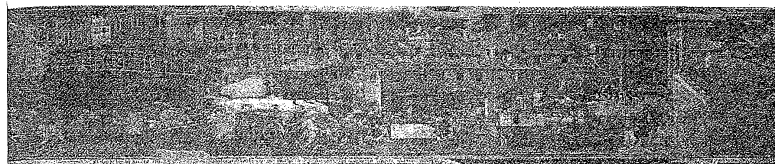# Implementation

edited by Søren C. Winter

## INTRODUCTION

Implementation research grew out of evaluation research. The Great Society policy reforms in USA in the 1960s and 1970s stimulated a lot of evaluation research in order to estimate the effects of the new welfare state programs and to suggest improvements. Classic evaluation analyses raised the question if it could be documented that a given policy intervention had any effect and, if so, what effect. However, evaluation analysts often became frustrated that most studies actually showed no or little effect (Albæk, 1988). According to the classic interpretation of such findings, the program did not work. It was based on a wrong causal theory. However, gradually, the apparent failures stimulated another interpretation that, possibly, nothing was wrong with the causal theory behind the planned policy intervention, but the intervention might not have taken place as intended. This stimulated an interest in studying the relationship between planned and actual interventions and the administrative process in between policy-adoption, delivery-level behaviors and effects.

Most implementation researchers would regard Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky's book *Implementation*, from 1973, as the first piece of implementation research. It was a case study of an economic development program in Oakland California that had been created to stimulate minority employment. However, it failed to do so due to the complexity of many actors having to work together. Although the book certainly opened the field, a few pieces of earlier research (e.g., Kaufman, 1960; Murphy, 1971) had actually focused on implementation problems. Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) guiding research questions were: 'How well was this authoritative mandate (law, regulation, program, official pronouncement) implemented?' and 'How might it have been better implemented?' Later research redefined the question to focus on achieving the explicit or implicit values in a given mandate rather than its prescriptive details (Bardach, 2001). Accordingly, goal achievement has been the dominating standard and dependent variable for implementation research since the 1970s.

With inspiration from Pressman and Wildavsky and other pioneers, implementation research became one of the fads of political science and policy analysis and reached its peak in terms of number of publications in the mid-1980s. While research

published under that explicit label has later decreased (Sætren, 2005), still a substantial amount of research focusing on implementation problems is being published, but often under other labels such as public administration, public management (Boyne, 2004; Meier and O'Toole, 2007), regulatory enforcement (Scholz and Wei, 1986; Kagan, 1994; May and Winter, 2000) and compliance (Winter and May, 2001; Parker and Nielsen, 2012), street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980), principal–agent theory (Brehm and Gates, 1999), new institutionalism, governance (Bogason, 2000; Lynn et al., 2001), networks (O'Toole, 2000), policy design and instruments (Salamon, 1981, 2002; Linder and Peters, 1989), etc., with several of these labels representing more recent research fads!

In addition, implementation research has later spread to books and journals that are specialized in a particular policy area, such as health policy, with it own implementation journal, *Implementation Science* (see also Fixen et al., 2005), and environmental policy. Sætren (2005) found many more publications under the label of 'implementation' in such policy specialized journals, rather than in core journals in political science, public administration and public policy. However, there seems to be very little relationship between implementation research in the specialized area and political science implementation research in core journals.

Implementation research is part of two subdisciplines of political science: public policy/policy analysis and public administration. Growing out of evaluation research, implementation studies tried to address the basic questions of policy analysis: What are the content, causes and consequences of public policies (Dye, 1976)? Implementation research focused on the consequences of those public policies that have been enacted as laws or other authoritative statutes. However, policy can also be conceived at an operational level as the delivery of public services and enforcement of regulations to citizens and firms. Consequently, implementation

research focuses on the content of such delivery-level behaviors, their causes and consequences. Implementation research has become an established part of public policy research that focuses on different stages of the policy process, such as agenda setting, policy formation, policy design, implementation, evaluation, knowledge utilization, and policy change more generally (Parson, 1995).

However, implementation research also addresses the basic question of public administration research: How is legislation executed? While public administration traditionally had studied formal, institutional and normative aspects of this issue, implementation research offered a fresh empirical, behavioral perspective on execution of laws that fitted well with the behavioral and much more political science-oriented trend in public administration research that started accelerating in the 1970s (Peters, 1978). Implementation research has had a major role in bringing public administration and public policy research together, implying that several scholars have been working in both fields. Joint public administration and public policy programs have been formed at many universities. Other research has been important in that bridging process. The policy perspective has crept into many aspects of public administration research, and new research approaches have contributed as well (e.g., neo-rational, institutionalist, governance, and network approaches); implementation research has certainly played an essential role, too.

## THE DIVERSITY OF IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH

During the barely 40 years of implementation research no general implementation theory has emerged, although many implementation scholars have had the development of such a theory as their ultimate, yet far-sighted objective. The implementation

subdiscipline has been characterized by many different approaches, representing different research strategies, evaluation standards, methodologies, concepts, and focal subject areas for research.

One of the major controversies among implementation analysts has been whether implementation should be studied from the top-down as a control problem (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981) or from the bottom-up, by focusing first on actors most proximate to the problems to be solved by policies (Hull and Hjern, 1987). Related to that discussion is the proper evaluation standard for implementation studies. While, as mentioned above, goal achievement has been the dominating standard, some bottom-up scholars have suggested focusing on problem solving rather than goal achievement. Problem solving could be defined either from the perspective of the group affected by the problem or from the researcher himself (Elmore, 1982; Hull and Hjern, 1987).

In terms of methodology, implementation analyses have been dominated by single case studies that allow the complex phenomena of implementation to be studied in detail and context. In each case several data sources are often applied, such as text analysis of reports and documents, qualitative interviews and observations of implementers, quantitative data on coverage of the program, target group participation, outputs in terms of delivery behaviors, and outcomes (Yin, 1982). Some scholars even use qualitative or quantitative methods for detailed text interpretation in case studies. Other scholars have called for a replacement of single case studies by comparative and statistical research designs, which can increase the number of observations and control for third variables in order to allow more systematic theory and hypothesis testing and generalization (Goggin, 1986).

Implementation scholars also disagree about the key concepts for implementation research: some want to focus on the implementation *process* as the dependent variable (Lester and Goggin, 1998), while others examine implementation behaviors/output as

the dependent variable (Lipsky, 1980), which is to be explained by process and organizational variables (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; Winter, 1999). Some scholars even include outcomes as dependent variables (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; Hull and Hjern, 1987; May and Winter, 2007; Meier and O'Toole, 2007). According to Peter May (1999), conceptual ambiguity and confusion have severely hampered theory development in implementation research.

Somewhat related to the conceptual disagreement are differences in the subjects that implementation researchers study. Many implementation studies present long lists of variables that might explain variation in implementation. A famous example is Mazmanian and Sabatier's (1981) list of 17 variables. However, implementation scholars tend to focus on different variables and subject matters in their research, e.g., hierarchical structuring, tractability of problems, communication, commitment, political support, resources, interorganizational relations and coordination problems, decision and veto points, discretion at various levels (including discretion by street-level bureaucrats), contexts (including socio-economic conditions and target groups' characteristics), empowerment of target groups, the roles of policy design and instruments, and management in shaping implementation.

## AN INTEGRATED IMPLEMENTATION MODEL

One attempt to synthesize and integrate some of the most important and promising variables in implementation research in a common framework of analysis has been presented by Winter (1990; Winter and Nielsen, 2008) in his Integrated Implementation Model (Figure 1). Some of the key factors in that model will be used as the main organizing principle for structuring the division among the following chapters in this implementation part of the Handbook (Part 5).
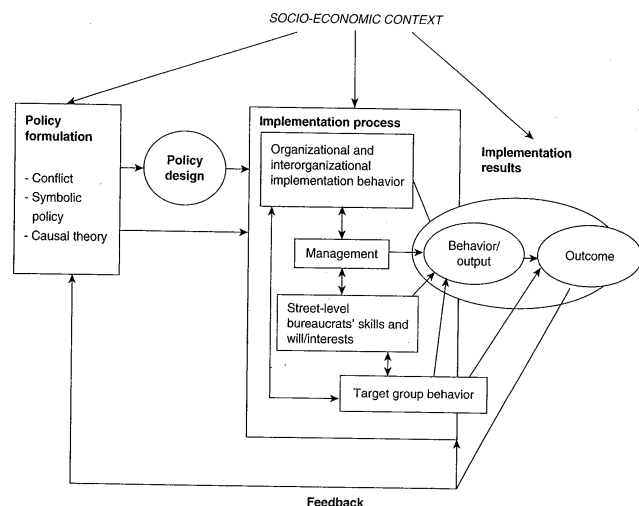
**Figure 1    The Integrated Implementation Model**

As dependent variable and standard for evaluating the results of the implementation process, the model focuses on both implementation behaviors (outputs) and outcomes in relation to the official policy objectives. This standard is selected from a democratic point of view, as goals formulated in legislatures and in laws have a particular legitimate status and are relevant for holding government accountable.

The first set of factors, which affects implementation results, are the *policy formulation process* and the *policy* design. Too many implementation researchers have erroneously put the whole blame for any lack of goal achievement on implementation. This is in sharp contrast to the early evaluation scholars, who blamed the policy design for any lack of effect; well-designed policies with effective instruments are necessary but not sufficient for improving implementation prospects. Other implementation scholars have ignored or failed to conceptualize the connections between policy formulation, policy design, and implementation.

The roots of implementation problems can often be found in the prior policy formulation process. For instance, conflicts in this process often create a policy that is marked by ambiguous goals as well as an invalid causal theory with a lack of connection between goals and means in the policy design concerned. Sometimes even symbolic policies are adopted to (appear to) address a problem without actually offering the means that could achieve the stated objectives. In addition, as mentioned by Bardach (1977), the conflicts in policy formulation often continue in the subsequent implementation process. Not only conflict but also lack of attention among the coalition partners passing a law can lead to implementation failures (Winter, 1986).

A policy design typically contains a set of goals, a mix of instruments for obtaining these goals, a designation of governmental or non-governmental entities charged with carrying out the goals and an allocation of resources for the requisite tasks (see May, 2012). Policy design and particular policy instruments have received substantial research interest since the 1980s. The basic claim of this literature is that any policy can be disaggregated to one or a mix of a limited number of generic policy instruments. The research interest, however, has not led to agreement on any typology of instruments (Vedung, 1995). One simple classification consists of mandates, economic incentives and information that aim to affect the behavior of either target groups or intermediaries (implementers).

The policy design affects the implementation process and results in various ways. Different mixes of instruments are not equally effective in obtaining a given policy objective. May (2012) finds that policy design is important in affecting the incentives of intermediaries to carry out their requisite tasks, particularly through affecting their commitment and capacity and by signaling desired actions. However, while the validity of the causal theory linking instruments to objectives is certainly important, the research documentation of instrument effects is still meager (however, for another good attempt, see Gunningham and Grabosky, 1998). One reason is that effects of instruments on implementation are often determined by the context, including the political context (as described by May, 2012). Consequently, designing good policies is not a simple, technocratic process like selecting the best types of materials for building a bridge.

The instruments selected may also affect the overall implementation structure and process, as certain instruments favor the formation of particular implementation structures. Mandates aimed at regulating the behavior of target groups normally require a staff for inspecting and enforcing the mandate and a set of sanctions. Information strategies and use of economic incentives such as environmental taxes can sometimes be implemented with fewer staff, although there is no one-to-one relationship between instruments and staff requirements. Some taxes are relatively automatic and easy to collect such as an environmental tax per unit gasoline sold, while others require a substantial staff for inspection and enforcing, e.g., taxing diffuse pollution.

It is important to understand that ineffective policy designs are not always due to lack of knowledge on the part of the policy designers. Policy design of instruments and organizational structure is first of all a political process, in which political actors – both policy proponents and opponents – try to maximize their interests, including selecting an organizational structure that will allow them to maximize long-term control of the implementation process (Moe, 1989).

The next set of factors of the model focuses on how the implementation process affects the results. Implementation processes are characterized by *organizational and interorganizational behaviors* that represent different degrees of commitment and coordination. Interorganizational implementation settings seem to become ever more important, as shown in Laurence O'Toole's Chapter 15: 'Interorganizational Relations and Policy Implementation'. Already, Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) focused on the typical 'complexity of joint action', according to which successful implementation is likely to be negatively related to the number of actors, the diversity of their interests and perspectives, and the number of decision and veto points.

However, O'Toole and Montjoy (1984; O'Toole, in Chapter 15) demonstrated that this insight only applies to certain kinds of interorganizational implementation settings. Decision points are not independent of each other, but successful implementation results can be stimulated by an early agreement on basic understandings, which can promote 'bandwagon effects' in later decisions, and decisions can be merged by crafting 'package deals.'

The implementation prospects also depend on the type of resource dependency among participating organizations. The 'complexity of joint action' is most likely to occur when the implementation process is a chain of sequential relations where one organization is depending on outputs from another as input for its own contribution to implementation. Reciprocal relations where two organizations are depending on each other for inputs may require some coordination but can also decrease the likelihood of veto points because both parties have incentives to cooperate. Pooled relations where multiple organizations can produce and deliver implementation outputs in parallel and independently of each other can produce relatively good implementation results, although coordination may not be optimal. In Chapter 15, O'Toole analyzes interorganizational relations in implementation in more depth, and discusses how interorganizational coordination problems can be reduced by using policy design to increase commitment, build and use a common interest, and facilitate cooperation via exchange.

As the role of management in implementation is easier to describe after discussing the role of street-level bureaucrats, we will first focus on the latter. The behaviors of *street-level bureaucrats* are crucial for the implementation of most policies, and Lipsky's (1980) insights on 'street-level bureaucracy' are included in the Integrated Implementation Model. Street-level bureaucrats make important discretionary decisions in their direct contact with citizens, who tend to define public policies not as crafted in statutes but as delivered to them by street-level bureaucrats. These bureaucrats work in situations characterized by many demands and limited resources. They cope with this situation by rationing services, making biased priorities among cases and clients, controlling clients, and modifying policy goals and client perceptions. According to Lipsky, the coping behaviors of street-level bureaucrats systematically bias the delivery behavior in relation to the policy mandates.

Whereas Lipsky's contribution was important for understanding implementation, the theory needs more specifications of the causal mechanisms that can explain variation in coping behaviors and their consequences (Winter, 2002). The concepts also apply more to social policies than to regulatory policies with target groups who are stronger and less likely to demand more services. In Chapter 14 Winter presents recent attempts to address these problems of conceptualizing and explaining behaviors of street-level bureaucrats, whereas in Chapter 16 Marcia Meyers and Vibeke Lehmann Nielsen analyze the role of street-level bureaucrats in implementation more fully.

As indicated by the above analysis, *management* of street-level bureaucrats is no easy task. The very nature of street-level bureaucrats' practices implies that they exercise considerable discretion in encounters with target groups that are normally not very visible to managers. While bookstands abound with simple recipes for excellent management, these are rarely based on systematic empirical research on public management. The existing evidence is limited and suggests that managing street-level bureaucrats is by no means a simple task, but rather a difficult and complex task.

In a meta-analysis George Boyne (2004) finds surprisingly few studies on effects of management on performance or outcomes. Yet he finds some evidence that management does matter. This has been confirmed by later studies, not least in educational management (Meier and O'Toole, 2007; Andersen and Winter, 2011). However, because such studies measure the direct link between management and outcomes, it is hard to know through what kinds of street-level bureaucratic practices managers can bring about better outcomes. Some causal links are missing. Unfortunately, so far, very few studies have examined the effects of management on street-level bureaucratic behaviors. Most studies indicate that these effects are limited and context contingent. The research challenge is to specify to what extent and

how management affects street-level bureaucratic behaviors in given contexts. Such research has just begun, however. Some preliminary findings can be mentioned.

In line with principal–agent theory, managers' influence seems to vary with the visibility of various street-level bureaucratic practices (Winter, 2003). In addition, managers and street-level bureaucrats sometimes experience a multiple principal problem when local politicians are resisting national policies. Thus, the effect of using some goal-directed management tools – such as clear signaling of expectations and recruiting workers with a better fit with the goals of the organization – may depend on whether local policies are supporting or opposing national ones (Winter et al., 2008a).

Finally, management is relational. This implies that the effect of management practices on street-level bureaucratic behaviors may be contingent on the characteristics of individual street-level bureaucrats, including their expertise, motivation and perceptions of the applied management tools. Thus, workers' expertise seems to condition the effect of delegation (May and Winter, 2009), and workers' motivation and perception of economic incentives seem to condition the effect of these incentives (Andersen and Pallesen, 2008). Although the direct and contingent effects of management on the behavior of street-level bureaucrats are often limited, indirect effects must also be taken into account. These include the impact that managers' commitment has on the attitudes of their front-line workers and the way in which managers, by designing or changing organizational structures, can shape bureaucratic attitudes and behaviors (Winter et al., 2008b).

According to the Integrated Implementation Model, also, *target groups* of public policies, i.e., citizens or firms, play an important role, not only on the effects of the policy but also in affecting the behaviors by street-level bureaucrats through citizens positive or negative actions in co-producing public services (Winter and Nielsen, 2008). Finally, the *socio-economic context* forms important

framework conditions for implementation. For example, in employment policies, both the types of employment and training offers and their effects depend heavily on ups and downs in the business cycle.

The Integrated Implementation Model is not a model in the strict sense of a simple causal model. It is rather a framework of analysis presenting key factors and mechanisms that affect implementation outputs and outcomes. For each set of factors, a number of more specific hypotheses can be developed (Winter, 1990; Winter and Nielsen, 2008; see also Chapters 14–16).

As mentioned above, key parts of the model will be used for structuring Part 5 into the following four chapters. In Chapter 14 'Implementation Perspectives: Status and Reconsideration' Søren Winter offers an account of the development of implementation research. The field has been developed across and within three 'generations' of implementation research. Winter also performs a critical examination of the field and focuses on recent promising directions for implementation research. In Chapter 15, Laurence O'Toole analyzes the role of interorganizational relations in implementation and how these can be affected to improve implementation. Finally, in Chapter 16, Marcia Meyers and Vibeke Lehmann Nielsen give a critical account of the literature on the role of street-level bureaucrats in policy implementation.

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# Implementation Perspectives: Status and Reconsideration

Søren C. Winter

Although the field of implementation research is barely 40 years old, implementation has already been analyzed from many different perspectives, representing different research strategies, evaluation standards, concepts, focal subject areas, and methodologies (see Part 5 Introduction). The purpose of this chapter is two-fold.

First, it performs a critical review of some of the major contributions to the literature. This examination follows the development of the field. Commentators have identified three generations of implementation research (Goggin, 1986), which are presented and assessed in the following. These are the pioneers with their explorative case studies, the second-generation studies with their top-down and bottom-up research strategies and synthesis models, and a third generation with more systematic tests based on comparative and statistical research designs. The nice thing about these generations is, however, that as a researcher you can belong to more than one and thus stay alive and even get younger!

Second, based on a critical examination of the development and status of the research field, the chapter suggests ways of moving ahead. Implementation research can be improved by (1) accepting theoretical diversity rather than looking for one common theoretical framework, (2) developing and testing partial theories and hypotheses rather than trying to reach for utopia in constructing a general implementation theory, (3) seeking conceptual clarification, (4) focusing on both outputs (behaviors of implementers) and outcomes as dependent variables in implementation research rather than goal achievement, and (5) applying more comparative and statistical research designs rather than relying on single case studies in order to sort out the influence of different implementation variables.

## THE PIONEERS

In several respects, the book *Implementation*, by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), sets the stage for later implementation research. Most implementation research has focused on implementation problems, barriers, and failures, and this pessimistic view of implementation

was already reflected in the subtitle of this seminal work,

How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland; or, Why it's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All

In this case study of the local implementation of a federal economic development program to decrease unemployment among ethnic minority groups in Oakland, Pressman and Wildavsky focused on the 'complexity of joint action' as the key implementation problem. In that case – as in many others – federal, regional, state, and local government actors, courts, affected interest groups, private firms, and media had a role and stake in policy implementation. Implementation problems were amplified not only by the many actors but also by the many decision and veto points, which must typically be passed during the implementation process. Although they probably overemphasized the lack of conflict in their case, Pressman and Wildavsky convincingly showed that merely slightly different perspectives, priorities, and time horizons among multiple actors with different missions in repeated and sequential decisions could cause delay, distortion, and even failures in policy implementation.

However, the two authors also demonstrated that failures are not only caused by bad implementation but also by bad policy instruments. Many of the problems in the Oakland case would have been avoided had policy makers chosen a more direct economic instrument that would ex post have tied spending of public expenditures to the actual number of minority workers employed rather than relying on endless ex ante negotiations with affected parties and authorities.

Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) are good representatives for the first generation of implementation studies, which were typically explorative and inductive case studies with a theory-generating aim. Very few central theoretical variables were in focus: in this case, the number of actors and decision points and the validity of the causal theory. Another outstanding example is Eugene

Bardach's (1977) *The Implementation Game*, which placed more emphasis on the aspects of conflict in implementation, seeing implementation as a continuation of the political game from the policy adoption stage, though partly with other actors and other relations among actors. Bardach analyzed the types of games that various actors apply in the implementation process in order to pursue their own interests. However, these games tend to distort implementation from the legislative goals. Among other representatives from what has later been called the first generation of implementation research we find Erwin Hargrove (1975), who called implementation research 'the missing link' in the study of the policy process, and Walter Williams and Richard Elmore (1976).

## SECOND-GENERATION MODEL BUILDERS: TOP-DOWN, BOTTOM-UP, AND SYNTHESES

Second-generation implementation studies began in the early 1980s. Whereas the first-generation studies had been explorative and theory generating, the ambition of the second generation was to take the next step in theory development by constructing theoretical models, or rather frameworks of analysis, that could guide empirical analysis. Some of these studies had more optimistic views on successful implementation.

The construction of models and research strategies, however, immediately led to a major confrontation between the so-called top-down and bottom-up perspectives on policy implementation. The predominant top-down researchers focused on a specific political decision, normally a law. On the background of its official purpose, they followed the implementation down through the system, often with special interest in central decision makers. They would typically assume a control perspective on implementation, trying to give good advice on how to structure the implementation process from

above in order to achieve the purpose of the legislation and to minimize the number of decision points that could be vetoed.

The best-known and most frequently used (Sabatier, 1986) top-down analysis framework was developed by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1981). It contains 17 variables placed in three main groups, concerning the tractability of the problems addressed by the legislation, the social and political context, and the ability of the legislation to structure the implementation process. This structuring can be made by means of, for example, hierarchy, appointing of authorities and staff with a positive attitude towards the legislation/program, and use of incentives, including competition among providers. By adding a long-term perspective of 10–15 years to implementation, the authors show that, over time, start-up problems are often ameliorated by better structuring of the implementation by policy advocates (see also Kirst and Jung, 1982). This gave rise to much more optimistic views of implementation in contrast to the pessimism introduced by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) and joined by most implementation analysts.

Mazmanian and Sabatier's framework was met by two different kinds of criticism. According to one strand, the model was naïve and unrealistic because it overemphasized the ability of policy proponents to structure implementation, thus ignoring the ability of policy opponents to interfere in this structuring process (Moe, 1989). Often policy opponents are able to make policy goals contradictory or ambiguous and to increase their own long-term influence in the implementation process in order to avoid some of the effects intended by policy proponents. Conceptually, the model ignored the politics of policy formulation and policy design (Winter, 1986b).

Another strand of criticism came from the bottom-up researchers who took special interest in 'the bottom' of the implementation system, the place where the public sector – or private providers of public services – meets the citizens or firms. They all emphasized the

influence that front-line staff or field workers have on the delivery of policies such as social services, income transfers, and law enforcement in relation to citizens and firms. Field workers are crucial decision makers in these studies, and the disability of politicians and administrative managers to control field workers is emphasized.

Like top-down researchers and also most evaluation researchers, some bottom-up researchers use the official objectives of a given legislation as the standard of evaluation (Lipsky, 1980; Winter, 1986a). Michael Lipsky (1980) developed a theory on 'Street-level Bureaucracy.' It focuses on the discretionary decisions that each field worker – or 'street-level bureaucrat' as Lipsky prefers to call them – makes in relation to individual citizens when delivering policies to them. This discretionary role in delivering services or enforcing regulations makes street-level bureaucrats essential actors in implementing public policies. Indeed, Lipsky (1980) turns the policy process upside-down by claiming that street-level bureaucrats are the real policy makers. However, one ironic aspect of the theory is that although he emphasizes the individual role of street-level bureaucrats in implementing public policies, according to Lipsky their similar working conditions make them all apply rather similar behavior. This means that street-level bureaucrats, even across policy types, tend to apply similar types of practices whether they are teachers, policemen, nurses, doctors, or social workers.

Although trying to do their best, street-level bureaucrats experience a gap between the demands made on them by legislative mandates, managers, and citizens, on the one hand, and their limited resources, on the other. In this situation they apply a number of coping mechanisms that systematically distort their work in relation to the intentions of the legislation. They ration services and make priorities between their tasks and clients, e.g., by upgrading easy tasks and cases in which clients make pressure to obtain a benefit or decision, at the expense of

complicated, non-programmed tasks and clients that do not press for a decision. Street-level bureaucrats tend to apply few, crude standard classifications for grouping clients and combine these by rules of thumb for the processing of these categories, rather than treating clients individually. To prove successful, street-level bureaucrats tend to apply creaming in favoring relatively resourceful clients and downgrading the weaker clients. Street-level bureaucrats try to gain control over clients in order to make cases simpler to process. As time goes by, street-level bureaucrats develop more cynical perceptions of clients and modify the policy objectives.

Other bottom-up researchers go the whole length, rejecting the objective of policy mandates as an evaluation standard. Instead, their analysis departs from a specific problem such as youth unemployment (Elmore, 1982) or small firms' conditions of growth (Hull and Hjern, 1987). In practice it is the researcher himself, who in most cases defines the problem and thereby his evaluation standard. In my opinion this is acceptable if done explicitly, and it can be fruitful if the researcher is able to convince others about the appropriateness of his problem definition.

The next task in Hull and Hjern's *bottom-up* approach is to identify the many actors that are affecting the problem in question and to map relations between them. In these network analyses both public and private actors become essential, and the analyses often include several policies that affect the same problem whether or not it is intended in those policies. For instance, when defining youth unemployment as the focal problem, youth unemployment is affected by a great number of actors such as schools, high schools, educational and vocational training institutions, the social welfare system, employment service, unemployment foundations, and employment providers as well as the social partners (e.g., through fixing of wage rates).

Hull and Hjern (1987) focused on the role of local networks in affecting a given problem in the implementation process, and they also developed a way of identifying these networks. It is a combination of a snowball method and a sociometric method. Starting with the actors with most direct contact with people exposed to the problem, one gradually identifies more and more actors who are interacting with the first set of actors around the problem, and so on. In this way, this type of bottom-up analysis maps the informal, empirical implementation structure around a given problem, while *top-down* research tends to look at the formal implementation structure related to one particular policy program. According to Hull and Hjern, empirical implementation structures tend to be far less hierarchical than formal ones, and they often cross organizational borders and may include public as well as private actors in forming collaborative networks at the operational level that may even take on an identity of their own relatively independent of their mother organizations. The bottom-up analyses by Hjern and associates, which are important in drawing attention to implementation activities and structures at the local operational level, have given inspiration to later policy network and governance analyses (Bogason, 2000). However, the perspective has more the character of guidelines for an inductive research strategy and methodology than a development of theory and hypotheses that can be empirically tested.

This also applies to Elmore's (1982) 'backward mapping' strategy, which has played an important role in the development of the bottom-up perspective. However, Elmore's perspective is more aimed at helping policy analysts and policy makers in designing sound policies than offering a research strategy and contributing to theory development.

The *top-down* and *bottom-up* perspectives were useful in drawing increased attention to the fact that both top and bottom play important roles in the implementation process, but in the long run the battle between the two approaches was not fruitful. Each tended to ignore the portion of the implementation reality explained by the other (Goggin et al., 1990: 12). Elmore (1985) actually recommends using both forward mapping – which is essentially a top-down analysis – and backward mapping for policy analysis because each tends to offer valuable insights for policy makers. He claims that policy designers need to consider the policy instruments and the resources they have at their disposal (forward mapping) as well as the incentive structure of the target group and street-level bureaucrats' ability to tip the balance of these incentives in order to affect the problematic situation of the target group (backward mapping).

Other scholars have tried to solve the controversy by specifying the conditions where one approach might be more relevant than the other. Sabatier (1986) claims that the *top-down* perspective is best suited for studying the implementation in policy areas that are dominated by one specific legislation, limited research funds, or where the situation is structured at least moderately well. *Bottom-up* perspectives, on the other hand, would be more relevant in situations where several different policies are directed towards a particular problem, and where one is primarily interested in the dynamics of different local situations.

Attempts were also made to synthesize the two models. Richard E. Matland (1995) suggests that their relative value depends on the degree of ambiguity in goals and means of a policy and the degree of conflict. Traditional *top-down* models, based on the public administration tradition, present an accurate description of the implementation process when a policy is clear, and the conflict is low. However, *top-down* models, such as the Mazmanian–Sabatier framework, are also relevant when conflict is high and ambiguity is low, which makes the structuring of the implementation particularly important. In contrast, *bottom-up* models provide an accurate description of the implementation process when the policy is ambiguous and the conflict is low. When conflict as well as ambiguity is present, both models have some relevance according to Matland.

Other attempts at synthesizing the two approaches were made by the former main combatants. The previous *bottom-up* analyses, which were performed by the circle around Hull and Hjern (1987), focused on actors and activities at the bottom, while in practice their analyses did not rise very high above it. However, in their synthesis proposal – called 'an inductive approach to match outcomes of politics and their intentions' – Hull and Hjern recommend systematic interview analysis of relevant actors from the bottom to the very top, including mapping of implementation activities and structures, the actors' evaluation of the politically determined purposes of the relevant laws and their achievement, and also the actors' opinions on where it goes wrong and analyses of how various policies contribute to solve the *policy problem* in question. Obviously, it would require immense resources to carry out this research strategy, and I am not aware of any such study performed in practice. In addition – as was the case for their bottom-up analyses above – the proposed synthesis suffers from being methodological recommendations rather than theoretically based expectations, which can be tested systematically.

Sabatier (1986) has also suggested a synthesis – the so-called *Advocacy Coalition Framework* (ACF). He adopts 'the bottom-uppers' unit of analysis – a whole variety of public and private actors involved with a policy problem – as well as their concerns with understanding the perspectives and strategies of all major categories of actors (not simply program proponents). He then combines this starting point with top-downers' concern with the manner in which socio-economic conditions and legal instruments constrain behavior' (Sabatier, 1986: 39). The synthesis applies the framework to explaining policy change over a period of a decade

or more in order to deal with the role of policy-oriented learning. It also adopts the top-down style of developing and testing hypotheses as a contribution to theory development. In conceptualizing policy change, Sabatier focuses on government action programs that, in turn, produce policy outputs at the operational level, which again result in a variety of impacts. The focus on legislative mandates as well as outputs and impacts could be potentially relevant for implementation research. In practice, however, the ACF was further developed to focus on policy change in mandates rather than implementation. Although making an important contribution to the public policy literature, Sabatier and his later associate, Jenkins-Smith (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993), actually moved the focus of analysis away from implementation towards policy change and formation.

Another kind of synthesis was suggested by Winter (1990; Winter and Nielsen, 2008) in his 'Integrated Implementation Model'. Unlike previous attempts, the purpose here was not to make a true synthesis between *top-down* and *bottom-up* perspectives, but rather to integrate a number of the most fruitful theoretical elements from various pieces of implementation research – regardless of their origin – into a joint model or framework. Its main factors in explaining implementation, outputs and outcomes are policy formation and policy design, interorganizational relations, management, street-level bureaucrats' will and capacity, in addition to target group behavior, socio-economic conditions, and feedback mechanisms, cf. Introduction to Part 5 of the Handbook.

## THIRD GENERATION: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS

While the first and second generations of implementation studies have been helpful in directing attention to implementation problems and identifying implementation barriers

and factors that might ease implementation, the research had not succeeded in sorting out the relative importance of the explanatory variables. A substantial part of the studies could be criticized as merely presenting – often long – checklists of variables that might effect implementation. Malcolm Goggin (1986) pointed out that because implementation research had been dominated by single case studies, it was plagued by the problem of 'too few cases and too many variables' or by overdetermination, where two or more variables explain variation in the dependent variable equally well. The single case study approach did not allow for any control of third variables. According to Goggin, this problem had hampered the development of implementation theory. He therefore, called for a third-generation of implementation studies that would test theories on the basis of more comparative case studies and statistical research designs which could increase the number of observations and allow control for third variables.

Goggin followed up on these recommendations in a study with his associates (Goggin, Bowman, Lester, and O'Toole, 1990). The study was mainly based on a communications theory perspective on intergovernmental implementation, but also included many variables from previous top-down and bottom-up research. The study focused especially on variation among states in the way and extent they implement federal policies in three different social and regulatory policies. The authors tried to encourage further research involving multiple measures and multiple methods, including quantitative methods. Later, Lester and Goggin (1998), in making a status for implementation research, called for the development of 'a parsimonious, yet complete, theory of policy implementation.' They suggested that such a meta-theory might be developed by combining the insights of communications theory, regime theory, rational choice theory (especially game theory), and contingency theories. As a dependent variable for implementation studies, they proposed to focus on

implementation processes rather than outputs and outcomes.

## A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

While agreeing with Goggin's (1986) call for using more comparative and statistical research designs based on quantitative methods, I disagree with several of the later methodological and theoretical recommendations made by him and his colleagues. As recognized by one of these authors, O'Toole (2000), to follow the methodological suggestions given by Goggin, Bowman, Lester, and O'Toole (1990) would involve at least outlining a research career's worth of work. It would require applying research designs that involve numerous variables, across different policy types, across 50 states, over at least 10 years, as well as measuring the relevant variables by a combination of content analyses, expert panels, elite surveys, and expert reassessment of the data from questionnaires and interviews. Because such a research strategy is too demanding, less taxing research strategies that can still secure a sufficient number of observations would be more realistic.

Given the many exploratory variables that have already been identified by various implementation scholars, Lester and Goggin's suggested development of a 'parsimonious, yet complete implementation theory' by combining theoretical elements from at least four different theories appear to be a *contradictio in adjecto* and is more likely to lead to theoretical mismatch. Rather than looking for the overall and one-for-all implementation theory, we should welcome diversity in both theoretical perspectives and methodologies applied. Such diversity will give us new insights, some of which may then later be integrated into broader analytical frameworks or models (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; Goggin, Bowman, Lester, and O'Toole, 1990; Winter, 1990). It strikes me, however, as unrealistic to think that many scholars can

agree on applying one common theoretical framework.

Although the general implementation frameworks presented by model builders so far have been helpful in giving an overview of some crucial implementation variables, the generality of such models may in fact be an obstacle for further development of our understanding of implementation. This is because generality inhibits precise specification of variables and causal mechanisms (May, 1999). Consequently, it seems more fruitful to utilize research resources on developing partial theories and hypotheses about different and more limited implementation problems and on putting these to serious empirical tests.

My suggestions for further development of implementation research can be summarized in five points: (1) provide theoretical diversity; (2) focus on partial rather than general implementation theories; (3) seek conceptual clarification; (4) focus on outputs (behavior of implementers – particularly delivery behaviors) as well as outcomes as dependent variables; and (5) use more comparative and statistical research designs (Winter, 1999). While the two first and the fifth points have been developed above, I will elaborate on the other points in the following and illustrate them by recent research.

### Need for conceptual clarifications and a focus on both outputs and outcomes as dependent variables

As pointed out by Peter May (1999), most conceptual frameworks in the implementation literature are weakly developed, lacking adequate definitions of concepts and specification of causal mechanisms. The most important issue for the development of implementation research may be to reconsider what constitutes the object of the study. There has been some disagreement in the literature on the term of 'implementation' and on what is the important dependent

variable in implementation research (Hill and Hupe, 2009).

One problem is that the concept implementation is often used to characterize both the implementation process and the output – and sometimes also the outcome – of the implementation process. Lester and Goggin (1998) view implementation as a 'process, a series of subnational decisions and actions directed toward putting a prior authoritative federal decision into effect'. Thereby, they reject focusing on the output of the implementation process as 'a dichotomous conceptualization of implementation as simply success or failure.'

Although agreeing that the success/failure dichotomy is problematic, I suggest that the most important focus of implementation research would not be the implementation process but the outputs of that process in terms of delivery behaviors and the outcomes in terms of change in the behavior or conditions of target populations. As mentioned in the Part 5 Introduction to this implementation section, this would be much more in line with the classic focus of public policy research on the content of policy, its causes, and consequences (Dye, 1976). Implementation output is policy content at a much more operational level than a law. It is policy as it is being delivered to the citizens. Implementation outcomes are the consequences of implementation outputs/delivery behaviors.

The most common dependent variable in implementation research so far has been the degree of goal achievement, whether defined in terms of output or outcome. The first problem, however, is that goal achievement is a fraction. Output in terms of behaviors of implementers or outcome in terms of effects on target population is the numerator, and the policy goal is the denominator. Yet, using a fraction as the dependent variable renders theory building problematic when different factors explain variation in the numerator and the denominator. While the policy formation process is likely to account for variation in goals, the implementation

process is likely to account for variation in delivery behaviors.

Pushing it to extremes, the problem is that any attempt to make generalizations about goal achievement based on analysis of the behavior or outcome of implementers is dependent on the goal variable having a certain value. The generalization may become invalid if the goal changes. Therefore, generalizations about implementation output are extremely relativistic because statements are conditioned by the goals that are formulated. This is problematic when it is recognized that policy-makers are often more interested in making decisions on means or instruments than on goals; goals are often invented after decisions on the means have been made in order to legitimize the means adopted; and goals are not always expected or even intended to be achieved.

The second problem of using goal achievement as the dependent variable of implementation research is that such goals can be difficult to operationalize. Much has already been written in the implementation and evaluation literatures about the vagueness and ambiguity of policy goals and the difference between official and latent goals. In addition, while most policy statutes state some kind of goal for the outcome of the policy, many fail to specify goals or standards for the behavior of the implementers.

This is often the case in regulatory policies. For example, the Danish agro-environmental regulation has a general objective of reducing the nitrate pollution of the aquatic environment to a certain level, and it specifies a large number of very specific rules for farmers' behaviors in that respect. However, the only objective or requirement for the implementers – i.e., the municipalities that are in charge of enforcement – is that they inspect farms for compliance with the rules. In this case it is hard to gauge implementation success unless we use the goals for changes in the farmers' behaviors or in the physical environment as the standard. However, from the evaluation and implementation literatures, we also know that other

factors than implementation outputs may affect policy outcomes/effects (Rossi and Freeman, 1989).

Whereas the degree of goal achievement at the national level may not be an optimal variable for accumulating research evidence on policy implementation, implementation research has an important task in focusing on and explaining variation in outcomes. For several decades, however, implementation scholars as well as other political scientists have paid far too little attention to explaining variation in policy outcomes and examining the relation between implementation outputs and outcomes. As mentioned above, few implementation scholars have included outcome in their implementation models or framework (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; Elmore, 1982; Hull and Hjern, 1987; Goggin et al., 1990; Winter, 1990).

We do not have a complete understanding of the policy process unless we know how target groups respond to public policies. Despite the fact that 'the authoritative allocation of values for a society' (Easton, 1953) and 'who gets what, when, and how' (Lasswell, 1936) are among the most famous definitions of politics, until the turn of the century very few political science studies focused on how citizens respond to public policies. Some would say that this is the province of evaluation research. However, evaluation is typically characterized by a focus on methods, whereas very little theory development has occurred, especially extremely little political science theory. In political science journals the contrast between many studies of citizens' attitudes and behaviors at the input side of politics and very few outcome studies is striking. Yet, the study of outcomes is as much, if not more, about policy, as are most public opinion studies that relate to the input side of policy.

However, some very promising developments have taken place in the last two decades. First, starting particularly in the 1990s, some law and society and regulation scholars have attempted to explain variation in compliance among citizens (Tyler, 2006) and

firms (Parker and Nielsen, 2012) and the role of enforcement (i.e., policy implementation) in shaping compliance (Winter and May, 2001, 2002; May and Winter, 2012). Second, a research agenda on how public management affects the performance of organizations has been initiated around the turn of the century by, in particular, Kenneth Meier, Laurence O'Toole, George Boyne, and their collaborators (Boyne, 2003; Meier and O'Toole, 2007). They use the term 'performance' to indicate valued outcomes, e.g., academic performance of students in schools.

Accordingly, it is fruitful if implementation studies focus on and seek to explain variation in outputs and outcomes and study the relationship between implementation outputs and outcomes. For example, in several countries employment policies of the last decade have demanded that employment agencies and their caseworkers emphasize getting unemployed clients quickly into work in their conversations with such clients and use sanctions for non-compliance in order to increase employment. However, agencies and their street-level bureaucrats typically vary in the extent they deliver such outputs and outcomes. Implementation studies can play an important role in seeking to explain these variations by various implementation factors, such as the role of policy and organizational design (Hill, 2006; Beer et al., 2008; Winter et al., 2008a), interorganizational collaboration (Meier and O'Toole, 2003; Lundin, 2007; May and Winter, 2007), management behaviors, and the attitudes and capacity of street-level bureaucrats (Riccuci, 2005; Winter et al., 2008b; May and Winter, 2009; Schram et al., 2009).

The behaviors of street-level bureaucrats are also important in explaining variation in outcomes (Bloom et al., 2003; Heinesen et al., 2004; Winter, 2005; Baviskar and Winter, 2009; Behncke et al., 2010; Weatherall and Markwardt, 2010; Winter and Baviskar, 2010).

Treating implementation outputs as both a dependent variable – and as an independent variable in explaining variation in

outcomes – raises some important considerations on how to conceptualize and categorize the behavior of implementers at different organizational levels, including the crucial level of the individual street-level bureaucrat. One very intriguing question is whether we can find behavioral dimensions and classifications that are universally applicable in all policy areas, or if we should generate concepts and classifications that are different from one policy area to another.

To the extent that ~~a policy statute sets goals or standards for implementation practices – as in the employment-policy studies above – it is a relevant task for implementation research – both to study the extent to which these standards have actually been met – which is important from a democratic effectiveness~~ perspective (Winter, 1990; Winter and Nielsen, 2008) – ~~and to explain variations in such valued practices~~. Such findings can be important to policy makers and researchers in that particular policy area. However, some findings on implementation factors that are fostering compliance among implementing organizations and street-level bureaucrats with these standards are also likely to be valid in others settings and policy areas.

~~Another strategy is to use behavioral concepts that apply to all policy areas, whether these behaviors are mandated or not.~~ Although Meier and O'Toole (2007) in most of their studies of management and performance have studied educational management, their ~~theorizing and concepts on management practices are based on general public management theorizing, and many of their findings are likely to apply to other policies as well.~~ Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory represents an ambitious attempt to offer a universally applicable set of concepts for describing the coping behavior of street-level bureaucrats in all policy areas (see also Winter, 2002). However, several of these coping mechanisms apply better to implementation of social rather than regulatory policies, and a universally applicable classification scheme may suffer from a lack

of the precision that a more policy-specific set of concepts could offer.

A middle ground is to use sets of concepts that apply to very broad classes of policies. For example, concepts have been developed that are appropriate to classify the behavior of implementers in almost any kind of regulatory policy (Kagan, 1994). May and Winter (1999, 2000, 2012; Winter and May, 2001) have developed concepts for regulatory enforcement at both agency and individual street-level bureaucrat levels. Agency enforcement choices are conceptualized as (1) tools (use of different enforcement measures: sanctions, information and assistance, and incentives), (2) priorities (whom to target and what to inspect for), and (3) effort (use and leveraging of enforcement resources). The enforcement style of individual inspectors is defined as the character of the day-to-day interactions of inspectors with the target group. May and Winter expect, and verify, in a study of agro-environmental regulation in Denmark, that enforcement style has two dimensions – the degree of formality of interactions and the use of threats and other forms of coercion. They also identify distinct types of enforcement styles among inspectors along these two dimensions (May and Winter, 2000; 2012; see also May and Burby, 1998; May and Wood, 2003).

Whereas relevant concepts for delivery performance/outputs have been developed for regulatory policies, such conceptualizations seem to be underdeveloped in social policies apart from Lipsky's concepts of coping behaviors. Some inspiration can, however, be obtained from the above regulatory policy concepts at agency as well as individual field worker levels. In studies of the implementation of various Danish social policies on employment, integration of refugees and immigrants, and vulnerable children and youth, Winter and collaborators have conceptualized street-level bureaucratic behaviors along the dimensions of coping, formalism/legalism, coerciveness, and professional distance, which seem to be fruitful – both as dependent variables and

independent variables explaining variation in outcomes (Winter, 2002; 2005; Heinesen et al., 2004; Beer et al., 2008; Baviskar and Winter, 2009; 2011; Winter and Baviskar, 2010).

One advantage of creating such conceptualization of the behavior of implementers is that it is well suited for testing hypotheses for explaining variation in implementation behavior across time and space. Variables from implementation theory characterizing aspects of the implementation process would be an important basis for the development and testing of such hypotheses. However, another ~~advantage of focusing implementation research on implementation outputs and outcomes as dependent variables is that we can integrate the study of implementation much more with theory on bureaucratic politics as well as organization and management theory~~. Thereby, implementation research can gain inspiration from these research fields that have a long tradition of studying the behavior of agencies and bureaucrats. In return, these subdisciplines can benefit from implementation concepts that are much more policy relevant than the behavioral variables that have been applied in most bureaucracy and organization theory.

As examples, principal–agent theory and its notion of information asymmetries has been fruitful in examining control problems in service delivery (Brehm and Gates, 1997; Winter, 2003; Winter et al., 2008b). The same applies to classic bureaucracy theory on the role of rule boundedness in shaping street-level bureaucratic behaviors (Winter et al., 2008a). Representative bureaucracy theory has found a renaissance when applied to implementation problems at the street level (Keiser et al., 2002). ~~Network and contingency theories have been important in explaining collaboration in implementation and its effects on outcomes~~ (Meier and O'Toole, 2003; Lundin, 2007; May and Winter, 2007).

The conceptualization of implementation outputs/behaviors is likely to make it much easier to study the relation between

implementation outputs and outcomes (May and Winter, 1999; Winter and May, 2001, 2002; Bloom et al., 2003; Baviskar and Winter, 2009; Weatherall and Markwardt, 2010). In such studies delivery-level behaviors/output changes from being a dependent variable in explaining delivery behaviors to being an independent variable in explaining outcomes. However, often, ~~we need different theorizing to explain implementation outputs and outcomes.~~

As claimed by Elmore (1982, 1985), to change target groups' problematic behavior requires an understanding of the incentives that are operating on these people as well as of how street-level bureaucrats can influence and build on these incentives. For example, in examining Danish farmers' compliance with environmental regulations, Winter and May (2001) map the regulatees' action model and show that compliance is affected by farmers' (1) calculated motivations based on utility and calculating the costs of complying and the perceived risk of detection of violations, (2) normative sense of duty to comply, and (3) social motivations based on adaptation to expectations from significant others. Inspectors signal such expectations through their style of interacting with target groups, including their degree of formalism. However, willingness to comply is not enough if the regulated entities do not have the ability to comply. Thus, awareness of rules and financial capacity increase farmers' compliance. Understanding target populations' motivations and incentives is essential for specifying causal links between implementation behavior and target group responses and for designing smarter policies.

## CONCLUSION

~~Implementation research has made important contributions to public administration and public policy in adding a public policy perspective to public administration, with~~ a ~~strong focus on how policies are transformed~~

during the execution process until the point of delivery — and even after in changing the behaviors of citizens and firms. The research is valuable for our understanding of the complexities of policy implementation. The studies have revealed many important barriers for implementation and factors that may make success more likely.

The research has moved from explorative theory-generating case studies to a second generation of more theoretically ambitious models or frameworks of analysis with top-down and bottom-up research strategies and syntheses. However, while these frameworks presented lists of many relevant variables, the development of theory, specification of causal relations, and tests were still hampered by overdetermination because the common reliance on single case studies did not allow any control for third variables.

Goggin (1986) offered a very valuable suggestion in terms of applying more comparative and statistical research designs to cope with this problem. However, this is hardly enough. There is also a need for more theory development and testing, and the development of partial theories seems more promising than continuing the search for *the* general implementation theory or model.

In addition to methodological improvements and the development of partial theories, we need more conceptual clarification and specification of causal relations in order to increase our understanding of implementation. This includes reconsidering the dependent variable(s) in implementation research. If we return to the classic questions of public policy research formulated by Dye (1976) – i.e., studying the content, causes, and consequences of public policies – the delivery-level behavior/outputs of implementers is policy at its most operational level. Accordingly, I suggest that implementation research should aim at explaining variation in implementing behaviors/outputs and the role of these behaviors in shaping outcomes for target populations.

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# Interorganizational Relations and Policy Implementation

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Policy implementation is an important and arduous task in many kinds of institutional settings. It is clear, nevertheless, that implementation issues are at their thorniest – and most interesting – in interorganizational contexts. This chapter frames the subject of implementation especially as it relates to public administration, with a particular focus on interorganizational settings. The analysis considers how interorganizational relations can influence the implementation process, and what some of the practical implications might be for those who are responsible for trying to manage for policy success.

The first section of the chapter shows that interorganizational settings are both very common and also particularly challenging venues in which to effect implementation success. One implication is that public administrators need to develop an understanding about how to operate in such settings. The section following then begins to offer a way of understanding the interorganizational setting for implementation, and how interorganizational relations can be mobilized for action on behalf of public policy.

Here, the importance of structural relations themselves for implementation action is emphasized. A third section sketches some of the ways that interorganizational cooperation can be encouraged, despite the daunting impediments often faced by implementers. Attention is devoted to factors that may be useful for public administrators to consider in their efforts to improve implementation results, and particular emphasis is given to the efforts that managers can make outward, toward their interorganizational environment, to enhance performance and encourage success.

While scholars can now say a considerable amount about how interorganizational relations shape implementation processes and what managers might do to improve their effectiveness, this chapter provides no 'cookbook' with unambiguous guidance (O'Toole, 2004). The implications offered here, rather, should be considered of heuristic value. While offering guidance, therefore, implementation research nevertheless cannot tell a practicing manager just what to do in all situations.

## INTERORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Policy implementation almost always requires institutions to carry the burden of transforming general policy intent into an array of rules, routines, and social processes that can convert policy intention into action. This process is the core of what is meant by implementation.

The institutional settings for implementation can vary greatly in many ways (Saetren, 2005). One important distinction is between implementation that can be accomplished by (or through) one organization (Torenvlied, 2000), on the one hand, and implementation that requires the cooperation and perhaps coordination of multiple organizations, or parts of organizations (Winter and Nielsen, 2008, Chapter 4; Oosterwaal and Torenvlied, 2011), on the other. To the extent that implementation can be handled by a single formal organization, much of what is known about public administration in general can be applied to deliver policy results. When public programs need to be executed through actions spanning two or more organizational settings, the capacity for effective action may be enhanced, but the implementation task is more complicated. Impediments to concerted action are greater, *ceteris paribus*, and inducements to work together are typically fewer. Between (or among) organizations, the differing routines and specialized languages, not to mention distinct ways of seeing the world, mean that interorganizational implementation poses particularly daunting challenges. Among other things, such situations call for administrators to supplement what they know about managing within an organization with additional perspectives and options.

Interorganizational relations can be crucial for policy implementation. Two or more ministries of a single government may be tasked with handling a common program. Or so-called 'vertical' intergovernmental programs, such as those involving national and subnational authorities or the European Union with member states (Bauer, 2006), require the development and administration of operations across organizational lines. International organizations also are involved in encouraging domestic implementation action within states (Joachim et al., 2008). 'Horizontal' intergovernmental programs are less obvious but increasingly significant. A set of governments within a large metropolitan area, for example, may jointly administer cooperative programs for transportation, economic development or emergency services (Feiock and Scholz, 2010).

Beyond these types are contracting ties and privatization, and many policy fields in numerous countries now use complicated cross-sectoral implementation arrangements. These may include one or more public agencies linked to for-profit companies and/or non-profit organizations (Koski and May, 2006; Lane and Wallis, 2009). Certainly, the impetus of the 'New Public Management' has further encouraged such developments in some parts of the world (Kettl, 2005). In some nations, public–private patterns for implementation are buttressed by long traditions of social relations – such as the reliance on cooperation among 'social partners' in certain countries of Europe. And many public programs in several parts of the globe now include clients or target groups in the co-production of policy action.

The proliferation of interorganizational connections has become so pronounced that scholars and practitioners increasingly emphasize themes like 'collaboratives' and collaboration (Bardach, 1998; Krueathep et al., 2010) along with the critical role of interorganizational relations in influencing program results. A particularly visible theme in recent years in this regard has been that of 'networks' and network management (for instance, Kickert et al., 1997; Provan and Kenis, 2008; Rethemeyer and Hatmaker, 2008). This last topic is covered more thoroughly elsewhere in this volume, but it is important to recognize the connection between its increasing salience and the interorganizational patterns that typify many implementation settings.

For many implementation managers, the world is a very interorganizational one. Much of the systematic evidence on this point has been developed in Europe and the United States (Hill and Hupe, 2009), although there are few reasons to expect that these parts of the world are especially distinctive in this regard. Indeed, the much-referenced forces of 'globalization' are likely to encourage still more, as interdependencies proliferate.

Research in several countries of Europe shows clearly the importance of interorganizational phenomena for public administration. The works of Butler and Allen (2008), Koppenjan and Klijn (2004) and Lundin (2007) are illustrative; these studies document the complicated realities facing administrators and others in several countries. Data developed in North America are also important (Hall and May, 2004; Graddy and Chen, 2009; O'Toole et al., 2011).

Systematic studies of policy implementation are among the most telling kinds of evidence. In Europe, social scientists have shown that locally situated managers facing practical challenges like stimulating the growth of jobs and small-business economic activity confront an interorganizational terrain (Hull with Hjern, 1986). In the United States, research has shown that a substantial proportion of the public programs managed by public administrators are interorganizational (O'Toole and Montjoy, 1984; Hall and O'Toole, 2004). At the local and regional levels as well, interorganizational patterns are quite common (see Agranoff, 2007).

Why is the world of policy implementation so structurally complex? One factor has been the increase in the number of public programs crafted to embrace multiple values. When transportation programs focused solely on paving highways and adding lanes of traffic, maximizing the objective of moving vehicles might have seemed relatively easy – an engineering problem to be solved by a department managed in the interests of expanding the highway system. But when such a unit also has to cope with environmental degradation, housing dislocations, noise pollution and other impacts of such a program, implementation problems – and institutional arrangements – become more complicated. A result is the expansion of implementation patterns to embrace additional organizations and concerns.

The sheer expansion of the governmental agenda, furthermore, impels jurisdictional conflicts, overlaps and potential clashes. As the 'policy space' becomes increasingly filled with public programs, it is ever more difficult to operate without touching upon related programs managed elsewhere by governments – often by other departments of the same government. In such circumstances, it makes sense to try to link the operations, or to provide some social infrastructure of mutual consultation and information sharing.

A related issue is that, increasingly, governments are being asked to address problems that cannot be neatly categorized into one niche or another. So-called 'wicked problems' (Rittel and Webber, 1973), which touch upon several arenas and considerations simultaneously, require governmental responses that involve multiple jurisdictions and departments for effective resolution. A consequence is greater cross-boundary institutional links: interdepartmental advisory committees, complex sign-off authorization procedures, multiple veto and approval points, and so forth.

Another influence can be mentioned. Especially for governments facing budgetary stringencies, responses to pressing problems often take the form of 'mandates' directing an array of departments, governments or even outside parties to comply with orders. The purposes can be as varied as civil rights, sustainable development or the enactment of fair labor standards. The consequence can be that many units have additional objectives, and constraints, layered onto existing programs and activities. Such initiatives can constitute a catalyst for the proliferation of interorganizational implementation patterns.

A related stimulus derives from the forces of globalization, especially the impetus toward interorganizational patterning that emerges from the enactment of international agreements in policy fields: from trade, to

weapons control, to sustainable development. Once established, an international agreement can trigger reverberations at the national and subnational levels, as countries try to develop implementation patterns that can induce cooperation and compliance with commitments they have entered into (O'Toole and Hanf, 1992). Oftentimes, the required actions encourage the forging of links across ministries, governments and sectors within a particular country – not to mention ties between national bureaucracies and international secretariats, and transnational links between and among cooperating national agencies. The fact that there are thousands of international agreements now in place, and many more on the agenda, suggests the importance of this phenomenon. And the European Union, despite emphases on subsidiarity and the lack of a sizeable bureaucracy thus far in Brussels, has also experienced and stimulated multilevel interorganizational relations (Willems and De Lange, 2007).

Two additional causal factors are directly related to the forces of politics per se. Sometimes managers can handle the technical needs of a policy problem during execution by using a constrained set of actors in implementation, but political imperatives may encourage broadening the involvement to additional parties. The phenomenon is surely common in pluralistic systems, as public managers seek to maintain support for program execution following the enactment of policy. The addition of other actors to the 'coalition' involved in program execution can stem criticism and enhance chances for implementation success, even if some of the additional parties are likely to contribute little to the program's performance per se. Of course, interorganizational ties can also increase the chance that complexity and conflict will overwhelm efforts to make things happen. The trick is to promote the building of support while avoiding the tendency toward confusion and excessive complexity. In more corporatist political systems, there can be little choice. Peak associations of interested parties that are involved during initial phases of decision making are also explicitly the implementers and co-responsible parties during the latter phases of the process.

The second obviously political influence shaping interorganizational relations and policy implementation is that basic choices have been made, especially in nations with liberal commitments to the protection of a substantial private realm, that limits should be placed on the reach of public authority. A 'solution' during implementation can be for government to commit to problem solving but limit its formal control by opting for more complex, 'partnered' approaches with private firms or not-for-profit organizations. The result is a considerably more complicated, networked institutional form.

Of course, there are additional forces, impelling the waves of privatization, contracting, and related phenomena. These may include pressures for cost-cutting, ideological agendas, and weak management capacity in the public sector. In this regard, an irony can be briefly noted. To the extent that governments commit to contracting and privatization out of a concern that they lack internal management capacity, they are likely to be in for a nasty surprise: for public administration in such settings calls for great skill, effort, and capacity – more so, probably, than management in the more traditional situations (Rainey, 2009).

It seems clear, therefore, that the topic of interorganizational relations will remain important for administrators tasked with helping to make policy implementation succeed. Accordingly, it is critical to understand how to make sense of such institutional settings to improve prospects for implementation success.

## UNDERSTANDING INTERORGANIZATIONAL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Generating successful policy implementation means inducing cooperation, and perhaps even coordination, among interdependent actors in the face of impediments. In standard departments or ministries, the incentives to concert action would seem to be three:

- authority (B cooperates with A because B feels it is an obligation to do so);
- common interest (B cooperates with A because B feels that doing so toward the overall objectives would also serve B's own purposes); and
- exchange (B cooperates with A because B receives something else from A, or from elsewhere, that makes it worthwhile to go along).

The formal hierarchy allows public administrators in departments to rely to some considerable extent on authority as an aid to coordination. But administrators working across boundaries typically do not possess this luxury. There may be formal points of authority across disparate departments – the chief executive's office, for instance, or the cabinet – but in practice such authority is almost never invoked. Central officials have little to gain from being dragged into interministerial disputes and typically expect organizations to work out their differences. In addition, the time and authority of even central decision makers is strictly limited and is usually rationed for the most compelling cases. Rare is the implementation manager who can operate informally as an authority figure across organizations. The result is that public administrators who wish to trigger policy implementation while working across organizational borders must turn to other options: finding or stimulating common interest – and its continuing salience – and developing and maintaining sensible exchanges.

Behind these general and rather abstract statements lies a host of possibilities, and also complications. But the main point is that administering policy implementation in interorganizational contexts forces a reconsideration of the basic context of managerial choice, as well as the types and emphases accorded to managerial options. Administrators in interorganizational patterns can never assume support but must work to build it. They typically cannot rely on hierarchical institutional arrangements to congeal agreement, beyond their own formal unit, at any rate. Administrators working to implement in interorganizational settings often have to develop the infrastructure of communication – channels, language, signals, and so forth – to help achieve the objective of policy-oriented cooperation. The interorganizational setting is not a whole new world, for managers have been operating to some extent across boundaries for quite a while. But assuming an interorganizational array means shifting approaches to implementation from those injunctions more typically emphasized.

Public administrators operating in such institutionally complex settings find themselves maneuvering in a world where there are *multiple* points of managerial influence and very different managerial roles across the departments and other units of the policy world. Few moves can be made unilaterally. The task is less one of directing and controlling and more that of assessing contexts of interdependence and seeking to influence these, often in subtle ways, to increase prospects for successful cooperation (see Stoker, 1991).

The implementation challenge faced by public administrators, then, consists of assessing the structural setting itself to determine its strengths and weaknesses for encouraging cooperative effort; and then to tap common interest and exchange, as appropriate and practical, to increase prospects for success. The remainder of this section considers the interorganizational setting itself. The next part of the chapter focuses on the inducements to cooperation that may be available.

Not all patterns of interorganizational relations are created equal. One of the most important aspects of implementation settings is the structure of interdependence required or encouraged among the organizations involved. For it is not the sheer number of units, but their pattern and the way they link to each other, that is most critical.

This point conflicts with an assertion made in one of the most well-known implementation studies, that by Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), who claim that the 'complexity of joint action' is the key impediment to successful implementation. By this term, they mean the number of decision points. Pressman and Wildavsky indicate that as the number of such points required for implementation increases, the chance for action declines. Indeed, they seem to 'demonstrate' this conclusion mathematically.

The contradiction between this deduction and the abundant real-world evidence that success is not only possible but frequent has been dubbed the 'Pressman–Wildavsky paradox' by specialists in implementation. As Bowen (1982), among others, has shown, there are significant flaws in the analysis conducted by Pressman and Wildavsky. In reality, probabilities of agreement among organizations are not impervious to events; agreement on basic understandings at the outset of an implementation process can increase the odds of further agreement later. Organizations can also merge multiple decision points in a single set of negotiations. Bringing all the parties to the table to craft 'package deals' can also dramatically enhance the odds of success. Putting many issues into play simultaneously generates possibilities for tradeoffs. And merging decisions into a more comprehensive set of negotiations reduces the number of separate hurdles (see O'Toole, 2011).

These points suggest that the challenge of generating interorganizational cooperation toward success, even in complicated cases, is not likely to be nearly as uniformly disappointing as the Pressman–Wildavsky analysis suggests. An especially important aspect of complex interorganizational contexts that Pressman and Wildavsky failed to take into account is the structuring among the organizations themselves. Some policy tasks require that organizations – public agencies, say, or an agency along with a few contractors and subcontractors – deal sequentially with the challenge of implementation. In the

purest form of such an assembly-line pattern, one organization delivers outputs to another (which may do similarly to still more organizations down the implementation chain) without in turn receiving outputs from the second organization. Other policy tasks might call on units to work together closely, with the outputs of each serving as inputs for the others on a regular basis. Or perhaps a policy initiative might require several organizations to become active, but each one could act independently of the others. These three different kinds of circumstance fit Thompson's notions of sequential, reciprocal and pooled interdependence, respectively (1967; see also O'Toole and Montjoy, 1984). Of course, in large, complicated interorganizational networks, there may be instances of each of these types of interdependence within the same overall program array.

It should be clear that implementation is affected by the type(s) of interdependence, not simply the number of units or decisions. For example, in a sequential arrangement, a delay or impediment at any place in the chain will mean implementation problems at the point of intended impact. This assembly-line structure of interdependence creates, in effect, potential veto points at each link. Sometimes, interorganizational arrangements for implementation are structured to allow just one of the units involved to exercise potential veto power. This sort of arrangement is sometimes purposely chosen to make sure a particular organization, and its point of view and jurisdiction, are given special weight. An example would be an environmental agency charged with reviewing construction projects and disapproving those with significant adverse impacts.

In sequential arrangements, adding more organizational units in a chain increases the number of possible roadblocks to action. But in other arrangements, for instance in programs that seek to pool the action of multiple organizations, adding units can *increase* prospects for some implementation action. In short, the structure of interdependence among

the organizations can make a big difference in what happens. This point can be kept in mind when designing interorganizational patterns for implementation. For example, if reliability is of prime importance, multiple service-providing organizations arrayed in a pooled fashion can increase the probability of success via purposeful redundancy. Note the vast number of organizations assisting the seriously mentally ill in mid-sized US cities (Provan and Milward, 1991); the overall pattern is highly complex, but one result is that fewer clients slip entirely through the cracks. If a particular policy objective or value needs to be ensured in a complicated program setting, creating a veto point unit via sequential interdependence can be effective. If well-integrated action is essential, crafting interunit links framed around reciprocal interdependence can be important. And sometimes structural arrangements can be consolidated or reorganized to reduce coordination demands.

## ENCOURAGING INTERORGANIZATIONAL COOPERATION

Recognizing the significance of different interorganizational patterns is one step toward effective implementation. In addition, skillful implementation managers need to find ways of getting organizations to work together toward policy success. Doing so means that implementation managers have to interact with counterparts in other organizations and stakeholders in and outside of government – to build support, negotiate, coordinate, and sometimes fend off disruptive influences. This kind of managerial networking can be expected to be a part of any successful interorganizational implementation, and we address it first. We then turn to the different ways of encouraging cooperative effort during such a process. Inducing implementation success via interorganizational ties typically requires some combination of generating and tapping common

interest, on the one hand, and/or utilizing exchanges to link units in productive ways for purposes of policy. Each of these themes deserves attention as well.

### Managerial networking and interorganizational implementation

Implementing programs in interorganizational settings means that managers have to work not only inside their own agency or ministry but also externally to carry out the myriad tasks associated with enhancing cooperative effort. Systematic, quantitative empirical research has shown that managerial networking of this sort can improve performance – boosting the outputs and outcomes of policy. Findings in public education support this claim (Meier and O'Toole, 2001, 2003), as does research on law enforcement (Nicholson-Crotty and O'Toole, 2004). Managerial networking has also been found to improve results for US state agencies charged with managing human resources and also indebtedness (Donahue et al., 2004) and those seeking to implement reforms aimed at 'reinventing government' (Jacobson et al., 2010). In addition, Andrews et al. (2010) find performance-related effects for local authorities in England. Such externally directed efforts can also run the risk of cooptation – thus improving results for the more powerful external actors and clients while doing little or nothing for more marginal stakeholders (O'Toole and Meier, 2004) – but patterns of networking are clearly a regular part of interorganizational implementation.

We turn now to the functions that can be assisted through such interactions.

### Building and using common interest

If organizations each care about a policy objective, and if the participation of each is essential for success, their shared interest in the result may be enough to generate effective implementation. This statement

is true, and important, but one should be careful to recognize as well the non-trivial impediments to joint action that may still remain. For one thing, different organizations very often have somewhat different goals and perspectives on matters like policy. Even where there are overlaps in interest and priorities, there are also likely to be some discrepancies. Second, one key reason why so much implementation involves interorganizational links is that complicated policy challenges often require consideration by different kinds of units reflecting distinct and partially competing goals. In such cases, which are quite common, it is unrealistic to expect common interest itself to be sufficient. At a minimum, it is likely that even shared goals will be differentially salient in separate units. Third, for a whole set of nitty-gritty implementation details, different organizations will have unique perspectives even if they share a common overall goal. For instance, matters like turf and budgets can trigger conflicts even among strongly committed units.

Even if all relevant organizations share an interest in having the policy succeed, each may be reluctant to commit itself wholeheartedly without knowing that the others are doing so as well. Organizations involved in a complex enterprise, in short, may be cautious about the possibility of 'free riding' among their partners. When numerous organizations are potentially involved in an implementation effort, there may be a problem of collective action, even if there is common interest in the outcome. This issue can be quite vexing. Particularly when levels of trust are low, it may be difficult to get a true interorganizational effort off the ground.

What can public administrators do to assist the process? A number of actions can be helpful.

One possibility is signaling. If different bureaus or departments have similar perspectives on the common endeavor, managers can help by simply making that important fact clear to all involved. The more that all understand that everyone shares the commitment, the less the chance that doubts and second thoughts will arise. A related point is

'framing' (Kahneman and Tversky, 1984): interorganizational efforts are typically complicated. In the real world this complexity may cause doubts to form about the cooperative venture. Questions may arise about whether others are going to be cooperative, or whether differences will overwhelm the potential for success. Managers can help by highlighting the key points of common interest that could get lost from participants' attention amid a welter of detail and uncertainty. Focusing participants' perceptions on the accurate reality that they (mostly) do agree and that they are engaged with others in a valuable activity can help stem hesitation and increase trust (see further comments on this issue shortly).

Similarly, administrators can work to get parties on the record in public and obtain specific commitments to cooperate on certain observable tasks. Commitments on the part of some can facilitate the generation of commitments by others, as the risks of going it alone are substantially reduced. Similarly, iteration can help. Administrators can try to get the action going and keep it moving in relatively predictable, repeated interactions. Doing so reduces coordination costs, increases understanding and predictability, and also enhances trust. Moreover, administrators can craft transparent reporting systems, so that all parties can see what the others are up to on issues that matter for them. None of these options really alters the 'natural' line-up of forces among the organizations; instead, the moves are aimed at facilitating the search for stable and cooperative approaches to the joint effort.

Additional steps can also be helpful. Administrators can make efforts to prevent some units from acting as free riders on the efforts of the others – for instance, by monitoring action across multiple units, if all agree. Indeed, all may have an interest in assigning such responsibilities to a particular unit or manager, given the shared interests in cooperative effort. Also, managers of interorganizational implementation can sometimes exercise discretion to design or shift the mix of units involved to ensure a substantial

degree of overlap in perspectives; and implementation managers can use the art of persuasion, by finding ways to increase the perceived value associated with cooperative activities.

Cultivating norms supportive of cooperation can also be a valuable step. Such norms, along with respect for the needs of other participants, can be critical as forms of 'social capital' that can pay dividends into the future; and, of course, administrators of programs crossing organizational lines can apply their own influence to help generate regard for those actions supportive of these norms.

Furthermore, administrators can generate increasing amounts of cooperation by delegating large, complicated and potentially risky commitments and decisions into smaller ones. If multiple departments, for instance, are being asked to commit time and substantial resources to a joint enterprise apparently fraught with risks – including the perceived risk that others will not do their part – implementation managers can sometimes make cooperation more feasible by rendering it less risky. By trimming a large commitment into a series of smaller bargains enforced over time, and with at least the potential for withdrawal (or retaliation), the costs of any particular move become less of an impediment, while the benefits of joint cooperation over limited tasks escalate over time. And beyond the direct contributions to achieving the collective task, there is another benefit. Organizations that have learned to work with others and to draw gradually on the contributions of others are very likely to increase their mutual trust. As this shift in expectations develops, additional agreements are easier to strike; the payoffs do not have to be immediate. Successful management of the early stages can contribute to easier policy implementation over the longer haul.

### Facilitating cooperation via exchange

Beyond common interest as a kind of interorganizational 'glue' that can congeal

cooperation toward implementation action, exchange is a social process that can shape implementation in productive ways. Organizations involved in interorganizational implementation typically need things from each other if they are to do their jobs. Just which ones are involved, and how the needs may be distributed, depend on the nature of the policy tasks and the structure of interdependence, a topic discussed earlier. Exchanges between organizations can create sufficient inducements to congeal cooperation. Exchange here refers not simply to the use of funds to produce goods and services, but also to a broad array of types of trades among interdependent units.

The use of funds to cement concerted action, of course, is the most obvious kind of exchange. Often, third-party involvement in service delivery is desired by policy makers, for any of a variety of reasons. Contracting with both such parties is a common instrument for linking organizations and framing the implementation arena, particularly when governments contract in a competitive context. Indeed, a typical element of the 'New Public Management' has been an extensive set of contracting relations across organizations and sectors. Many features of the exchange relations can be designed explicitly into the contracted understanding; and contract elements can be negotiated to try to ensure that incentives match desired behavior and/or outputs. Even here, nonetheless, there is considerable need for skillful public management. Contracts are not self-enforcing; they require talented administration to work well, and no set of incentives, no matter how carefully designed, is completely self-enforcing (Miller, 1992). Some degree of leadership must be employed to congeal support across the units for effective action.

Exchanges among organizations involved in policy implementation can extend considerably beyond formal agreements to trade money for effort or results (Bardach, 1998). Organizations need inputs from their environments on a regular basis, and they seek

outlets for their products as well. The inputs can range from political support, to human resources, to information; and the outputs can be of myriad types as well. When implementation requires or encourages interorganizational cooperation, those concerned about making the process work well are often advantaged by focusing on the kinds of exchanges that have developed, and could be encouraged to develop, among the interdependent units. Central government agencies can offer funding, discretion and information to subnational units, which can often, in turn, regulate or deliver services better than could central authorities within their territory. The success of the subnational effort also benefits the national agency, whose interest is served by smooth flows of funds and delivery of services. And so on.

Exchanges can extend considerably beyond the most obvious kinds of trades. Organizations typically have relatively complex agendas, and often they must deal with each other over many matters and through extended periods. While these facts of life can make negotiating complicated, they also render it more productive. Public administrators involved in policy implementation can use such circumstances to encourage successful policy action. Departments and other organizations are often interdependent on a number of tasks. Even when they are not, it could be that what from one perspective looks like a single (potentially) cooperative endeavor – a joint program or proposal – can also be seen as a stream of interdependent decisions and joint efforts linked together, perhaps via a stream of exchanges.

This complexity can be an advantage, since the separable cooperative actions can be explicitly 'placed on the table' by creative public managers. Exchange might be built across different tasks of interdependent units to facilitate more stable long-term cooperation. In a similar vein, large policy efforts that require management across boundaries can themselves be seen as a substantial set of less overwhelming potentially cooperative efforts. Almost inevitably, different parties

will view the successful completion of these with different levels of salience or enthusiasm – the letting of a contract, the completion of a milestone, the involvement of certain outside interests, the incorporation of certain capital spending items into a larger plan, and so on. These discrete but related foci can offer chances for tradeoffs in the interest of overall success.

Public administrators can contribute to increasing the overall odds of success if they stay alert to such options. Often, the brokering of these possibilities does not happen without active effort on the part of managers focused on the overall effort. Identifying such exchange possibilities, proposing tradeoffs, helping to stipulate the terms of the interorganizational agreement, and then working to monitor and manage information flows so that all relevant parties can see what is happening and whether quid pro quos have remained viable – these kinds of managerial steps may be essential parts of any solutions over the longer term.

Sometimes, exchange can be facilitated by public administrators who can change the set of alternatives for cooperation (and non-cooperation) under consideration. On occasion, simply reminding organizations involved of the 'default option' – the consequences if no agreement is reached – can encourage productive exchange. Particularly if non-cooperation can result in another party (for instance, a higher level of government) enforcing its will on those involved in early stages of implementation, it can be helpful to alert such parties to the consequences of any lack of agreement. Managers can sometimes go beyond this point to identify new and creative options that may have escaped the notice of all other participants. The ability to see stable bargaining alternatives in highly conflictual situations has long been recognized as a key element of skillful diplomacy; and administrative diplomacy is often quite helpful in assisting exchange for interorganizational implementation. Crafting 'new' options, therefore, is often an

important element of productive interorganizational relations.

Similarly, shifting the set of organizations involved in an implementation setting can increase the degree of common interest among those in the program, as explained above, and can also facilitate exchange under certain circumstances. Which units ought to be a part of interorganizational implementation is only partially a technical matter. Stoker (1991) has pointed out that it may be possible to involve organizations that have enduring conflicts with each other and yet can find ways of cooperating on a particular program despite the persistence of such differences.

This consideration of exchange as a critical element should not be taken to imply that interorganizational relations are always, or even usually, marked by totally voluntary agreements among organizational units. Despite the reality that formal authority is rarely invoked to force long-term, productive interorganizational cooperation, power relations among interdependent organizations can influence the flow of events during implementation. Resource-dependence theory suggests that those units in possession of critical resources needed by others can be more influential. Units involved in interorganizational implementation tend to try to manage their strategic contingencies to maintain some maneuverability, and certainly, organizations that are crucially important to the other units involved in an implementation effort can be expected to play a particularly significant role in shaping the kind and level of cooperation that develops.

Public administrators located in such agencies may be able to influence implementation processes meaningfully. It is useful for public administrators to be alert for circumstances in which their units are unusually influential; such situations can provide opportunity to institutionalize agreements and understandings in ways particularly favorable to successful implementation action.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of public policy occurs in highly varied settings, but it is clear that, most often, interorganizational cooperation is needed to achieve successful results. The organizations involved include governmental departments and ministries, subnational agencies, non-profit and for-profit units and organizations of target groups – who may even be involved in producing the implementation action. Whether (and how) interorganizational cooperation emerges depends on a number of factors. Substantial impediments may be present, so cooperation must be developed; it cannot be assumed. The pattern of interdependence among the organizations matters, although there is no 'one best' way arrangement for all circumstances. More organizations add capacity and also constraints to any implementation system. Common interest among the units involved can help congeal cooperative action, as can opportunities for exchanges among the participating units. In all these respects, the actions and networking of public managers can be highly consequential.

This chapter has outlined these challenges and opportunities, with particular attention to the role of the administrator. Given the frequently interorganizational context of policy implementation, the importance of such a position is particularly deserving of attention and understanding.

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# 16

# Street-Level Bureaucrats and the Implementation of Public Policy

Marcia K. Meyers and Vibeke Lehmann Nielsen

The democratic control of implementing agents is a perennial public administration concern. Generations of scholars and practitioners have debated the appropriate relationship between the politics of the legislative processes and the administration of the resulting laws. Scholars working with rational choice models have joined the debate, with particular attention to the incentive and contractual structures that align the interests of implementing agents with policy-making principals. Similar concerns have been prominent in the scholarly literature on policy implementation, whether framed as a 'top-down' issue of fidelity to policy-makers' goals or a 'bottom-up' issue of policy adaptation during the implementation process. In recent years scholars have expanded the motivating questions for this field from the study of fidelity, per se, to consider the social construction of policy directives and the impact of the broader social and cultural context on the actions of front-line implementing agents.

In this chapter we consider what is known, how to understand and what remains to be learned, about the role of street-level bureaucrats in policy implementation. We begin with a review of the most commonly discussed characteristics of those front-line workers who function as de facto bureaucratic policy makers. We next consider the questions of whether (and how) policy officials control the discretionary actions of these workers. This leads us to consider the normative questions that motivate concern about hierarchical control, including the implications of the exercise of street-level discretion for democratic accountability, equity, and policy achievement. We briefly review emerging theoretical approaches that integrate theories of institutional, organizational, and individual contingencies and conclude by reflecting on the importance of contextualizing the evaluation of front-line performance to understand the intra- and inter-organizational conditions for policy implementation.

## DEFINING THE STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRAT

In his seminal 1980 study of workers in schools, courts, and welfare agencies, Michael Lipsky defined street-level bureaucrats as public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work' (Lipsky, 1980: 3). They include teachers, police officers, welfare workers, health and safety inspectors, and other public employees who control access to public programs, deliver service, and/or enforce public laws and regulations. As such, they occupy a unique, and uniquely influential, position in the implementation process.

By virtue of their position at the interface between citizens and the state, street-level bureaucrats are responsible for many of the most central activities of public agencies, from determining program eligibility to allocating benefits, judging compliance, imposing sanctions, and exempting individuals and businesses from penalties. Because these activities involve direct interactions with citizens, street-level bureaucrats also exercise considerable discretion. In contrast to other production processes, street-level services and regulations require workers to engage in a joint production process with their raw materials; workers can rarely produce desired policy outcomes without the active cooperation of the individuals who are beneficiaries of public services or the targets of public regulations. This interdependence introduces substantial variability and unpredictability into the work of street-level bureaucrats. It increases their need and their opportunities to exercise discretionary judgment and constrains the ability of supervisors to directly observe and monitor their activities.

In Table 16.1 we summarize the job characteristics – and some of the resulting behavioral

### Table 16.1   Street-level bureaucrats' job characteristics and their consequences

| Job characteristics | Consequence |
| --- | --- |
| ○ Job responsibilities cannot be fully specified in advance or micro-regulated by superiors | ◊ SLBs are able and required to exercise discretion in performance of their jobs |
| ○ Work is part of joint production process(es) that include other actors, including policy targets | ◊ SLBs' behaviors and job performance emerge in interaction with other actors, introducing variability and unpredictability |
| ○ On-the job behaviors are difficult to observe or to directly monitor | ◊ SLBs have opportunities to interpret policy during delivery and to engage in practices that deviate from those desired by policy makers |
| ○ Goals, priorities, and standards for job performance are often politically contested and the technology for achieving goals may be uncertain | ◊ SLBs often experience competing or even contradictory performance demands and may be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by multiple stakeholders with divergent values and expectations |
| ○ Resources available to achieve policy goals are limited | ◊ SLBs are required to ration their time, attention, and other resources, often without clear or consistent guidance about priorities |
| ○ Positions in public agencies or publicly authorized non-governmental organizations place them in the position of agents charged to act on behalf of political principals | ◊ SLBs manage and are accountable for performing job tasks for which they do not fully determine the goals, content or underlying assumptions |
| ○ Job performance, including specific decisions about cases and clients, have consequences for others | ◊ SLBs enact policy, control resources, and construct the terms of social citizenship for individuals who are the targets of policy and/or claimants for government assistance |

SLBs– street-level bureaucrats.

consequences – that scholars have identified as common to street-level bureaucrats across policy, institutional, and geographic settings (see also Winter and Nielsen, 2008).

Given their position at the interface of the state and the citizen and their opportunities to exercise discretion, street-level bureaucrats exert influence well beyond their formal authority. They operate, in Michael Lipsky's (1980) term, as bureaucrats who not only deliver but also actively shape policy outcomes by interpreting rules and allocating scarce resources. Through their day-to-day routines and decisions, they *produce* public policy as citizens experience it. Some observers ascribe even more far-reaching influence to street-level workers. Lipsky argues that they act as 'agents of social control' by requiring behaviors of citizens with whom they interact. Vinzant and Crothers (1998: 19) argue for a recasting of street-level bureaucrats as 'street level leaders' whose choices about which outcomes to pursue, and how to achieve them, 'help to define what it means to be a citizen in America.' Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003: 23) point out that street-level bureaucrats typically reject the term 'street-level bureaucrat,' describing themselves instead as 'citizen-agents who help create and maintain the normative order of society.' Less positively, scholars concerned with issues of oversight and direction of front-line workers draw attention to the potential lack of control and accountability in their work (Moe, 1984; Huber et al., 2001), going so far as to warn about the danger of 'runaway bureaucracies' (McCubbins et al., 1987) when discretion is not controlled.

## THE EXERCISE OF DISCRETION AT THE STREET LEVEL

The potential for front-line workers to affect policy as delivered raises obvious questions of democratic control. In his study of Danish farm inspectors, Winter (2000) poses the question: 'Are street-level bureaucrats servants

or masters?' The questions of whether, and how, policy-making principals control the discretion of their implementing agents dominated much of the initial empirical research on police, social service workers, health and safety inspectors, building inspectors, and other front-line workers. More recent work has broadened the focus to consider multiple sources of accountability within the contemporary, multi-actor, and often multi-sector context of governance for public programs (Lynn et al., 2000; Hill and Hupe, 2003; O'Toole, Chapter 16 in this Handbook).

### Political control

A number of scholars have taken up the question of whether political officials control the discretionary actions of street-level bureaucrats. Several studies using administrative data sets or surveys have found evidence that partisan political power (usually measured as the party composition of local legislatures) explains a significant portion of the variation in the performance of such front-line activities as determining eligibility for disability benefits (Keiser, 1999), granting good cause exemptions to child support cooperation requirements (Keiser and Soss, 1998), and conducting occupational health and safety inspections and imposing penalties (Scholz et al., 1991; Headrick et al., 2002). Two mediating variables have emerged in several studies of the influence of political officials. One variable is the proximity of political officials, with greater influence exerted by officials who are closer to front-line workers, e.g., at the municipal rather than federal level (May and Winter, 2009). A second variable is the clarity and consistency of policy-makers' goals: when policy makers' goals are unclear, contested or contradictory, front-line workers are more likely to make discretionary decisions that favor their own values and beliefs (Meyers et al., 2001; Riccucci et al., 2004; Keiser, 2010).

Because they rely on highly aggregated indicators of street-level behaviors, these

studies provide indirect evidence for political control over the actions and decisions of street-level bureaucrats. Research that has been conducted closer to the front lines has identified a number of constraints on the ability of political officials to direct front-line workers. In his study of Danish agricultural inspectors, for example, Winter (2000) concludes that information asymmetries between street-level workers and their supervisors render important aspects of front-line work beyond the control of political executives. He suggests that political principals exert only 'differentiated and limited political control' of street-level bureaucracies. Their control is greatest over actions that are visible, and more limited over less easily observed factors. Studies of front-line workers in social welfare programs have reached similar conclusions about the delivery of social welfare services and policy reforms (Meyers et al., 1998; Lin, 2000; Lindhorst et al., 2009).

In recent years scholars have moved beyond a simple model of political 'top down' vs street-level 'bottom-up' control over policy outcomes to frame the issue in terms of accountability within complex political, institutional, and organizational systems. As Hupe and Hill (2007: 284) argue, the contemporary structure of governance in the public sector places the work of street-level bureaucrats 'in a micro-network or "web" of multiple, both vertical and horizontal, relations.' Traditional forms of hierarchical control and accountability for achieving policy outcomes may be balanced or challenged by other forms of accountability in this web, including, for example, accountability to co-workers for managing work processes and relationships; accountability to peers within and beyond the organization for enforcing professional norms and standards of practice; and accountability to policy targets and other citizens.

### Organizational control

Consistent with a model of nested or multiple sources of accountability, many scholars

have focused their attention on the role of organization in controlling or directing front-line discretion. At the most basic level, the exercise of discretion by front-line workers has been linked to the structure of the task environment. For example, in their study of the failure of front-line staff to fully implement welfare reforms in California, Meyers and Dillon (1999) describe the 'paradox' that resulted when policy officials exhorted front-line staff to implement new employment-related policies but maintained existing performance-monitoring systems and incentive structures that emphasized eligibility determination tasks.

The extent and direction of front-line discretion has also been linked to organizational and task complexity. Complexity increases the need for discretionary judgments by front-line workers along with the difficulty of overseeing and monitoring their actions. Political efforts to control discretion through the promulgation of detailed rules and procedures often produce the contrary result, forcing front-line workers to selectively apply rules that are too voluminous to enforce in their totality (Simon, 1983). As Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003: 8) observe: 'Street-level work is, ironically, rule saturated but not rule bound.'

A number of studies have identified resource constraints as a key influence on the extent and direction of front-line discretion. Street-level bureaucrats have been observed to cope with chronically limited time and other resources by rationing services, discriminating in the provision of services to more cooperative clients, and rationalizing program objectives (Pesso, 1978; Lipsky, 1980; Keiser and Soss, 1998; Keiser, 1999, 2010; Winter, 2001). As Brodkin (1997: 24) observes, 'Caseworkers, like other lower-level bureaucrats, do not do just what they want or just what they are told to want. They do what they can.' Ironically, efforts to cope with limited time and other resources may lead to either inconsistent and particularistic treatment of similar clients, or routinized treatment of clients with dissimilar needs (Weatherley and Lipsky, 1977; Pesso, 1978;

Hagen, 1987; Brodkin, 1995, 1997). The importance of resources has been noted also in studies of the regulatory effort of government inspectors (Winter, 2000).

Scholars have expanded the study of resources to consider front-line workers' knowledge. In a study of the local implementation of natural resources (fish stocking) policies in Sweden, for example, Sandström (2011) finds that variation in access to current scientific knowledge resources explained differences in how local officials implemented regulations in the context of complex policy subsystems with conflicting goals. Hill (2003) proposes an even more expansive definition of resources as the 'storehouse of knowledge and practical advice that implementers might turn to for assistance,' including the knowledge and expertise provided by many non-governmental actors such as consultants, academics, journalists, foundations, and professional associations. In a study of community policing practices, she suggests that when street-level bureaucrats make use of such resources their professional practices may improve in advance of (or even in the absence of) policy reforms.

Scholars have also focused on variation in information and communication technology as a significant resource for implementation fidelity. By structuring interactions with clients to conform with data entry protocols and aggregating case-level data that can be used for performance monitoring, the introduction of management information systems would be expected to reduce the discretion of front-line workers and increase consistency across workers and cases (Bovens and Zouridis, 2002). There is some evidence that greater automation in tasks such as eligibility and claims determinations decreases variation in the treatment of clients resulting from street-level bureaucrats' subjective assessments – reducing the opportunities for street-level bureaucrats to act as 'rouge agents' who use discretion to discriminate in their treatment of claimants (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Wenger and Wilkins, 2008). As Hupe and Hill (2007) argue, however, when technologies are adopted within the context of

street-level bureaucracies their role is likely to be contested and the consequences for front-line discretion are uncertain. As an example, in a review of four studies of the restructuring of adult social care as part of the shift to new managerialism in the UK, Ellis (2007, 2011) concludes that technologies designed to increase top-down control increased standardization of practices in some setting while 'producing fresh conditions and requirements' for the exercise of front-line discretion in other areas of practice.

Considering the organizational setting more broadly in her study of the implementation of education programs in prisons, Lin (2000) argues that the implementation of new policies is likely to succeed only when the policies are congruent with the organizational context of implementing agencies:

> When policies are bent to purposes other than those that policy makers anticipated … it is not because staff do not understand their work. Instead, it is precisely because they try to make sense of their work, and thus to understand their jobs as a series of related tasks all bent toward the same purpose. This naturally leads them to refer each new policy to the values that are most salient in their organization (Lin, 2000: 162).

The observation that front-line workers seek congruence with existing organizational norms in their exercise of discretion can be extended to consider the influence of the larger context of the organizational networks within which most workers are embedded. In a study of eligibility determinations within the US Social Security Disability Insurance program, for example, Keiser (2010) finds evidence that eligibility workers' decisions were influenced not only by their own beliefs about policy goals and accountability but also by their perceptions of what other actors in the multi-organizational governance network might do. Even if they were not in a hierarchical relationship or direct contact with other actors, workers with greater knowledge about the usual actions of other organizations were more likely to reach eligibility determinations that would be consistent with those actions.

## Worker ideology and professional norms

Other scholars argue that street-level bureaucrats are relatively immune to the power of both policy directives and formal organizational incentives. They point, instead, to the influence of individual interests, professional norms, and the processes through which workers construct meaning in their daily work routines.

Numerous public administration scholars have described norms of public service as the most powerful incentive for bureaucratic performance. Some observers of street-level bureaucrats have reached similar conclusions. Examining survey and observational data on bureaucratic behavior, Brehm and Gates (1997) conclude that supervisors exert relatively little influence on the policy choices of bureaucrats, who are largely self-regulating. Bureaucrats 'work' – instead of shirking or sabotaging policy efforts – primarily because they embrace norms of public service and, secondarily, because these norms are shared and reinforced by their fellow bureaucrats.

Scholars have identified various aspects of worker ideology that may be consequential for discretionary behaviors, from their socialization into professional norms to their personal beliefs about policy instruments and targets. Winter's (2001) study of coping behaviors among front-line workers in a Danish social welfare program lends empirical support to the multidimensional role of worker beliefs. His multivariate analyses capture significant, independent contributions from workers' beliefs about their work environment (including perceived workload and adequacy of professional support), their assessment of the potential effectiveness of the policy instruments at their disposal, and their beliefs about target populations.

In a study of front-line workers' engagement with collaborative, interagency activities, Sandfort (2000) describes front-line welfare workers as largely isolated from their external environment and resistant to new

policy directives. She concludes that these street-level bureaucrats were guided largely by the shared knowledge and collective beliefs – or schemas – that staff developed to make sense of their day-to-day work. When management initiatives were consistent with these collective schemas, front-line workers found it reasonable to comply with new directives. But when initiatives appeared illegitimate or disconnected from the realities of daily work, workers' collective schemas legitimated workers' pursuit of alternative objectives and definitions of success.

Watkins-Hays (2009a, 2009b) contextualizes the development of workers' individual and shared schemas by focusing on social identity among front-line workers, both their social group memberships outside the organization (e.g., race, gender, class) and their development of professional identities within the organization. These social and professional self-concepts bring what Watkins-Hays calls the missing pieces to models of the implementation of public policies by street-level bureaucrats:

> This limited attention to the evolution of self-conception has caused us to underestimate the degree to which *how* street-level bureaucrats think of themselves – as professionals, members of racial groups, women, men, and community residents – shapes *what* they value, what they emphasize, and how they negotiated distributing the resources of the state to clients (Watkins-Hays, 2009a: 11).

## NORMATIVE AND EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS ABOUT STREET-LEVEL DISCRETION

The salience of the question about control depends entirely on normative beliefs about democratic governance and policy delivery. We care about the extent to which policy officials direct and limit the discretionary actions of front-line workers to the extent that we believe it has implications for outcomes such as democratic governance, fair and equitable treatment of citizens, or policy

achievement. The belief that these values are best achieved through a top-down, hierarchical model of control is a legacy of early Public Administration theory. A variety of competing perspectives suggest that the exercise of discretion by front-line workers is not only inevitable but also desirable – for promoting democratic control over policy processes, tailoring policies to individual needs, and increasing the effectiveness of policy efforts.

## Democratic accountability

The most obvious governance concern is the potential of street-level bureaucrats to undermine the goals of elected officials. Because street-level bureaucrats are neither elected nor appointed by elected officials, they are largely immune to electoral accountability. To the extent that elected officials cannot fully control street-level bureaucrats' day-to-day decisions and actions, citizens have few mechanisms for assessing, much less controlling, their impact on policy. Policy goals may be displaced or distorted when front-line workers focus their energies on managing workloads, coping with job demands, or pursuing their own ideological, policy, or political interests (e.g., Lipsky, 1980; Sandfort, 2000; Winter, 2000). In the language of principal–agent theory, while some street-level bureaucrats may 'work' to achieve policy makers' goals others may 'shirk' by pursuing other objectives or 'sabotage' policy by deliberately undermining the directives of their superiors (Brehm and Gates, 1997).

In other respects the exercise of discretion by street-level workers may actually contribute to democratic accountability by bridging gaps between citizens and elected officials. Local program workers, inspectors, and other front-line workers can serve as one more 'check and balance' on the exercise of power by legislators who are often far removed from the citizens who are the targets of their policies (e.g., Ferman, 1990). The exercise of discretion by front-line workers may

promote representative democracy by allowing for local influence on federal rules and bureaucracies (Scholz et al., 1991) and by creating opportunities for those most affected by policies to influence their delivery (Ferman, 1990). Vinzant and Crothers (1998) propose an even more important governance role for 'street-level leaders' whose 'active, accountable, and responsible' work at the interface of citizens, communities, and the state can increase the legitimacy and responsiveness of government agencies.

## Equity

A second normative question concerns the implications of street-level discretion for the individuals who are affected by their actions. It is possible that front-line workers use their discretion to the benefit of the citizens with whom they interact, taking individual circumstances into account when allocating benefits, enforcing regulations, applying sanctions, and the like. Street-level bureaucrats are also assumed by many to have professional expertise and knowledge that they can use to the advantage of clients (Vinzant and Crothers, 1998). Studies of welfare workers, rehabilitation counselors, police, and teachers provide numerous examples of the exercise of 'positive discrimination' to assist those individuals that they consider most in need or most deserving of assistance (Goodsell, 1981; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003).

Similar dynamics may create complicit relationships between regulators and the targets of regulation. Gormley (1995), for example, describes 'regulatory rituals' in US childcare arising from a combination of weak state regulations and regulators' unwillingness to punish poor-quality providers by putting them out of business. As he describes, 'the cumulative effect of all these norms is that good and bad providers become virtually indistinguishable, judging from the regulatory agency's output. Inspectors know who has been naughty and who's been nice,

that remains their little secret' (Gormley, 1995: 56).

It is equally possible that the exercise of street-level discretion leads to harmful or discriminatory treatment. Street-level bureaucrats in gatekeeping roles have been observed to limit claimants' access to benefits to which they are entitled (Hill and Bramley, 1986) and to discriminate in their treatment policy targets, introducing their own biases into the distribution of public benefits and enforcement of penalties (Lipsky, 1980; Brodkin, 1997; Keiser and Soss, 1998). Brodkin (1997) and others argue that chronic resource limitations, coupled with the difficulty of monitoring the quality of front-line services in public agencies, create conditions in which workers are very likely to deliver government services that are inconsistent and of poor quality. And she notes that this is particularly likely for poor and involuntary 'clients' of the welfare state for whom 'rights are uncertain, 'voice' is risky, and 'exit' means forgoing basic income support' (Brodkin, 1997: 25).

## Policy achievement

A third normative question concerns the implications of front-line discretion for the achievement of policy objectives. Street-level discretion introduces considerable uncertainty into the achievement of public policy goals, particularly when the interests of policy makers and workers diverge. Even when they both share a long-term interest in the achievement of policy objectives, in the short-term they usually operate with distinctly different priorities: policy makers to satisfy stakeholder demands for visible results; front-line staff to cope with the problems of managing work; and clients to survive and to manage the social bureaucracies (Lynn, 1993; Lin, 2000; Meyers et al., 2001).

When interests are aligned through policy and organizational design, the attempts of policy makers, front-line workers, and clients to satisfy these short-term objectives may

result in achievement of policy officials' goals. Behn (1991), for example, describes successful welfare-to-work programs in which agency managers employed performance measures and incentives (e.g., tracking and rewarding job placements) that aligned workers' interests with those of policy officials (to reduce welfare caseloads) and clients (to obtain stable employment). The attempts of each group to satisfy their own goals can result, however, in implementation that is inconsistent, at best, and incomplete, subverted, or aborted at worst. In these cases, the achievement of policy objectives is partial at most: e.g., routinization of 'individualized' educational plans (Weatherley and Lipsky, 1977), prison education programs that do not provide instruction (Lin, 2000), childcare inspections that become 'regulatory rituals' without sanctions or rewards (Gormley, 1995), or manpower training programs that 'train students for unemployment' by directing them to overcrowded occupations or equipping them with outdated skills (Hjern and Porter, 1981) or that fail to deliver on promises to place them into meaningful training and employment (Winter, 2001).

Much of the empirical research on front-line discretion and policy achievement has relied on detailed case studies of one or a small number of programs. A handful of studies have used multivariate techniques to examine the link between the behaviors of front-line workers and policy achievement by capitalizing on cross-site variation. Findings about the explanatory power of worker behavior from these have been mixed and suggest that results are sensitive to both model specification and to the measurement of the dependent variable.

Riccio and Hasenfeld (1996), for example, find only modest support for their hypothesis that the approach used by welfare-to-work staff influences client participation in employment-preparation activities. When they use a large sample of observations from similar welfare-to-work programs and employ multilevel estimation methods to

control for individual- as well as program-level characteristics, Bloom et al. (2001) find substantially stronger client-level effects associated with workers' description of the service approach in their office – such as the degree of personalization.

Multivariate studies also suggest that the same policy and organizational factors may have different effects on different aspects of target group behaviors. May and Winter (2000) find significant but weak effects of agency enforcement tools and inspectors' enforcement styles on perceived compliance of farmers with agricultural regulations. However, May and Wood (2003) find evidence that while building inspectors' enforcement style does not influence homebuilders' compliance with building codes directly, it may do so indirectly through affecting their knowledge of code provisions and cooperation with inspectors.

## STUDYING THE STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRAT IN CONTEXT

The growing body of scholarship on street-level bureaucrats paints a contradictory portrait. In some studies these workers emerge as frustrated and powerless cogs in bureaucratic machines; in others, as self-interested bureaucrats whose coping mechanisms frustrate and distort the policy intentions of elected officials; in still others, as heroic local leaders who translate impersonal policy directives for the benefit of their clients. Detailed case studies of the impact of street-level discretion on policy outcomes ascribe a powerful influence to front-line workers, while efforts to measure this impact using multivariate models have found relatively weak effects.

This contradictory portrait of street-level bureaucrats reflects both the lack of sufficient theory and methods for studying street-level workers and the failure to fully contextualize the evaluation of their performance. As Hjern and Porter (1981) argued over

two decades ago, given the complexity of implementation structures, neither organizational models of hierarchical control nor economic theories of individual incentives fully describe the influences on street-level workers. Scholars have proposed several theoretical frames that may be useful for integrating these factors. While none provide a single unifying theory, two examples suggest promising directors for future work.

One approach focuses on the implementation *process* and the dynamic tension between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' interests throughout this process. A recent paper by Hasenfeld (2010) provides an example of the integration of structural and political factors in a model of implementation of politically and morally contested policies. His model places worker/client interactions at the center of nested organizational and institutional layers through which political and moral conflicts are passed down from policy makers to policy implementers. The outer layer is the context for the policy design itself, typically crafted by national or local political officials to affirm broad policy principles and moral values. To the extent that these values are contested, political actors buffer themselves from political conflicts by crafting policy designs, to be passed on to implementing agencies, that are often vague, ambiguous or even internally contradictory. Implementing agencies, in turn, operate within the second nested layer of the model, a particular and often local institutional political economy in which multiple interests compete to influence the structures and practices for policy delivery. The decisions, compromises, and accommodations made by actors in the administering agencies in response to dominant interests are passed on, via policy and administrative directives, to organizations that interface with the targets of policy. These organizations also exist within a context of multiple internal and external interests, the third nested layer of the model. These interests influence the strategic choices of organizational actors about the structure and technology of policy delivery – choices that

balance, for example, the organization's need to align with dominant values, to mobilize resources, to justify practices ideologies and to satisfy internal and external stakeholders. At the fourth layer of the model, these politically negotiated structures and technologies create the conditions of work in which street-level bureaucrats actually create policy as delivered – from the tasks they are directed to complete to the number and characteristics of clients with whom they interact, the resources at their disposal, and the rewards, penalties, and discretion they experience. Hasenfeld's model suggests that it is through these proximate mechanisms, and the interactions of workers with clients, that larger political and social conflicts are ultimately resolved.

A second, and relatively less-developed conceptual approach to the study of street-level bureaucrats focuses more explicitly on the characteristics of *the street-level bureaucrats themselves* and how they interact with the organizational and institutional settings of their task and agency. Although worker characteristics have been included in empirical studies, they are often interpreted along the single dimension of workers' efforts to control their work environment. More recent work is expanding attention to consider multiple motivations that interact to influence their actions (see, for example, Hill, 2003; Schofield, 2004; May and Winter, 2009).

Working in this emerging area of scholarship, Nielsen (2006 – see also Winter and Nielsen, 2008) provides an example of a conceptual model for street-level bureaucrats' capacity and motivation that draws on theory from organizational learning and human motivation studies. Starting with the assumption that street-level bureaucrats are embedded in organizational and institutional systems, she focuses in particular on the characteristics and experiences of the street-level bureaucrats themselves. In this model the first worker-level factors operate to influence the workers' ability to implement policy, such as knowledge, cognitive abilities, and analytic and emotional intelligence

(Nielsen, 2010). The second worker-level factor that Nielsen proposes is workers' will or motivation to act in ways that go beyond their own self-interest in controlling work demands. She draws on classic motivational theory to suggest features of the organizational and task environment that will compel and/or entice workers to pursue policy goals. From *scientific management*, she considers whether the implementation of policy improves their conditions of work as 'economic (wo)man' – for example, salary, opportunities for promotion or financial bonuses, control over work hours. From *human relations* theory, she identifies factors that align workers' needs as 'social (wo)man' with policy directives, such as improving relations with co-workers, supervisors, and clients. Finally, from *neo-human relations* theory, she suggests factors that are important to workers' interests as 'self-fulfilling (wo)man' – for example, the extent to which implementation of the policy brings professional challenge and the achievement of policy goals is seen to have value and significance. Nielsen argues that both abilities and will are augmented or limited in practice by the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive institutions (Scott, 2001) of the organization, thereby recognizing the contingent influence of formal and informal institutions and the power of both policy makers and front-line workers to influence policy 'as delivered.'

## EVALUATING OUTCOMES

As scholars theorize about the role of street-level bureaucrats in policy implementation, they face the challenge of articulating clear criteria against which to evaluate their contributions. If street-level bureaucrats are embedded in complex implementation structures that both grant discretionary power and channel the exercise of that discretion, then it is impossible to evaluate their performance without considering the

implementation context. This creates considerable difficulties for the analyst who hopes to generalize about the 'success' of implementation or the 'cooperation' of street-level bureaucrats with policy officials' goals. The same front-line decisions and actions that represent cooperation in one implementation context may reflect shirking or even sabotage in another.

Implementation contexts vary across countries and political systems. Hill (1997), for example, contrasts the acute concerns for hierarchical policy control that arise in the highly fragmented and competitive federalist system of the United States with the 'rather gentler and more consensual' debates about national and local collaboration that arise in the more cooperative political systems in Scandinavian countries. Implementation contexts also vary with policy design. Delivering benefits to citizens, for example, raises very different implementation issues than regulating their behavior. Because policies designed to affect the behavior or circumstances of target groups must be co-produced with these targets, the implementation context also varies with characteristics of the target population. And some social problems are simply easier to resolve than others, because the technology is more certain, the desired outcomes are more realistic, or the interests and capabilities of the target population are more consistent with policy goals. Politics and policy designs determine not only what will be done or provided to whom but also the resources and authority that the implementing agencies will have at their disposal, the capacity of the organizational delivery system, the complexity of the inter-organizational network that must cooperate to achieve policy objectives, the density and coherence of the existing policy framework, and other organizational factors.

Given the diversity of implementation contexts, resolving the normative questions of what street-level bureaucrats *should* do, and the empirical questions of what they *do* do have an often-overlooked indeterminacy. As Helen Ingram (1990: 470) suggests,

'the challenge presented to implementers depends very much on the problems passed along to them by policy formulators.' The problems passed on to implementing bureaucracies, and the solutions they adopt, become, in turn, the challenge presented to local agencies and their front-line staff – including the job they are asked to do, the resources they are provided to do it, the rewards for performance, and the penalties for non-performance. If the job of the street-level bureaucrat and his or her capacity to do that job depend on the implementation context, against what criteria do we judge their exercise of discretion?

Recognizing the limited control that many workers exercise over policy outcomes and impacts, some observers suggest that we judge fidelity in terms of street-level behaviors rather than policy outcome (Matland, 1995). Lin (2000), for example, suggests that implementation success be judged on the basis of staff activities that are 'plausibly related' to the achievement of policy objective. Winter, in Chapter 14, also argues for the evaluation of behavioral variables that characterize the *behavior* of implementers. Whether this behavior by implementers brings about desired behaviors among target groups depends on additional variables, including the validity of the underlying causal model, which may be beyond the control of street-level workers.

Activities and performance that reflect fidelity to policy makers' intentions can provide a useful yardstick for evaluation. As Matland (1995 – see also Ingram, 1990) suggests, however, the definition of such actions can still be challenging. Appropriate actions are most easily defined when the intentions of policy officials are clear, consistent, and reasonable in light of agency capacity and expertise. But these implementation conditions are far from certain in democratic societies. Consider the case, quite common in social policy, in which policy-making officials achieve political consensus by adopting ambiguous or even contradictory policy directives. In this case we may judge the activities of front-line workers in terms of

their successful negotiation of a clear set of directives. When the technology to achieve desired policy ends is uncertain or unknown, front-line cooperation might be judged by the extent and success of local program experimentation. In still other cases, front-line implementing agents may seek to faithfully pursue policy-makers' interests but fail to achieve policy goals because they are not given the resources, or lack technical capacity, to achieve them. Under these conditions, success and cooperation might be viewed in terms of policy learning, with implementing staff informing decision makers about the mismatch between formal goals and actual capacity. Through a different lens, cooperation under these conditions could be defined as quiet complicity with the non-delivery of bold but essentially hollow promises that policy officials make to their constituents.

In short, in various implementation contexts, we might consider creativity, adaptation, learning, entrepreneurship, experimentation, or even complicity as the appropriate output against which to evaluate the exercise of discretion by street-level bureaucrats. Our failure to acknowledge this indeterminacy can lead us to assign both credit and blame for policy outcomes to street-level bureaucrats when our attention should be directed toward policy designs and other factors in the implementation context. As Hill (1997: 383) observes about the assessment of recent decentralization efforts in Britain: 'The notion of the distinction between policy making and implementation provides a splendid vehicle for shifting the blame – there was nothing wrong with the policy but it was undermined, subverted, and so on.'

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