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.

## Implementation Basics

* 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 ("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.

# 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*.