works with these distinctions and summarises some of what has been said above.

Imagined, actual and potential roles of policy in practice

Imagined role of policy in practice	**Actual role of policy in practice**	**Potential role of policy in practice**
Cool Biz was designed to promote environmental awareness	Cool Biz represented an effective intervention in the social process of keeping cool	Cool Biz could be seen as part of a systemic energy programme.
Advertising impact and leverage were important measures of success	Modify shared conventions, redefine normality, modify cues and codes of office life	Government could revise CO2 emissions estimates assuming no heating or cooling between 20 and 28°C
	Government changed the rules of the game, new conventions emerged, social practices have been reconfigured.	Government could re-write building codes and standards assuming no heating or cooling between 20 and 28°C.
BUT: two puzzles *a) Cool Biz worked but not because of increased environmental awareness.* *b) No other 'green' lifestyle campaign has worked as well.*	Gap between imagined, actual and potential roles of policy 	*BUT: this potential role is excluded because of the enduring power of the imagined role. The imagined role prevents understanding of the actual role.*

The wider implication of this analysis is that forms of steering can be constrained by the terms in which they are imagined and expected to work. This can blind the policy process, preventing understanding of how accidental embedding in practice comes about, and limiting the scope for exploiting that further.

5. Policy (in action) is not made by policy makers alone

Cool Biz found its way into the fabric of daily life but Warm Biz did not. It is stating the obvious to say that effective policy and steering is made when it is reproduced and enacted in practice, and in specific contexts and situations. The more challenging questions are to do with how policy and practice actually intersect. Various projects in DEMAND, including studies of office standards (Noel Cass, John Connaughton and James Faulconbridge), and of what we are calling invisible energy governance (Sarah Royston, Jan Selby) provide some insight into how steering works, how

standardised policy initiatives filter through different institutions and situations and how they have effect on the ground. As these efforts demonstrate, deliberate attempts at steering and policy intervention are best understood as part of the dynamics of social practice, not as levers, rudders or instruments of change that are somehow operated from the outside.

Notes

[1] It is interesting that a government ministry created a 'brand' – companies could apply to use the Cool Biz logo for free.

[2] At the highest level there is the policy of meeting emissions targets. Then there is a specific policy-driven eco-awareness campaign. There are also 'policies' of heating and cooling and of dress codes – as adopted by government as a major employer, and by businesses of all kinds. In cases where there is no agreed 'dress code' individual employees have to come up with something like a policy of their own: what should they were and when, and how should they navigate between these other more official 'policy' positions?

[3] http://www.env.go.jp/en/earth/tm6/061110.html. As far as I know, efforts to measure the impact of Cool Biz on carbon emissions did not continue beyond 2006. Beyond that year the effects of the policy were presumably too diffuse, not liked to a specific media campaign, and too routinized to identify or measure. This is an interesting point about how policy effects are calculated, and when that calculation stops – even though the 'effect' continues.

[4] Yuriko Koike fronted a fashion show entitled 'Cool Asia' in 2006 featuring cabinet ministers, people from foreign embassies, and Japanese and overseas personalities, each wearing their own national style of traditionally cool clothing. http://www.env.go.jp/en/earth/tm6/060516.html

[5] Another option, the 'Safari suit' was too strongly and too negatively associated with the politics of the 1970s, and with a different moment in Japanese-Western relations. There was some idea that these outfits (shorts and short sleeves) were fine for long-legged Westerners but that they looked ridiculous when worn by typically shorter Japanese men.

[6] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-13620900

[7] http://tech.mit.edu/V131/N15/japan.html.

[8] The current strategy, which has the slogan 'fun to share' suggests that saving the planet can be enjoyable if people work together in this cause: http://www.env.go.jp/en/focus/140521.html. It is also firmly in the tradition of an ABC style of policy making. (Shove 2010).

[9] For some reason the temperature ranges are narrower: "The trial "Cool UN" in August 2008 involves increasing the air conditioning temperature setting from 22.2°C to 25°C in the majority of the Secretariat building, and from 21.1°C to 23.9°C in the conference rooms: http://ourworld.unu.edu/en/cool-united-nations

[10] As it were!

[11] It is often said that the Cool Biz policy process only worked because Japan is a conformist society and because formal hierarchies (with the prime minister at the top) remain important. A more persuasive point is that policy processes are always and inevitably filtered through local historically specific arrangements.

References

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