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*.