

Review on Concepts and Theoretical Approaches of Policy Implementation

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Abstract: Policy implementation involves translating the goals and objectives of policy into action. This article reviews the literature on the topic 'Review on concepts & theoretical approaches of policy implementation.' The review article focuses on the state and status of policy implementation as a discipline, the concept of policy implementation, the theoretical approaches for policy implementation, and the factors/challenges affecting successful policy implementation performance, based on a review of the literature and analysis of different scholars. Finally, most researches focus on policy implementation as only one part of the public policy process cycle. There is no single perspective better than the rest one size fits all approach to implementation. But policy implementation can be studied using various theoretical tools from different perspectives.

Keywords - Bottom-Up Approach; Inter-organizational Approach; Policy Implementation; Policy Implementation Dimensions; Top-Down Approach;

1. INTRODUCTION

It is argued that policy implementation is the most challenging stage of all activities. Public policy scholars view it that "there is many a slip twixt cup and lip" (Cochran et al. 1993, 67) situation in implementation, to imply a gap between what is to be implemented and what is implemented. The primary task in implementation is providing institutional resources for putting the program into effect or process under a given institution. The implementation also involves money to be spent, laws to be enforced, employees to be hired, and action plans to be put in place. Implementation of a public policy presupposes outputs and impacts.

It is also argued policy implementation is neglected due mainly to its complexity in its analytical and practical pressure. According to scholars (e.g., Wu, Ramesh, Howlett, and Fritzen 2010), the political sensitivity involved in it causes significant complexities. In consequence, the following are considered **barriers** to obstruct policy implementation processes:

- **political** (slow authorization, weak political support, bureaucratic opposition, and poor implementer incentives);
- **analytical competence** (vague or multiple missions, changing priorities, poor design, and uneven feasibility); and
- **operational capacity** (fund limitations, weak management structure or net coordination capacity, and lack of clarity in operational plans). Hence, the secret of policy success or its opposite side lies in all of these factors: their presence or absence determines policy success or failure.

In response, scholars advise that there is a need to a) build constituencies support of policy development or change, b) secure sufficient resources necessary to drive the process forward, c) prepare for the implementation challenges by undertaking stakeholder analysis, d) designing a strategic implementation roadmap, e) developing effective managerial and accountability systems that are facilitative and a critical capacity necessary to have a multi-stakeholder implementation mechanism.

Policy implementation refers to the mechanisms, resources, and relationships that link policies to program action. More specifically, it means carrying out, accomplishing, fulfilling, producing, or completing a given task. Therefore, understanding the nature of policy implementation is essential because international experience indicates that policies, once adopted, are not always implemented as envisioned and do not necessarily achieve the intended results (Pressman & Wildavsky 1973:32; Calista 1994:120; Love 2004:72; Bhuyan et al. 2010:1).

Policy implementation is a lengthy process that begins from designing a policy's content to achieving the results. There are a few crucial dimensions and essential pre-conditions for successful policy implementation. The success or failure of a policy depends upon its effective implementation. Further, it draws various dimensions of policy implementation and identifies some of the important conditions for the successful implementation of a policy. Up until the 1970s, policy analysts gave little attention to policy implementation aspects.

The purpose of this review literature is to analyze the factors/challenges that affect successful policy implementation.

1.1. Review questions

- What is the concept of policy implementation?
- What are the theoretical approaches to policy implementation?
- What factors/dimensions affecting successful policy implementation?

1.2. Methodology

The study used a secondary source of data collection. And it takes a form of a literature review of studies related to the policy implementation theory and practice and public policymaking process. Most of the revisions were sourced from journals and books related to public policy, policy analysis, and public policy implementation.

2. REVIEW LITERATURE

2.1. The Concept of Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is complicated. Various contextual factors can derail otherwise ideal implementation practice, and given the nature of the field, controlled experiments are not likely representations of real-world implementation scenarios. Attempts to better understand policy implementation by isolating specific variables have not been characterized by success (deLeon and deLeon 2002, 475).

Yet other scholars have attempted to come up with policy implementation theories. Despite decades of implementation research, scholars have agreed that implementation is far too complex to be accounted for by a single theory (Winter 2011, 24). Additionally, implementation is inextricably linked to other parts of the policy process. Implementation research is "often performed under labels other than 'implementation' such as (new) governance, policy design and instruments, network studies, outsourcing, public-private partnerships, street-level bureaucracy, management, 'new public management,' principal-agent studies, performance, regulatory enforcement, and compliance" (Winter 2011, 25).

2.2. Theoretical approaches for policy implementation

Since the beginning of policy implementation research, no theory of implementation commands general agreement; researchers continue to work from diverse theoretical perspectives and employ different variables to make sense of their findings (O'Toole and Montjoy, 1984, quoted in Lester et al., 1995, p84). Scholars agree that policy implementation is complex and needs a multi-theoretical account (Winter, 2012, p. 24).

After the mid-1970s, researchers sought to create systematic theories of the policy process that were generalizable to many cases, rather than focusing on one or a few instances. As this research progressed, two separate research approaches emerged. The first of these approaches emphasize a "top-down" perspective on policy

implementation. These studies focus on the gaps between the goals set by a policy's drafters and the policy's actual performance and outcomes. The second approach emphasizes a "bottom-up" perspective, which suggests that implementation is best studied by starting at the lowest implementation system levels and moving upward to see where performance is more or less successful (Birkland, 2015). These two approaches and three additional methods will discuss in the section below.

I. Top-down approach

Top-down theories started from the hypothesis that policy implementation begins with a decision made by the central government. A top-down approach, also called forward mapping, is a means of studying policy design and implementation that considers the highest-level policy designers' goals and traces the policy's design and implementation through the lowest-level implementers (Birkland, 2015).

This approach uses the decision of authority as a starting point, identifying the tractability of the problem and the ability to structure implementation, as well as the non-statutory variables affecting implementation. Most top-down models advise governments to have clear and reliable goals, limit the extent of change necessary, and place responsibility for implementation with an agency sympathetic to the policy's goals (Signé, 2017).

According to Birkland (2015), the top-down approach is based on a set of critical assumptions, which are presented as follows:

- Policies contain clearly defined goals against which can measure performance.
- Policies contain clearly defined policy tools for the accomplishment of goals.
- The existence of a single statute or other authoritative statements of policy characterizes the policy.
- The policy is an "implementation chain" that "starts with a policy message at the top and sees implementation as occurring in a chain."
- Designers have good knowledge of the commitment and capacity of the implementers. Capacity encompasses the availability of resources for an implementing organization to carry out its tasks, including monetary and human resources, legal authority and autonomy, and the knowledge needed to implement policy effectively.
- The implementer assumes that these features are present or overcome any problems suggested by these assumptions.
- The focus then is on creating the proper structures and controls to encourage or compel compliance with the top's goals.

Top-down policy implementation models have collapsed mainly out of favor because of assumptions that have been disproven (Signé, 2017). Perhaps the most challenging

feature of top-down models is the emphasis on clear objectives or goals. It is not easy to set a benchmark for program success and failure without a consensus on its goals. Another assumption problem with top-down models is a single national government that can successfully structure policy implementation and provides direct delivery of services. Nevertheless, most federal government policies require considerable state and, in many cases, local governmental cooperation (Hill, 2005).

II. Bottom-up approach

Bottom-up approaches argue that policy implementation cannot separate from policy formulation. Bottom-up scholars do not just pay attention to one particular stage of the policy cycle. Instead, they are interested in the whole process of how policies are defined, shaped, implemented, and probably redefined. The bottom-up approach, also called (action-centered or backward mapping. "backward reasoning," is a system of studying policy design and implementation that looks at the abilities and motivations of the lowest-level implementers and ways policy design from that level to the highest levels of government (Birkland, 2015). Bottom-up is an implementation approach in which the implementation process and the relevant relationships are mapped backward from the ultimate implementer to the topmost policy designers.

One difference between the top-down and bottom-up approaches is the metrics selected for evaluation. Top-down models generally see legislative objectives as the metric that should determine success or failure. Top-down models see assessment as a determinant of goal achievement. Bottom-up approaches also use legislative purposes to assess policy success or failure. Still, they explain that the gap between legislative (top-down) objectives and resources changes the implementation's nature (Signé, 2017).

Some criticisms have been advanced against the bottom-up models. Street-level bureaucrats have significant discretion in their interactions with clients and are likely to abdicate their clients' goals and ascend their own in their place (Mugambaw J. et al., 2018). Local implementers may resist policies handed down from above. In some cases, the street-level bureaucrat may also want to follow top-level designers' lead, supporting the goals handed down from higher up, and working as best they can to implement national plans (Birkland, 2015).

III. Synthesis: The third generation of implementation research

Hybrid (synthesis) theories try to overcome the divide between the top-bottom and bottom-up approaches of policy implementation by incorporating top-down and bottom-up models (Pulzl & Treib, 2007; Chand, 2011). It focuses on the two theories' relative strengths and weaknesses and synthesizes them into a balanced implementation theory. In

this manner, "implementation is considered as much a matter of negotiation and communication as opposed to a matter of command, where it sometimes is resisted on the grounds of unclear or inconsistent goals with receivers' expectations" (Goggin et al., 1990). Researchers have sought to relate the benefits of two approaches synthesis into one model due to top-down & bottom-up approaches' relative strengths and weaknesses.

Richard Elmore has sought to combine his idea of "backward mapping" with a "forward mapping element." By looking both forward and backward, we can understand that top policymakers can choose policy instruments or tools to structure implementation while considering lower-level implementers' motivations and needs (Birkland, 2015).

IV. Inter-organizational interaction approach

Implementation is also described as a process that involves interactions within a diversity of organizations; in this context; there are two approaches mentioned below:

- a) **Power Dependency Approach:** According to this approach, implementation occurs in the context of organizations' interaction. Such interaction produces power relationships in which organizations can induce other, less powerful organizations to interact with them.
- b) **Organizational Exchange Approach:** This view holds that organizations collaborate with their counterparts for mutual benefit. Whereas in the power dependency approach, the structural relations are based on dominance and dependence, interaction in the organizational exchange approach is based on exchange for mutual benefit. In this study, the researcher emphasizes synthesis theories, both the top-bottom and bottom-up theories of policy implementation, by incorporating inter-organizational interaction with different dimensions' factor elements challenges on the policy implementation.

2.3. Policy implementation dimensions and models

Several theories support different vital components of policy implementation and how to evaluate successful implementation. Egonmwan (2009) identified four factors that affect policy implementation in his work. He recognized that the policy's content, program implementers, policy context, and environmental factors are significant factors for policy implementation. Nevertheless, within the context of particular problems, and critical factors affecting implementation will vary.

Also, Bhuyan et al., 2010:5 outline the seven dimensions that influence policy implementation:

- the policy, its formulation, and dissemination;
- Social, political, and economic context;
- Leadership for policy implementation;

- Stakeholder involvement in policy implementation;
- Implementation planning and resource mobilization;
- Operations and services; and
- Feedback on progress and results.

Policy implementation involves translating the goals and objectives of policy into action. Khan & Khandaker (2016) took a critical look at the theoretical aspects of policy implementation and its performance issues. On this basis, the researcher developed five models to provide guidelines for successful implementation that design to accelerate implementation performance.

The model comprises rational, management, organizational development, bureaucratic and political factors as an independent variable and implementation performance as a dependent variable.

a) Rational factors

This model is mainly based on the assumption that policy implementation requires clarifying goals, missions, objectives, detailed planning, practical job assignments, effective monitoring, and evaluation. All-inclusive and efficient operating procedures and techniques are needed to help implementers define the scope of their responsibilities in line with policy objectives.

b) Management factors

The management factor is based on the idea that the performance of policy implementation depends on many factors. These are organizational structure, personnel, human resources, front-line implementers, equipment and technology, the level of skillful and effective interaction and cooperation, the exercise of authority, and place/location as implementation infrastructure. This model also seeks to identify problems or obstacles to policy implementation caused by shortages in resources or resource acquisition delays.

c) Organizational factors

This model assumes that policy implementation's performance depends on organizational leadership capacity, team building, the engagement of the various parties involved, participation, motivation, coordination, and commitment.

d) Bureaucratic factors

The bureaucratic model considers the role of front-line staff members in the implementation of the policy. The idea is that successful policy implementation relies heavily on the role of staff members who directly come into contact with people and other stakeholders. This model is intended to ascertain social reality concerning the discretionary power of front-line implementers. This model is based on the bottom-up theory of policy implementation.

e) Political factors

This model hypothesizes that policy implementation's performance depends on the outcome of interactions between agent capacity, either institutional or representative, bargaining power, conflict resolution, and outside environmental factors from an economic, political, and social perspective. The performance of policy implementation is an outcome of conflict and conflict management efficiency in society. This model's implication for policy implementation depends on the interplay among agencies, actors, and interest groups.

According to Signé (2017), the policy implementation models include the top-down, bottom-up, policy-action relationship, inter-organizational interaction, a rational choice, and synthesis of bottom-up and top-down implementation models.

The Top-down policy implementation model depicts the cascading of policies from the national or Federal office to the city through various departments. In using this model, communication is also from the top to the actual implementers of the policy. Signé (2017) verified that the top-down approach, which is the first generation thinking, is in line with how educational policies are implemented even in the universities. The top-down model regularly neglects prior context and political aspects of policy as if the implementation were only a matter of administration, depending only on the availability of resources. The top-down policy implementation model has mostly fallen out of favour because it assumes that policymakers can control the policy implementation environment.

The bottom-up policy implementation model was founded by Lipsky (1980) in Signé (2017), which views policy from the perspective of the target population and the service deliverers. The model relies on the decision of those who implement the policy taken as a critical factor in successful implementation. This model is based on the idea that controls over people is not the mechanism for effective policy implementation. He argues that the decisions of "street-level bureaucrats," the procedures they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with doubts and work pressures effectively become the public policies they carry out. It implies that beyond the issue of proper formulation of the policy content, there are realities to contend with which the street-level bureaucrats are aware of practicing to shape policies and play a vital role in ensuring a policy's performance.

The Policy-action relationship model developed by Lewis and Flynn viewed policy implementation as action by actors constrained by the world outside the organization. This model implies that the outside environment affects the activities of an organization. This model's implication is total dependence on each other, signifying the importance of both the policymaker who has the resources. The model

emphasizes power and dependence issues, pursuits of interests rather than the top-down or bottom-up models.

The inter-organizational interaction model is which handles policy implementation between different organizations. It involves the interaction of a diversity of organizations, which can be managed using either the Power Dependency Approach or the Organizational Exchange Approach. Considering that organizations differ in influence, power, and size, the power-dependency approach is used when an organization depends on its resourcefulness for sustenance. The organizational exchange approach is used when organizations relate to their counterparts, like one office or another.

The rational choice model is based on the theory of policy implementation. It requires clarifying goals, missions and objectives, detailed planning, proper job assignments, effective monitoring and evaluation, broad and efficient operating procedures, and techniques needed to assist implementers in defining the scope of their responsibilities in line with policy objectives. It is a more scientific model and belongs to the third generation thinking. Khan & Khandaker (2016, p.543) stated, "This is a policy implementation model that believes in clearer goals, targets and objectives. The more accurate and consistent the plan is, the greater the possibility of successful implementation". Adequate standardization, detailed task assignment, and a greater monitoring level increase the potential for success using this model. The conceptual premise of these six (6) models agrees with the five (5) policy implementation models advocated by Khan & Khandaker (2016), which are christened rational, management, organizational development, bureaucratic and political models. Khan & Khandaker (2016) emphasized that should give enough consideration in the policy implementation process to organizational structure, personnel, human resources, front-line implementers, equipment and technology, coordination and cooperation, and the exercise of authority, political and administrative factors.

Daniel-Kalio (2019), in her work on the process of policy implementation in the management of change in the education sector, summarized the challenges of policy implementation into a four dimension solutions model categorizing all the factors into four groups that are environmental, political, economic, and the policy itself.

3. CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed the studies on policy implementation and policy analysis. Policy implementation is an essential component in the process of policy formulation. It is a lengthy process that starts by designing a policy's content and achieving the results. Policy implementation is one of the most challenging aspects of the policy process. Paneo et al. (2017, p.20) stated that "policy is only a good plan stored in the archive if not implemented

correctly." Policy implementation is inextricably linked to the political process of governing (Schofield, 2001, p284).

As much as the researcher looks for in the literature, the author of this article should not find a uniform policy implementation dimension. Policy implementation factors can be seen in different case study dimensions considering its focus and target purpose. Most researches focus on policy implementation as only one part of the public policy process cycle. But policy implementation can be studied using different theoretical tools from different perspectives. Policy implementation practice is complex and dynamic. Several theories support various vital components of policy implementation and how to evaluate successful implementation. There is no single perspective better than the rest one size fits all approach to implementation, not meet the varied needs of diverse target populations and clients of services in the country.

In terms of methodology, much research on policy implementation has been dominated by single case studies, allowing the complex phenomena of implementation to be studied in a broad context. Several data sources are often applied in each case, such as reports and documents, a qualitative survey with implementers, quantitative data on program coverage, participation, and output in terms of delivery performance and outcomes (Yin, 1982). This review article on concepts and theoretical approaches of policy implementation guides and helps both students and practitioners make sense of the complex variables that influence policy implementation to improve policy implementation success.

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