



A Critical Insight into Policy Implementation and Implementation Performance

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Abstract. *Policy implementation involves translating the goals and objectives of policy into action. Although seen as an integral part of the policy cycle, substantial research has not yet been carried out in this area. This paper examines the state and status of policy implementation as a discipline and the factors associated with implementation performance, based on a review of the literature and analysis by researchers. The assessment in this study confirms the dearth of theoretical development of this subject as a major concern for this discipline and a barrier for perfect execution. It was also found that multiple factors are linked to poor policy performance, such as a lack of coordination, funding, commitment, capabilities among implementers and top-down support. Finally, by critically looking into loopholes associated with performance in policy implementation, five theoretical models were developed for improving performance. These respectively had a rational, organisational, political, bureaucratic and management basis. It is expected that the application of these standards would help to overcome issues, leading to successful policy performance.*

Keywords: *public policy, policy implementation, policy performance, implementation theory, implementation models.*

Raktažodžiai: *viešoji politika, politikos įgyvendinimas, politikos efektyvumas, įgyvendinimo teorija, įgyvendinimo modeliai.*

Introduction

Public policy is a guide to action, and it relates to a broader framework that involves putting into operation a philosophy, principle, vision and decision that are translated into various programmes, projects, and activities. A policy entails the broad statement of future goals and actions, and expresses the means of attaining

them. It is a framework of governmental intervention and covers a variety of activities. Public policy is defined as a purposeful course of action that an actor or set of actors follows in dealing with a problem or matter of concern [1]. It is a series or pattern of government activities or decisions designed to remedy certain social problems. Public policy must be properly implemented to reap benefits for citizens [17], and its success is positively correlated with the way in which it is put into practice. Even the best policy is worth little if it is poorly implemented.

One problem involved with policy implementation is that how to put it into practice lacks proper direction or guidelines. Markedly, such direction is supposed to be derived from the appropriate theories of policy implementation. Unfortunately, there is a consensus amongst scholars that “policy implementation” as a discipline suffers from viable, valid and universally accepted imposing or good theories. In this subject area, there is perhaps no such grand or fully fledged theory that, for instance, is comparable to Durkheim’s sociological theory of anomie or other similar patterns of theoretical sophistication [7]. One reason for the absence of such a grand theory for implementation is because this is still in its infancy as a discipline [6]. Over the years, this area has also been severely overlooked in the broader domain of public administration, thus restricting its theoretical development. Moreover, the implementation of a particular policy is very much context specific because it depends on political, social, economic, organisational and attitudinal factors that influence how well or poorly a policy or programme is implemented [10] [17]. The situation also varies considerably over time, across policies, and from one state to the next [6]. Many contextual factors have stopped the discipline from being adequately developed with regard to intellectual advancement.

The aim of this research is to take a critical look at the theoretical aspects of policy implementation, and issues associated with its performance. On the basis of such reflections, a few models are developed to provide guidelines for successful implementation. The research methodology relies on a literature review and rigorous reflexive interpretation.

State of the Discipline of “Policy Implementation”

What are the characteristics of a good theory? A good argument must follow virtues such as uniqueness, parsimony, conservation, the ability to be generalised, fecundity, internal consistency, empirical riskiness, and abstraction that applies to all research methods [20]. It is highly unlikely that policy theory would contain all these characteristics, and is almost impossible for any theory to include all these traits at once [11]. Ironically, there is no grand theory for policy implementation and, as such, this serves to obfuscate what implementation is and is not [6]. Nonetheless, although the discipline of policy implementation requires having classical theories over a span of time, different theoretical models or approaches (at least two: top-down and bottom-up) [17] and case studies have been developed in this area.

Implementation is an important stage in the policymaking process. This refers to the execution of law, in which various stakeholders and organisations work together with the use of procedures and techniques to put policies into effect to help attain goals [17]. Implementation is considered a process, output and outcome, and involves some actors, organisations and techniques for control. It is a process of interactions between setting goals and the actions directed towards achieving them [12]. The constituent element of most cited definitions of implementation is the gap that exists between policy intent and outcomes [9] [16]. The first-generation study of policy implementation has grown substantially since the seminal book “Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland” by Pressman and Wildavsky was published in 1973. Before then, there was a period of academic debate about the meaning of implementation [7]. As a case study, this work explored the difficulties encountered by the Economic Development Administration in Oakland, California, when trying to implement a job-creation programme during the 1960s. The research resulted in demonstrable progress in at least two respects. Firstly, there is now an enhanced understanding of the meaning of implementation and how it varies across time, policies and government; and secondly, it links policy design and application performance [17]. “The Implementation Game” is another important first-generation study conducted by Bardach (1977) [13]. First-generation studies were primarily concerned with describing numerous barriers to effective policy implementation [17]. However, they have been criticised for being atheoretical, case-specific and non-cumulative [6], and, importantly, theory-building was not at their heart [13].

Second-generation studies were more concerned with explaining success or failure with regard to implementation [17], and contributed towards developing analytical frameworks and models to guide research on implementation [6]. These studies can be broadly classified into top-down and bottom-up approaches to policy implementation [17]. This period was seemingly marked by a debate that was later dubbed as referring to top-down and bottom-up approaches and models for implementation research [13]. Notable scholars, such as Meter and Horn, Maznamin and Sabatier, illustrated a top-down model in explaining implementation, whereas on the bottom-up side, scholars such as Elmore Lipsky emphasised that application consisted of the standard problem-solving strategies of “street-level bureaucrats” [13]. Again, scholars tend to unify the two approaches or provide a hybrid one, and argue that policymakers should employ policy instruments based on the structure of target groups [15] [6]. According to the hybrid approach, the outcome of implementation is influenced by factors at a central and local level [6]. The goal of third-generation research was simply to be more scientific than the previous two generations in its approach to the study of implementation. This research attempted to directly confront conceptual and measurement problems that have impeded progress in the discipline [6], and put emphasis on defining specific hypotheses, finding proper operationalisation, and producing empirical observations to test the hypotheses [13].

Under the above circumstances, many scholars of policy implementation agree that the future phase of research in this area must be directed towards theory development [17], because a lack of theoretical sophistication is a critical problem that invariably affects policy performance, and effective performance requires appropriate guidance. It is assumed that direction should be derived from sound theories. Before we deal with the issue of theory development for this discipline, some aspects and understanding on policy performance are outlined below.

Policy Implementation Performance

The performance of policy implementation can be categorised into three areas, namely: 1) output and outcome of the policy; 2) the impact of policy; and 3) assessment of whether the policy leads to the development of a country or society as a whole. Successful policy outcomes depend not only on designing effective systems, but also on managing their implementation [4]. Until the early 1970s, application was considered unproblematic and considered only putting theory into practice. This viewpoint changed with the publication of Pressman and Wildavsky's case study "Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland." The authors examined the implementation strategies of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in Oakland, California, in the US. Despite having excellent intentions, this programme was unsuccessfully implemented, and the primary factors for failure included: 1) faulty theory for the programme; 2) unclear goals and objectives, 3) a lack of coordinated planning; 4) a lack of standardisation; 5) intra-agency antipathies; and 6) the complexity of joint actions. The complexity of joint action was in turn evident with regard to many aspects, such as i) the large number of participants and perspectives; ii) the multiplicity of decisions and the decreasing probability of programme success; iii) the result of having two goals and two decision paths; iv) the emergence of unexpected decisions; and v) the anatomy of delay. Later on, a study conducted by Bardach as a case of mental health reform in California viewed the implementation process as involving pressure politics (pressure and counter forces), messing with assent, administrative control processes, intergovernmental bargaining, and the complexity of joint actions. Features associated with each of these factors headed towards the conceptualisation of the process as "a system of loosely related games". Bardach was concerned about those games that have adverse effects on policy implementation, or factors that cause delays or failures in implementation. There are four types of adverse effect: (a) the diversion of resources; (b) the deflection of policy goals; (c) administration dilemmas; and (d) the dissipation of energies.

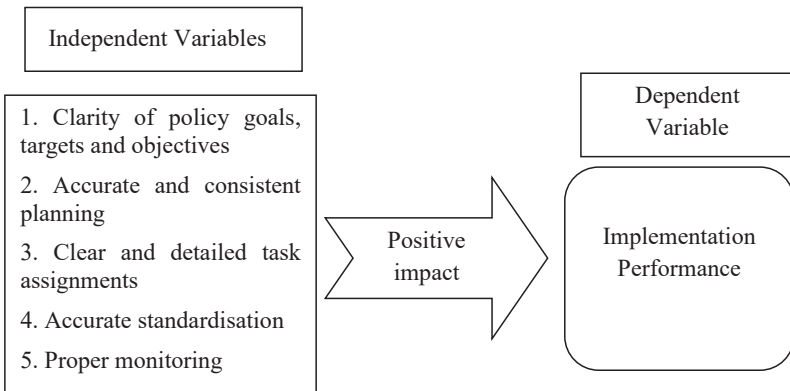
Other scholars have talked about constraints associated with policy implementation. Many policies are not implemented or executed according to their design, and a policy intervention may just be poorly managed or compromised by political interference. Sometimes personnel are not available or facilities are inadequate, and sometimes front-line implementers are unable to carry out an intervention through

a lack of motivation or expertise. Policy design may also be poorly structured, or the original design may not be transmitted well to staff. Moreover, indented policy participants may not exist in sufficient numbers or be identified precisely, or may be found to be non-cooperative [14]. Some scholars confirm that effective implementation of any policy can be severely undermined through a lack of sufficient resources [10] [9] [4] [8], incentive [10] [3] or competent staff, the presence of a negative disposition among implementers [10], a lack of inter-organisational communication [10] [3], professional and technical resources [6] [9], official commitment to statutory objectives [9], delegation of authority and flexibility [5], or sufficient autonomy [21], inter-organisational complexity and conflict [18], the impact of economic, political and social conditions [10], a lack of specific technical know-how or administrative capabilities, in prevalence of self-serving goals of street-level bureaucrats and an absence of organisational willingness [19], increased demand for services, vague, ambiguous or conflicting goal expectations, difficulties in achieving goals, and involuntary clients [8].

Models Developed for Successful Policy Implementation

Based on the contextual premises mentioned above with regard to precise performance, five models have been designed to accelerate implementation performance, as outlined below. These respectively comprise a rational, management, organisational development, bureaucratic and political model. Relevant hypotheses have also been formulated with regard to each model so they can be tested to comprehend the effect of implementation performance. The application of these standards would assist in developing theories for this discipline. Once these are developed, sufficient guidelines must be available for successful policy implementation.

1. Rational Model

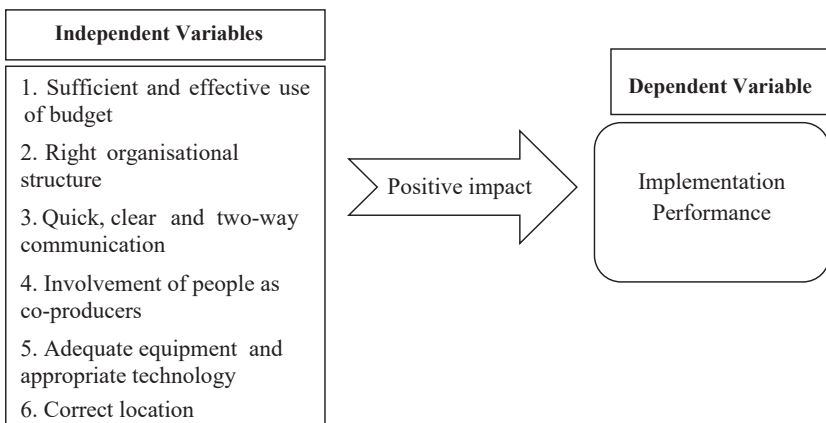


This model is primarily based on the assumption that policy implementation requires the clarification of goals, missions and objectives, detailed planning, appropriate job assignments, effective monitoring and evaluation, comprehensive and efficient operating procedures, and techniques required to assist implementers to define the scope of their responsibilities in line with policy objectives. The key independent variables involved in and the way they impact on policy performance have been highlighted in the following conceptual model.

Hypothesis 1: The clearer the goals, targets and objectives, the more chance that the policy will be successfully implemented; **Hypothesis 2:** The more accurate and consistent the planning, the greater the possibility of successful implementation; **Hypothesis 3:** Setting clear and detailed task assignments will lead to better implementation performance; **Hypothesis 4:** Accurate standardisation will enhance the performance of policy implementation and result in successful implementation; **Hypothesis 5:** The greater the level of monitoring, the greater the chance of successful implementation.

2. Management Model

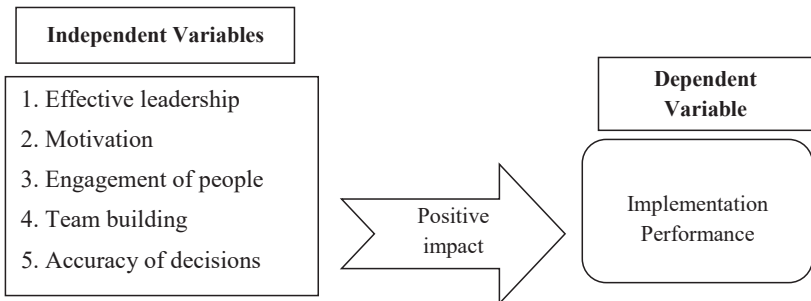
This model is based on the belief that the performance of policy implementation depends on many factors such as organisational structure, personnel and human resources, the activities of front-line implementers, equipment and technology, the level of coordination and cooperation, the exercise of authority, and place/location as implementation infrastructure. This model also attempts to identify problems or obstacles to policy implementation caused by any shortages in resources or delays to resource acquisition. The key independent variables and their impacts with regard to implementation performance have been stated in the following model.



Hypothesis 1: The greater the budget and the more efficiently it is used, the greater the chance of implementation success; **Hypothesis 2:** The right organisational structure will help lead to successful implementation; **Hypothesis 3:** Quick, clear and two-way communication will help to ensure better performance during policy implementation; **Hypothesis 4:** The greater the involvement of people (key stakeholders or beneficiaries) as co-producers, the greater the chance for productive and fruitful implementation of the policy; **Hypothesis 5:** Adequate equipment and appropriate technology will increase the effectiveness of policy performance; **Hypothesis 6:** The correct location of implementation processes will decrease delays and enhance the possibility of success.

3. Organisational Development Model

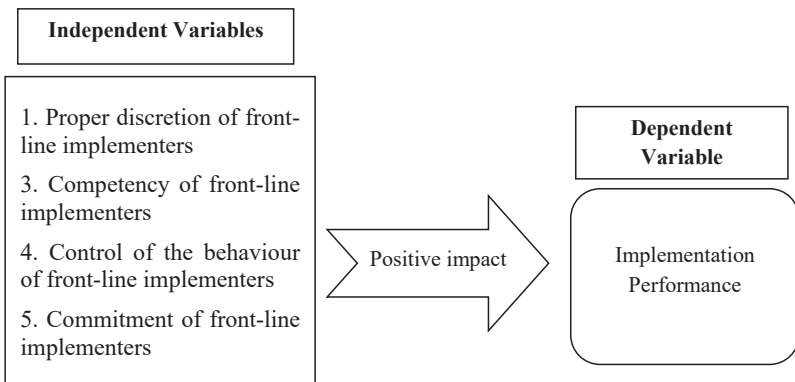
This model assumes that the performance of policy implementation depends on organisational leadership capacity, team building, the engagement of the various parties involved, participation, motivation, coordination and commitment. Selected independent variables involved in this model and their impacts on implementation performance are shown below.



Hypothesis 1: The success of implementation depends largely upon effective leadership. The more effective the leader, the more successful the implementation of policy; **Hypothesis 2:** Motivation will lead to successful implementation; **Hypothesis 3:** The engagement of people will lead to successful implementation; **Hypothesis 4:** The more committed and fruitful the team, the greater the possibility of implementation success; **Hypothesis 5:** The accuracy of the decisions of leaders will aid the successful implementation of policy.

4. Bureaucratic Model

The bureaucratic model considers the role of front-line staff members in the implementation of policy. The idea is that successful policy implementation relies heavily on the role of members of staff who directly come into contact with people and other stakeholders. This model is intended to ascertain social reality with regard to the discretionary power of front-line implementers. This model is based on the bottom-up theory of policy implementation. With regard to policy compliance, the behavior of front-line policy implementers includes: (i) voluntary compliance; (ii) unintentional non-compliance; (iii) intentional non-compliance; and (iv) involuntary compliance. Important independent variables and the way in which they impact on policy performance are shown in the following model.

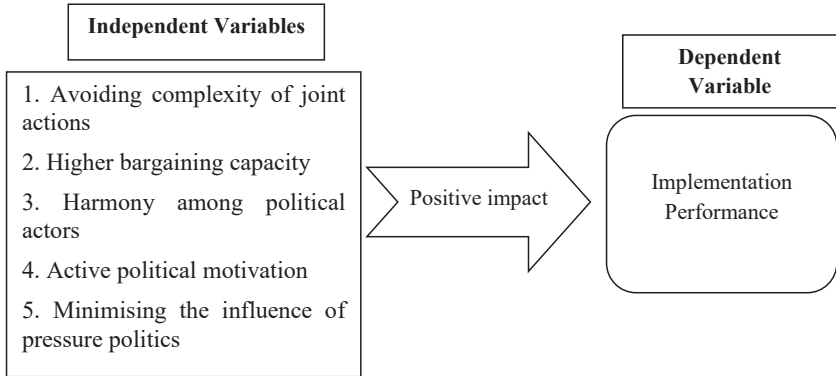


Hypothesis 1: The correct discretionary power of front-line implementers positively influences the implementation of policy; **Hypothesis 2:** Competency among front-line implementers will lead to delays and failures; **Hypothesis 3:** Control of the behaviour of front-line implementers aids successful policy implementation; **Hypothesis 4:** Commitment by front-line implementers will lead to implementation success.

5. Political Model

This model hypothesises that the performance of policy implementation depends on the outcome of interactions between agent capacity, either institutional or representative, bargaining power, conflict resolution, and outside environmental factors from an economic, political and social perspective. The performance of policy implementation is an outcome of the degree of conflict and the efficiency of conflict management in society. The implication of this model for policy imple-

mentation depends on the interplay among agencies, actors and interest groups. The following conceptual model has been developed to consider the major independent variables and their impacts on policy performance.



Hypothesis 1: The lower the complexity of joint actions, the greater the chance of implementation success; **Hypothesis 2:** The greater the bargaining power, the greater the possibility of implementation success; **Hypothesis 3:** Harmony among political actors aids implementation success; **Hypothesis 4:** Implementation carried out with a positive political motivation will result in successful implementation; **Hypothesis 5:** Minimising the influence of pressure politics helps lead to implementation success.

Conclusion

This paper has significant implications, at least in some critical areas. Firstly, it reminds us of the need for scholars to undertake efforts to produce substantial theories so that policy implementation is recognised as an important discipline. Once the subject is rich with regard to theoretical sophistication, it will be possible to provide appropriate guidelines to implementers for carrying out tasks in the best possible way. Secondly, the paper helps us to revisit some of the biggest problems in the area of policy implementation identified by scholars working in this field. Thirdly, it develops five different models of policy implementation, each of which comes up with some hypotheses. If these assumptions are applied before carrying out policy implementation, it is expected that good theories will be developed. If the discipline has theoretical sophistication, it will be easier not only to carry out effective policy implementation, but also to reduce problems in this area. In conclusion, a large amount of work still needs to be carried out by scholars to bolster the theoretical basis of this discipline.

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Kritinės įžvalgos viešosios politikos įgyvendinimo ir efektyvumo požiūriu

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Anotacija

Viešosios politikos įgyvendinimo procesas neatsiejamas nuo viešosios politikos tikslų pavertimo konkrečiais veiksmis. Kadangi šis etapas vertinamas labiau kaip integruota politinio ciklo dalis, iki šiol nėra reikšmingų tyrimų šioje sferoje. Straipsnis remiasi literatūros analize ir tyrėjų refleksine analize, orientuota į valstybės ir jos viešosios politikos įgyvendinimą, kaip į discipliną, ir į veiksmių, kurie neatsiejami nuo viešosios politikos įgyvendinimo efektyvumo, analizę. Šio tyrimo rezultatai patvirtina esminę minėtos disciplinos teorinio vystymosi trūkumą, todėl šios tendencijos gali būti vertinamos kaip iššūkis ne vien jai, bet ir veiksmingam politikos įgyvendinimui. Taip pat buvo atrasta daugybė veiksmių, susijusių su neefektyviu viešosios politikos įgyvendinimu akcentuojant koordinacijos, finansavimo, įsipareigojimo, įgyvendinimo kompetencijų trūkumą ir aukščiausio lygio vadovų paramos trūkumą. Kritiškai vertinant egzistuojančias viešosios politikos įgyvendinimo procesų efektyvumo spragas, buvo suformuoti penki teoriniai modeliai: racionalusis, organizacinės politikos, biurokratinis ir vadybinis, kuriais remiantis būtų galima padidinti viešosios politikos įgyvendinimo efektyvumą. Manoma, kad šių standartų įdiegimas suteiktų galimybę disciplinai įveikti egzistuojančias disfunkcijas ir užtikrintų viešosios politikos įgyvendinimo efektyvumą.

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