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21

Blame Games

Stories of Crises, Causes, and Culprits

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Introduction

Following a crisis, questions are asked about its causes and consequences, the management thereof, and whether the crisis could have been prevented. In other words, did the occurrence of the crisis or the handling thereof constitute a failure for which someone or an organization can be held accountable? On the one hand, there is a need to learn from the crisis, to ensure it will not happen again. On the other hand, there is a need to hold someone or something accountable for what happened. The accountability phase of crisis management therefore consists of learning from and holding people and/or organizations accountable for what happened (Resodihardjo 2020).

It is during this phase that blame games can occur: fingers are pointed at persons or organizations who (partially) caused, contributed to, or mishandled the crisis. These actors will respond to being blamed. These responses can range from trying to minimize, deflect, or shift blame away to acknowledging responsibility. The latter could include apologizing and even resigning.

In an ideal world, the accountability phase of crisis management is balanced: both learning and holding actors accountable take place in equal measure. The reality is that blame games can become dominant during this phase, thereby hampering the learning process as people will not feel free to share any mistakes they made (Resodihardjo 2020). After all, the public's, the media's, and politicians' demand for resignations and the need to know what happened have increased the last couple of decades (De Vries 2004; Weaver 2018; Hinterleitner and Sager 2019). However, that pressing need for a culprit clashes with the need to learn (Hilliard, Kovras, and Loizides 2021). Learning requires a climate in which people feel safe to discuss what happened and what went wrong. But if people are afraid that opening up will result in getting fired, they will be less inclined to do so (May 1992; Weick and Sutcliffe 2007; Guerin, McCrae, and Shepherd 2018). If learning from crises is hampered, chances are that similar events will happen in the future. It is therefore important to understand how blame games work, because that could potentially help actors better manage the blame game and thus help create a more balanced accountability phase (Resodihardjo 2020).

Achieving a more balanced accountability phase also requires an understanding of the important role framing plays in the accountability phase. To learn from crises, inquiries are

appointed. Their terms of reference need to be formulated. Depending on how this is phrased, certain aspects and actors will not be included in the investigation. During blame games, framing also plays an important role, ranging from how an event is defined (as a crisis or not) to how actors respond to blame (Resodihardjo 2020).

In recent years, the study of blame games has taken flight, helping us understand how blame games work, which blame responses actors can use prior to and during blame games, and how factors such as holidays and rituals affect how the blame game evolves (Hood et al. 2009; Hood 2011; Resodihardjo et al. 2016; Resodihardjo 2020; Miller and Reeves 2021). Academics have studied various cases, including populism (Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou, and Exadaktylos 2014), festivals (Resodihardjo et al. 2016), immigration (Rubenstein 2018), public transport (Bach and Wegrich 2019), and floods (Albrecht 2021) across numerous countries such as Tanzania (Mdee and Mushi 2021), Australia (Hinterleitner and Sager 2015), Germany (Bach and Wegrich 2019), Sweden (Johannesson and Weinryb 2021), Norway (Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud 2018), the United States (Malhotra and Kuo 2008), Israel (Gilman 2021), Greece and Turkey (Zahariadis, Petridou, and Oztig 2020), and China (Li, Ni, and Wang 2021).

Recently, more attention is paid to multilevel blame games. Multilevel governance (MLG) is the reality in which governments operate, whether it is within a country or as a member of, for instance, the European Union (EU), and whether it is with other government parties or with a combination of public and private partners. This focus on multilevel blame games is all the more important as the outbreak and handling of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) shows the various ways in which actors blame others. President Donald Trump, for instance, blamed the World Health Organization (WHO) and China (McNeil, Jr. and Jacobs 2020; Flinders 2021), while questions were raised about the way in which vaccines were purchased within the EU (Deutsch 2021). Moreover, Flinders (2021) points out that relying so much on experts while managing the COVID-19 outbreak has consequences when it comes to holding people accountable as experts can be used to avoid blame. All in all, that means that COVID-19 blame games are likely to involve blame at multiple levels.

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, numerous investigations will be conducted regarding the causes and consequences of the outbreak as well as the handling of the crisis. Though there may be a deep-seated wish to learn from the outbreak to ensure it will not happen again, chances are that blame games will dominate COVID-19's accountability phase (Flinders 2020).

Providing enough space to learn during the accountability phase, requires a good understanding of how blame games work as that will help actors manage the blame game and hopefully minimize its impact on the learning process. This chapter therefore aims to provide a description of how blame games work, while paying particular attention to multilevel blame games. Addressing multilevel blame games in this chapter also helps achieve a second aim: providing a description of state-of-the-art research. Considering the fact that the increasing interest in multilevel blame games is a recent development, this section aims to provide a general idea of what multilevel blame games are.

The chapter will be structured as follows. Following a brief introduction to blame games, the link between framing and blame games will be described and attention will be paid to multilevel blame games. The literature used for these sections comes from various disciplines as blame games and reputation management are not only studied in the field of crisis management but also in the fields of business administration, political science, and public administration. In the concluding section, a brief reflection is provided while pointing out various avenues for future research.

Before we continue, however, it is important to address how this chapter relates to the concept of failure – the overarching theme of this book. Because of my research background in crisis

management and public administration, this chapter starts from a crisis management perspective: an operational crisis happens (such as a monster truck driving into an audience), questions are raised, and depending on the answers to these questions, a blame game will ensue that could hamper the learning process following a crisis. But as you will see in the next sections, blame game dynamics (ranging from constructing an event as a crisis to assigning and responding to blame) also pertain to policy and organizational failures (cf. Best 2016). The text on constructing an event as a crisis, for instance, can thus also be read as a text on constructing an event as a failure.

A Brief Introduction to the Blame Game Process

In this chapter, blame games are defined as that period of time when actors deal with blame, starting with the event being defined as a crisis and ending with the public being content with actors' responses to the blame. The latter could mean, for instance, resignation, but also surviving a debate in arenas such as Parliament or municipal councils (Resodihardjo 2020).

According to Brändström and Kuipers (2003), who will be blamed depends on whether the crisis is seen as a one-off event or not. They argue that if an event is seen as an incident, it is likely that someone or an organization at the operational level will be blamed. If, however, the event is not perceived as incidental but as something illustrating a bigger crisis, the focus will be on the strategic or political level such as a minister.

How much blame one receives, depends on a myriad of factors. These include how much avoidable harm the crisis caused (no harm, no foul) (McGraw, Todorov, and Kunreuther 2011; Hood 2011); the extent to which someone caused or contributed to the crisis (less responsibility means less blame) (Stone 1997; De Vries 2004; Coombs 2007a; 2007b; Boin, 't Hart, and McConnell 2009; Hood 2011); the reputation one has prior to a crisis (it is more difficult to attack an actor with a strong reputation) (Coombs and Holladay 2006; Coombs 2007a; 2007b; Hinterleitner and Sager 2019); and crisis recurrence (since one could have learned from the previous crisis, more blame will be attributed) (Coombs 2007a; 2007b).

Reactions to blame (or the threat thereof) can be categorized into proactive and reactive strategies. The former refers to strategies already in place prior to the start of the crisis and consist of two types: agency and policy strategies. Actors can try to limit or deflect blame by creating, for instance, a distinctly separate organization responsible for implementing policy (the agency). If something goes wrong during the implementation stage, actors can then point the finger at this agency. The policy strategy works along similar lines: following a crisis, actors can point to existing policies, regulations, or standard operating procedures as an excuse or justification for what happened (Hood et al. 2009; Hood 2011; Hinterleitner and Sager 2019).

When successfully applied, these proactive strategies will help limit or even deflect blame. When no such strategies are in place or when these strategies are not successful, reactive strategies come into play.

These reactive strategies are so-called presentational strategies. These strategies are mostly rhetorical in nature, but actions such as resigning and appointing an inquiry (Hood 2002; 2011; Resodihardjo 2020). Within the literature, various presentational strategies are mentioned (Resodihardjo 2020). Hood et al. (2009), for instance, distinguish three categories of presentational strategies where actors (A) claim there is no problem; (B) admit the problem's existence but deny responsibility for said problem; and (C) acknowledge that there is a problem and that they are responsible.

One of the B-category strategies revolves around actors trying to shift blame away. Hood (2011) points out that blame can be shifted downwards, upwards, outwards, and inwards/

sideways (Hood 2011). Downwards and upwards refer to shifting blame to subordinates and superordinates respectively. A prime minister blaming a minister, or a minister blaming the director of an agency are examples of shifting blame downwards. An example of upwards blame shifting could be the agency's director response that the minister cut the budget, which explains why the agency failed to deliver. Examples that Hood (2011, 42) provides for inwards/sideways and outwards are respectively "blaming other agencies" and "blaming media, enemies, saboteurs."

As Hood et al.'s (2009) categorization shows, presentational strategies range from defensive (there is no problem) to accommodative (problem and responsibility are acknowledged). Other authors also point out that some responses are more defensive than others (Benoit 1997; Bovens et al. 1999; Ihlen 2002; Coombs 2007a). This raises the question which blame response to select when. Two assumptions within the blame game literature are helpful to understand how actors select their blame responses. First, the so-called staged retreat approach assumes that actors will initially respond to blame in quite a defensive manner; only when their blame responses do not have the desired result (i.e. ending or lessening the blame they face) do actors move towards a less defensive response (Hearit 2001; Ihlen 2002; Hood et al. 2009; Hood, Jennings, and Copeland 2016). Second, blame responses should match the level of blame one is facing. If blame levels are low, actors can use rather defensive blame responses. If, however, blame levels are high and actors opt for a defensive response, then this will only result in a further increase of the blame levels as people will be angered by the actor's blame response. According to the second hypothesis, a well-selected blame response which matches the blame level should result in decreasing blame levels (Resodihardjo, Van Eijk, and Carroll 2012; Resodihardjo 2020).

The Importance of Framing in Blame Games

Most of the blame responses that actors can choose from are rhetorical in nature; language is used to convince others, for instance, that the situation is not that bad. Rhetorical blame responses thus revolve around framing.

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

Entman 1993, 52, emphasis in original

Considering this definition of framing, it comes as no surprise that framing plays an important role throughout the whole blame game, starting with defining the event as a crisis. A distinction can be made here between events that are clearly a crisis (such as the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami) and events that are not immediately recognizable as a crisis. The latter actually happens quite often and requires people reaching a consensus on whether or not the event was a crisis ('t Hart 1993; Specter 2019). Issues such as which aspects to take into consideration when determining whether an event (or its handling) is a crisis (or a failure) as well as shifting perspectives over time (what was once seen as a fiasco is now seen as a success), all play a part in this discussion (Bovens and 't Hart 1996; McConnell 2010a; 2010b; 2011; Houston, Pfefferbaum, and Rosenholtz 2012).

That means that framing also plays a role in determining what the crisis is about. How the debate unfolds affects which aspects of the event will come to the fore and which elements will be neglected (Wood 2006; Farley et al. 2007; Pralle 2009; Hurka 2017; Prater and Lindell 2000; Resodihardjo 2022). A single event, such as a flood, can thus become defined differently depending on how the debate progresses. The debate could revolve, for example, around the

flood's economic effects, the problems encountered while trying to rebuild the area, or the populations which were disproportionately affected by the flood.

So sometimes a crisis is clearly recognizable and sometimes it takes a while for an event to become defined as a crisis. More importantly, sometimes an event becomes defined as a non-crisis. That is important because if a consensus is reached that social norms and values are at stake, a blame game will ensue, but if a consensus is reached that there was no crisis, then no blame game will start (Brändström and Kuipers 2003; Boin, 't Hart, and McConnell 2009).

The discussion whether or not an event was a crisis not only creates opportunities for actors wanting to avoid blame to introduce arguments that there was no crisis, but also allows them to argue that the situation or its effects were not that bad (Benoit 1997; Boin, 't Hart, and McConnell 2009). This brings us to the next stage of blame games: how much blame actors will receive.

If actors are able to claim that the crisis' effects were small, then the level of perceived harm will be low. Consequently, there will not be a lot of blame (Boin, 't Hart and McConnell 2009; Hood 2011). Similarly, if actors are able to show that the cause of the crisis fell outside of people's sphere of influence, then it is difficult to blame anyone (Stone 1997; Coombs 2007b; Boin, 't Hart, and McConnell 2009). However, in societies where the public increasingly relies on government to prevent and deal with any risks, it will be more difficult to use the Act of God argument. Following natural hazards such as floods, for instance, questions will be raised about issues such as the lack of timely warnings to evacuate (Resodihardjo 2020). As the Act of God argument becomes less and less common, someone or an organization can be blamed for causing or contributing to the crisis (Burgess 2012; Dodds 2015), which requires a response: the presentational strategies.

Since presentational strategies used in blame games are mostly rhetorical in nature, blame responses are all about framing. Even the blame response of appointing an inquiry is influenced by framing as the way in which the inquiry's terms of references are framed will determine the scope of the investigation (Resodihardjo 2020). For this chapter, one blame response is of particular importance: shifting/deflecting blame to others. Blame can be shifted to, for example, superordinates, subordinates, and other organizations. That means that blame games can involve actors from different levels, hence the concept of multilevel blame games.

Multilevel Blame Games

During blame games, actors try to minimize, deflect, and/or shift blame away. Actors can deflect and shift blame to actors at the same level (e.g. multiple ministries were responsible for different aspects of a large-scale evacuation and now the ministries are pointing to each other to explain why the evacuation was a failure) or at a different level (e.g. a minister blames the director of an agency). As such, multilevel blame games are not a new phenomenon. Hood (2002), for instance, already pointed out that agencies will not automatically accept the blame being shifted towards them by the delegator. What is new, is the recent expansion of the scope of blame game research by specifically focusing on how blame games work in multilevel governance systems (MLGSs).

Though much can be said about MLG and governance (see for example Levi-Faur 2012; Peters 2012; Bache 2012; Rhoades 2012; Bache et al. 2015; Tortola 2017), engaging with this debate falls outside the scope of this chapter. Considering this chapter's focus on framing and blame games, particularly multilevel blame games, it would suffice to say that in this chapter, MLG is about government actors' need to work with other (non-)governmental actors to achieve government objectives. They do so by working in and trying to manage complex networks that

span multiple government/administrative levels and where “powers, roles and responsibilities” have been delegated along vertical and horizontal lines (Bache et al. 2015, 69; Levi-Faur 2012; Peters 2012). These MLGSs can be located within a country or encompass multiple countries as happens, for instance, in the EU (Bache 2012; Bache et al. 2015; Tortola 2017).

Considering the complexity of MLGSs, there is an inherent danger that accountability will take a back seat. Numerous actors are involved (the so-called problem of ‘many hands’ (Bovens 2007)) and responsibilities are diffused throughout the system (Bache 2012; Bache et al. 2015; Bach and Wegrich 2019; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild, Kriegmair, and Rittberger 2020). Moreover, even though accountability mechanisms may be in place in some areas of the MLGSs, “accountability to the top of the chain of delegation for the governance of governance networks” might be lacking (Bache et al. 2015, 71). Labels such as fuzzy accountability, accountability gap, and accountability vacuum are used to address the accountability problems in MLGSs (Bache et al. 2015). Not knowing who can be held accountable, opens the door for blame games (Connolly and Elliott 2020). No wonder then that there is an increasing interest in multilevel blame games.

So, what are multilevel blame games? Considering the above explanation of blame games and MLG, the following definition of multilevel blame games is proposed in this chapter: multilevel blame games are blame games where actors use the complexity and fuzziness of MLGSs to move blame to other actors at either the same or a different level (i.e., higher or lower). No distinction is made between types of actors. In other words, both governmental and non-governmental actors can be part of MLGSs and thus of multilevel blame games.

As in any blame game, structure determines who can be potentially blamed. Who is involved? To what extent can actors be held accountable for what happened? The fuzziness and complexity of MLGSs, however, allows for more opportunities to shift blame than a straightforward relationship between, for instance, an agency implementing policy and its parent ministry (Bache 2012; Bache et al. 2015; Bach and Wegrich 2019; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020).

Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl (2020) do point out two possible limits to whom can be blamed in MLGSs. First, “the more that policymaking responsibility is located on their own level, the more difficult it will be for them to shift the blame for contested policies onto another level” (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020, 957). And second, it can be quite difficult in MLGSs to establish who was responsible for making policy as so many actors at various levels were involved. It is therefore quite likely that the focus will move to those actors responsible for implementing policies (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild, Kriegmair, and Rittberger 2020).

Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl (2020) also posit the idea that actors in MLGSs will have a preference for blaming actors positioned on a different level than their own. Two reasons inform this assumption. First, actors will meet actors at the same level more often than actors from other levels. This breeds loyalty between actors on the same level. And second, actors are quite dependent on other actors at the same level. Consequently, it would not be smart to blame actors whose help you will need in the future (Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020). Although Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl’s work and ideas hold a lot of appeal, it is important to note that their work is focused on EU multilevel blame games and their ideas still need to be tested in non-EU MLGSs.

Bach and Wegrich (2019) did look at a domestic MLGS case (public transport in Berlin), paying particular attention to the relationship between delegator (executive politicians) and delegatee (service provider) while testing the staged-retreat hypothesis. Their research shows the dynamic relation between different MLGS levels as blame shifted from one level to another. Moreover, their research indicates that it would be interesting to further explore (1) how an

MLGS offers opportunities for all actors – not just executive politicians – to shift blame to other actors within the MLGS as well as (2) the link between the position one holds in the MLGS and how quickly one moves from a defensive to a more accommodative blame response (i.e. the staged retreat).

Future Research of Blame Games, Crises, and Failures

This chapter started by pointing out that questions will be asked following a crisis: What caused it? What are its effects? Was the crisis managed properly? And could this event have been prevented? In other words, questions are raised to determine whether the occurrence of the crisis or the handling thereof constitutes a failure for which someone or an organization can be held responsible. Framing plays a crucial role as crisis, causes, and effects (particularly harm) need to be defined as such. Depending on how the debate evolves, a blame game will either start, be quenched quickly, or never come into play. After all, if the event is not seen as a crisis, no blame game will start.

Understanding how blame games work helps in better understanding how the accountability phase following crises works. The accountability phase consists of learning from the crisis (to ensure such an event will not happen again) and holding actors accountable for what happened. Ideally, the two are balanced. In reality, learning and blame games can be at odds as fear for resignations could make people hesitant to open up about what happened and what went wrong. But if important knowledge is not shared, no proper learning can take place (Resodihardjo 2020).

To ensure a more balanced accountability phase, with plenty of room to learn from what went wrong, a better understanding of blame games is needed. That is why this chapter describes how blame games work and what role framing plays in this process. In this chapter, particular attention is paid to multilevel blame games as complex networks become more common. Considering this trend, it is worth exploring possible future avenues for research regarding multilevel blame games. This, as well as two ways to further explore framing and failure in blame game research, will be addressed in this section on avenues for future research.

Multilevel Blame Games

Complexity affects how blame games evolve. If the situation is not complicated; blame games will be straightforward when it comes to the question of who can be held accountable. The Dutch Minister of Justice and Safety's failure, for instance, to abide by social distancing rules on his wedding day in August 2020 resulted in a straightforward blame game: he failed to follow COVID-19 rules, so he was held accountable and had to defend himself in Parliament. In more complex situations, where multiple actors at multiple government/administrative levels are involved in making and implementing policy, it becomes more difficult to pinpoint responsibility if something goes wrong.

Multilevel blame games are not a new phenomenon in the blame game literature. Hood (Hood 2002; 2011; Hood et al. 2009), for instance, already introduced the proactive/anticipatory strategy of creating agencies onto which future blame could be deflected while also stating that these agencies will not always accept this blame. Recently, more attention is being paid to multilevel blame games in the blame game literature in the context of MLGSs. The added value of this recent interest is showing and helping us understand how the complexity of current governance structures affects blame games. This research shows that indeed responsibility becomes diffused in MLGSs because of the many hands involved and that blame does shift between levels (Bach and Wegrich 2019).

More research is needed to understand how blame games work in MLGSs. A potentially interesting case to further our knowledge on multilevel blame games is the handling of the COVID-19 outbreak. This outbreak is a so-called transboundary crisis. A transboundary crisis is a crisis which not only crosses state borders, but also crosses borders within a country as different administrative levels, sectors, organizations, and disciplines have to work together to manage the crisis (Ansell, Boin, and Keller 2010). That means that MLGSs are everywhere when it comes to handling the COVID-19 cases, be it supranationally (e.g. the EU buying vaccines) or domestically (e.g. crisis management networks set up to deal with the outbreak). Depending on how evaluations and blame games evolve after the COVID-19 outbreak, at least three avenues could be explored.

First, questions raised in current multilevel blame games can be explored further. Bach and Wegrich's (2019) research raises questions about the extent to which staged retreat-approaches differ per actor within an MLGS and the extent to which an MLGS opens opportunities for all involved to blame partners in the MLGS. Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl (2020) posit intriguing assumptions on blame opportunities and preferences in MLGSs which should be explored outside an EU setting.

Second, experts play a prominent role in the management of the COVID-19 outbreak. Flinders (2021) points out that experts could be used to deflect blame. After all, actors could say that they were just following the advice of experts. The question is whether blame will be indeed shifted towards experts and if so, how would they respond? After all, Hood (2002) argues that delegates do not necessarily roll over when faced with blame; they can fight back and (try to) shift the blame back to the delegator. Could something similar happen if experts got blamed?

And third, since COVID-19 is a transboundary crisis involving numerous MLGSs, it allows for a comparative study to determine to what extent MAD takes place. In this case, MAD does not stand for mutually assured destruction, but for multiple accountabilities disorder (Flinders 2020). As stated in the previous section, responsibilities are diffused in MLGSs due to the many hands involved in making and implementing policies (Bache 2012; Bache et al. 2015; Bach and Wegrich 2019; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild, Kriegmair, and Rittberger 2020). This does not mean that there are no accountability mechanisms in place; there are. But "accountability to the top of the chain of delegation for the governance of governance networks" might be lacking (Bache et al. 2015, 71). Considering the complexity of handling the COVID-19 crisis, there could be a problem with too many accountability processes in which actors have to participate. If various sectors, political institutions, crisis networks, and safety boards all hold their own investigation into what happened (or appoint an inquiry to do so), actors will be overwhelmed. As Flinders writes, MAD

occurs when politicians and their officials are expected to account through so many different accountability channels and to so many scrutiny bodies – which themselves often demand very different forms of information and are blame-orientated rather than understanding-focussed – that they are distracted from focussing on their core tasks. Put slightly differently, MAD occurs when senior staffs are expected to spend too much time 'accounting-up' instead of focussing on 'delivering-down' which, in turn, increases the chances that mistakes and errors will be made which would, in turn, simply increase the scrutiny placed upon them.

Flinders 2021, 496

In other words, the diffusion of responsibilities within MLGSs combined with the various accountability mechanisms scattered throughout MLGSs makes it possible that either too many or not enough accountability mechanisms are activated. However, as stated at the beginning of

this chapter, learning and holding actors accountable are equally important in the accountability phase following a crisis. If blame games are dominant, learning will probably take a back seat as people could be scared to open up about mistakes made for fear of getting fired. Conversely, if blame games are too light or mild, and actors can get away by simply saying sorry, chances are that no one feels the need to dig deeper into the underlying causes of the problem. In either case, learning could be hampered, opening the door for future recurrences (Resodihardjo 2020).

Framing, Failure, and Blame Games

As stated in the introduction, this chapter is written from a crisis management perspective. This does not mean that blame games do not pertain to failures; on the contrary, since “failures imply responsibility, most failures involve debate and disagreement about who is to blame and for what” (Best 2016, 42). In fact, the concept of failure is part and parcel of the blame game literature (e.g. Brändström and Kuipers 2003; Hood et al. 2009; Bach and Wegrich 2019).

Having said that, McConnell’s work offers two intriguing ways to further explore how failures are framed in the context of blame games, particularly how either a policy or the management of a crisis is framed as a failure or success. First, in his work on policy success and failure, McConnell (2010a; 2010b) acknowledges that a policy is not simply a success or a failure; instead, a policy can simultaneously contain elements of failure and success depending on who is doing the framing (McConnell 2010b). He distinguishes three different dimensions (politics, process, and programmes) – for each dimension it is possible to argue whether a policy was a failure/success using certain claims such as the extent to which the target group benefits from the policy and how much support there is for the policy (McConnell 2010b). And second, McConnell points out in his 2011 publication how difficult it is to evaluate crisis management – and thus to determine whether the management of a crisis was a success or a failure – while offering clues on how to assess the management of a crisis. As such, McConnell’s publications offer insights which researchers can use to analyse in a structured manner how blame game debates evolve, and which criteria are used (and by whom) to define a policy or the management of a crisis as a success or a failure.

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