

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 Policy Implementation: Interorganizational Relationships

Based on Eugene Bardach's *The Implementation Game* (1977)

1. Joint Action in Policy Implementation

- Involves multiple organizations and actors
- Success relies on effective **interorganizational relationships**
- Bardach describes implementation as a game of "**assembly**" and "**bargaining**"

2. Challenges in Interorganizational Relationships

- Organizations may have differing:
 - **Goals**
 - **Priorities**
 - **Constraints**
- Key issues:
 - **Incompatible goals**
 - **Multiple commitments**
 - **Dependence** on other actors
 - **Leadership conflicts**
 - **Agreements** without the power to act

3. Bardach's Perspective on Implementation

- **Assembly**: Combining program elements from different sources
- **Strategic Interaction**: Actors pursue strategies to achieve their goals
- **Fixing the Game**: Reducing negative outcomes, promoting positive collaboration
- **Fixer Role**: A central figure who manages the implementation process

4. Strategies for Effective Implementation

- **Scenario Writing**: Anticipating potential problems in advance
- Encouraging clear and open **communication** between organizations
- Establishing **shared goals** and clear success metrics
- Empowering a "**fixer**" to oversee and coordinate the 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.
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*.