

Understanding Public Policymaking

Policy Implementation

POSC 315 - Week 7-1

Understanding Implementation in the Policy Process

What is Policy Implementation?

Implementation is the process of putting policies into action, carried out by the bureaucracy and sometimes influenced by the courts.

- **Importance:** A policy is only effective if it is implemented well.
- Implementation can be a battleground for power and influence.

Key Concepts

- Implementation is one of the most critical stages in the policy process.
- **Bureaucratic Discretion:** Government agencies have leeway in interpreting policies, but are not free from constraints or biases.

Key Concepts (cont.)

- **Street-Level Bureaucrats:** Frontline workers who interact directly with citizens, often have significant discretion in policy implementation.
- **Policy Feedback:** Implementation can reveal flaws in policy design, leading to feedback and potential policy change.

Key Concepts (cont.)

- **Policy Tools:** Instruments used to implement policy, such as regulations, grants, and direct services.
- **Policy Networks:** The complex relationships among actors involved in policy implementation, including government agencies, interest groups, and the public.

Key Concepts (cont.)

- **Policy Capacity:** The ability of government agencies to effectively implement policies, often influenced by resources, expertise, and political support.

- **Policy Evaluation:** Assessing the effectiveness of policy implementation, often through monitoring and feedback mechanisms.

The Complexity of Joint Action

(Bardach, 1977)

- Policy implementation often involves multiple organizations and actors.
- Success depends on effective *interorganizational relationships*.
- Bardach views implementation as a game of "assembly" and "bargaining".

Interorganizational Relationships

- Each organization may have its own:
 - Goals
 - Priorities
 - Constraints
- Different perspectives and success metrics can lead to disagreements.
- Bardach's "games": Dilemmas of administration and politics.

Challenges of Interorganizational Relationships

When a policy depends on multiple actors, numerous issues can arise:

- **Incompatible Goals:** Organizations may have different priorities or interpretations of the policy.
- **Simultaneous Commitments:** Agencies often have other projects and commitments that can delay progress.
- **Dependence on Other Actors:** A delay by one actor can stall the entire process.

Challenges of Interorganizational Relationships (cont.)

- **Leadership Conflicts:** Disagreements about who should lead can create friction.
- **Agreement Without Power:** Agencies may agree on what needs to be done but lack the authority to act effectively.
- **Bardach's "Scenario Writing":** The importance of anticipating potential implementation problems.

Bardach's Implementation Perspective

- **Implementation as Assembly:** Putting together program elements from various sources.
- **Strategic Interaction:** Actors pursue strategies to achieve their goals.
- **Fixing the Game:** Designing implementation to reduce negative games and promote positive ones.
- **Fixer Role:** The importance of a central figure who can manage the implementation process.

Four Generations of Implementation Studies

First Generation: 1960s-1970s

Focus: Case studies of specific programs shaped the initial theories of implementation.

- **Martha Derthick's "New Towns in Town" (1969):** Explored urban policy implementation, emphasizing local needs.
- **Pressman and Wildavsky's "Implementation" (1973):** Showed the challenges of translating federal policy into local action, particularly the complexity of "joint action."

Lessons from Early Studies

- Success requires commitment from both local and federal actors.
- Local preferences and conditions are crucial for effective policy design.
- Implementation involves multiple actors, making collaboration challenging —the *"Complexity of Joint Action"*.

Second Generation: 1980s-1990s

This era saw attempts to build theoretical models of implementation:

- **Top-Down Models:** Policy as a rational, linear process, with clear goals and centralized control.
- **Bottom-Up Models:** Emphasis on the role of local implementers and "street-level bureaucrats."

Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Models

Top-Down	Bottom-Up
Focuses on policy makers' intent and central control.	Emphasizes local flexibility and adaptation to community needs.

Top-Down	Bottom-Up
Clear lines of authority, but less adaptable to local conditions.	More responsive to specific local contexts, but can lead to inconsistencies.

Third Generation: 2000s

A synthesis of earlier models, recognizing the value of both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

- **Key Idea:** Implementation is about communication between policymakers and those carrying out the policy.
- Success requires clear goals, adequate resources, and a supportive political environment.

Fourth Generation: 2010s and Beyond

- Focus has shifted to **program implementation**—less on grand theories, more on "what works" for specific programs.
- Recognizes the dynamic and interactive nature of implementation, especially across different sectors like health and education.

Challenges in Policy Implementation

- **Complexity:** Policies often involve multiple actors and agencies, making coordination difficult.
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited funding and staff can hinder effective implementation.
- **Political Resistance:** Opposition from interest groups or political rivals can stall or derail implementation.

Summary of Implementation

- Implementation translates policy into action; without it, policies are ineffective.
- Implementation involves complex interactions among different agencies and actors.
- Different models offer insights: from top-down control to flexible bottom-up approaches.

Discussion Questions

- What are the key challenges in policy implementation?
- How can policymakers and implementers work together effectively?
- What role does evaluation play in improving policy implementation?

References

- Bardach, Eugene. 1977. *The Implementation Game*.
- Derthick, Martha. 1969. *New Towns in Town*.
- Pressman, Jeffrey L., and Aaron Wildavsky. 1973. *Implementation*.
- Sabatier, Paul A., and Daniel A. Mazmanian. 1980. *The Implementation of Public Policy*.