POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: LESSONS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on key issues regarding the implementation of policy and service delivery in the South African public sector. The purpose is to clarify concepts and to identify key variables for implementation. The challenge is to analytically appreciate the resulting complexity of implementation. Like so much of the literature on domestic implementation, implementation could be considered to be intrinsically complex. Although one expects all implementation to be dynamic and complex, not every episode of implementation is likely to be equally complex. Depending on particular situations some variables are likely to be more manifestly complex in some situations than in others. Also, the set of variables proposed is, in fact, more parsimonious than many alternative sets. The complexity is not as much in the breadth of the variables as in their depth. Unravelling that complexity is imperative to unravelling implementation effectiveness and therefore successful service delivery. The opportunity is to use the five Cs strategically in their complex interlinkages to synergise implementation.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa, in a policy context, went through a major review of policies especially during 1995 to 1996. This is the so-called *White Paper Era*. This period was followed by a phase of particular emphasis on service delivery (1997 to 2003) with a renewed focus on implementation by President Thabo Mbeki. In recent times much attention has also been paid to service delivery, especially in the sphere of local government. There are currently ample examples in the media on service delivery or the lack of it. Service delivery is also linked to policy and policy implementation. The question is how one enhances policy implementation strategies to ensure successful service delivery. Policy

development, implementation and service delivery therefore need to be consolidated so that a more coherent policy and strategy system with ongoing review and performance management mechanisms are developed.

Policy implementation and service delivery are critical for both the public and private sectors. Currently there are also ample examples in both these sectors in the media. However, the media focus is predominantly on service delivery and not so much on policy implementation. The specific usage of concepts like, policy, strategy and service delivery might also have different meanings in the public and private sector. In this paper the emphasis will mainly be on the public sector perspective and interpretation.

This paper will briefly review some commonly known approaches to policy implementation followed by a section on critical variables for implementation. These variables, partly or wholly, prove to be vital for the policy implementation challenges in South Africa.

Meaning of policy implementation

Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) uncovered many surprises and unmasked many myths. One of these concerned the literature on the subject:

> *There is (or there must be) a large literature about implementation in the social sciences- or so we have been told by numerous people... It must be there; it should be there; but in fact it is not. There is a kind of semantic illusion at work here because everything ever done in public policy or public administration must, in the nature of things, have some bearing on implementation.... Nevertheless, except for the few pieces mentioned in the body of this book, we have been unable to find any significant analytic work dealing with implementation (Pressman and Wildavsky,1973: 166).*

Although the United States of America and Western Europe have passed through different phases of policy implementation research, South Africa is currently in the midst of the implementation era. Scholars, like Wildavsky (1973) already started in the sixties and the seventies with implementation research; however, a common theory is still lacking. There is still some confusion regarding the beginning of implementation, when it ends, and how many types of implementation there are.

Implementation, according to Pressman and Wildavsky (1973: xiii-xv), means just what Webster [dictionary] and Roget [thesaurus] say it does: to carry out, accomplish, fulfill, produce, complete." According to their seminal book on the subject: "Policies imply theories... Policies become programs when, by authoritative action, the initial conditions are created... Implementation, then, is the ability to forge subsequent links in the causal chain so as to obtain the desired result

A more specific definition is provided by Van Meter and Van Horn (1974: 447-8): "Policy implementation encompasses those actions by public or private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions." They make a clear distinction between the interrelated concepts of implementation, performance, impact and stress. The observation is that impact studies typically ask *What*

happened? whereas implementation studies ask *Why did it happen?*

A widely accepted model of the causal processes of implementation still remains, what Hargrove (1975) had called the *missing link* in social policy studies. It could be pointed out that:

> Implementation research has been too restricted in time (i.e., an emphasis on cross-sectional versus longitudinal analysis), too restricted in number (i.e., an emphasis on case study versus comparative analyses), too restricted in policy type (i.e., an emphasis on single policy type versus multiple policy types), too restricted in defining the concept of implementation (i.e., limited to a single output measure versus multiple measures), and too restricted in approach (i.e., the utilization of either top-down or bottom-up approach versus both).

Having argued that, the literature has, in fact, come a long way in highlighting the inevitable complexity of the implementation process and the saliency of trying to understand this complexity.

Three generations of research into implementation

Research into implementation has evolved over the last twenty years. The literature on implementation is arbitrary not necessarily in any sequence, but there are certain highlights that can be identified. Three generations of research into policy implementation exists. The very first or classical generation of thinking on the subject began with the assumption that implementation would happen 'automatically' once the appropriate policies had been authoritatively proclaimed. The second generation set out to challenge this assumption, to explain implementation 'failure' in specific cases, and to demonstrate that implementation was a political process no less complex (and often more so) than policy formulation. The third or analytical generation, by contrast, has been less concerned with specific implementation failure and more with understanding how implementation works in general and how its prospects might be improved.

Generation #1: A Cog in the Administrative Machine

It could be stated that the policy sciences may be characterized as having a long history (if they are defined in terms of advice to rulers) and a short past (if they are defined as a systematic, institutionalized approach to improved governance). This general observation is all the more true for policy implementation. Hjern and Hull (1982: 107; see also Hjern 1982) trace the antecedents of the *classical* view of administration and implementation to early 'constitutionalist' theorists. Quoting Hume, they suggest that his and his successors' political methodology could be labelled the 'single-authority, top-down' approach to political organization (and, thereby, to policy implementation):

> So great is the force of laws and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humors and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them as any which the mathematical sciences afford us.

Administration was, therefore, conceived as being scientific, rational, predictable and, ultimately, machine-like. This suggests that this *classical* model of policy administration was based on three basic concepts which helped make the *machine* the metaphor and model for the study of administration -- and helped foster the view that implementation was but an automatic cog within the rationalized administrative machine (Hjern and Hull,1982)

Generation #2: Implementation is complex and 'nothing works'

The limitations of the classical model, however, began to be highlighted in the post World War-II period as it became apparent that public policy worked less as an efficient and orderly machine and more as a process of *muddling through* (Lindblom, 1979). Such limitations were brought into sharp relief as the scope and span of government dramatically enlarged in both the United States (largely because of President Johnson's *Great Society Program*) and in Western Europe (largely because of post-War reconstruction and social welfare programmes).

A number of case studies in the United States showed that the grand policies of the 1960s were not working the way they were supposed to, under the classical model. At the same time, scholarship in Public Administration and organizational behaviour (e.g., Simon, 1947; Kaufman, 1960; Etozioni, 1964) was revealing that administration -- and implementation -- was far more complex, and political, than the classical assumptions had suggested them to be.

The first generation of scholars was criticised for underestimating the complexity of implementation processes; the second generation set out to record the magnitude of this complexity through detailed empirical studies. Scholars of the generation meticulously documented specific case studies and showed how complex implementation really was and why it was folly to assume that just because a policy had been proclaimed, it would be implemented.

While Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) are the most prominent examples of this genre of research, the general mood of this generation is captured by Bardach in *The Implementation Game* (1977: 3):

> It is hard enough to design public policies and programmes that look good on paper. It is harder still to formulate them in words and slogans that resonate pleasingly in the ears of political leaders and the constituencies to which they are responsive. And it is excruciatingly hard to implement them in a way that pleases anyone at all, including the supposed beneficiaries or clients.

Generation #3: The Search for a fully-fledged implementation theory

The battle for recognition of implementation as a critical element of policy-making has been won. But the analysis of implementation is just moving beyond the stages of isolated case studies and applied wisdom. It is time to design research so that knowledge from individual studies in different policy sectors can be acccumulated and compared.

Others had already begun coming to, and were increasingly arriving at, similar conclusions. It was the realization of the absence of (and the need for) causal understanding,

organizing frameworks, conceptual models, analytic approaches, and ultimately explanatory and predictive theories that ushered in the third generation of thinking on implementation.

Researchers do not agree on the outlines of a theory of implementation nor even on the variables crucial to implementation success. Researchers, for most part implicitly, also disagree on what should constitute implementation success, especially in the multi-actor setting. But even among those who seem to share assumptions on this issue, for instance those who utilize an unambiguously top-down perspective and seek to execute the wishes of a central sovereign, there seems to be considerable diversity.

Having stated all of the above, the contribution of this generation of implementation research must not go underappreciated. Despite the fact that there remains a lack of accumulation or convergence in the field and that predictive implementation theory remains elusive, this generation of scholarship has substantially enhanced our understanding of the important clusters of variables that can impact implementation.

APPROACHES TO IMPLEMENTATION

Varies opinions exist as to the most appropriate approaches to policy implementation in the South African context. Although various prominent paradigms are debated and practised internationally, South Africans seemed to have adopted their own approaches in executing the vast range of policies in Government. Naturally, the consequences are also varying degrees of success of policy implementation.

It is noted that early scholars of policy science saw implementation merely as an administrative choice which, once policy had been legislated and the institutions mandated with administrative authority, would happen of and by itself. This view has, however, been refuted. While the complexity inherent in implementation processes has been amply demonstrated, we are still nowhere near a widely accepted causal theory with predictive or prescriptive powers. Although the United States and Western Europe moved through different phases of policy implementation research, South Africa is currently in the midst of the implementation era. Scholars such as Wildavsky began implementation research in the 1960s and 1970s; however, a common theory is still lacking. There is still some confusion about when implementation begins, when it ends, and how many types of implementation there are.

In the literature on policy implementation several obstacles were identified in the way of successful policy implementation. However, there are also a surprising number of common findings as well as suggestions among scholars of implementation literature. As implementation research evolved, two schools of thought developed as to the most effective method for studying and describing implementation: top-down and bottom-up. Top-down supporters view policy designers as the central actors and concentrate their attention on factors that can be manipulated at the national level. Bottom-up supporters emphasise target groups and service deliverers. Presently most theorists agree that some convergence of the two perspectives exists. This is exactly why there is a close relationship between policy implementation and service delivery. This means that the macro-level variables of the top-down model are tied with the micro-level bottom-up proponents (Matland 1995).

The most common meaning of implementation is to carry out, to accomplish, to fulfil, produce or to complete. This meaning could easily be equated to service delivery. For the purposes of a working definition for this paper, policy implementation is regarded as the accomplishment of policy objectives through the planning and programming of operations and projects so that agreed upon outcomes and desired impacts are achieved.

POLICY GAP

Khosa (2003:49) notes on a project entitled *Closing the gap between policy and implementation in South Africa*, that:

> *… the discrepancies between policy and implementation are largely caused by unrealistic policies, and a lack of managerial expertise. Another key finding is that policy implementation has suffered from the absence of a people driven process. Insufficient co-ordination of policy implementation is cited in virtually all sectors, and has significantly hampered the implementation of policies. In addition, insufficient staffing and capacity of all three spheres of government, as well as the linkages between them, have largely worked against the successful implementation of policies.*

These findings would have an adverse effect on successful service delivery.

POLICY COHERENCE AND INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

In an effort to address the challenges that the need for increased co-ordination and co-operation has posed worldwide, South Africans have adopted the cluster approach in an effort to improve policy co-ordination and the integration of service delivery. Significant challenges exist in establishing policy coherence in the South African context. Several sectors such as housing, transport and public works have also witnessed a major review of policy frameworks and much still needs to be done to attain alignment in a multi-sectoral sense. The South African Government has used the cluster system whereby a number of departments (on respectively the national and provincial spheres) with related functions have been planning their activities together. Such arrangements included for example social or economic and finance clusters, clusters for good governance and security clusters. These arrangements have been mirrored in Government where technical committees have been developed to ensure joint planning and integrated service delivery. Whereas some successes have been experienced, especially in high profile projects such as Presidential lead projects, technical committees have, by and large, not been able to achieve interdepartmental co-operation at a broad level.

Although some evaluations of cluster systems have been carried out, these results have never been released with the consequence that lessons of experience for application across provinces are not generally available. Although some disadvantages to the cluster system also exist such as that a sectoral approach has been used as a point of departure for the cluster system that obviously down-plays other criteria. For cluster formation such

as urban/ rural divisions or other transversal issues (such as youth, gender, transformation and others).

VIEW FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Although there still seems to be a gap between research in West European and in the United States on implementation, attempts are under way to fill these gaps by collaborative research. This is perhaps also an opportune moment for South Africa to engage in similar collaborative research. However, even the possibility that this implementation research may have something to learn from, contribute to, bear upon, or be relevant to implementation research and practice in developing countries is scarcely ever raised, let alone be debated. This is neither because such research has not been done nor because it is not accessible to scholars in industrialized countries. It emanates, instead, from the always implied, often unstated, never actually tested, and practically unchallenged assumption that not only the local conditions but the very process through which implementation occurs is fundamentally different in developing as in industrialized societies. This assumption is shared by scholars -- partly because there is little interaction and even less overlap between scholars who study implementation in industrialized societies and those who do so in developing countries. Partly because local conditions in the two are, in fact, substantively different. Indeed, in a field as complex -- and as dependent on local and issue realities -- as implementation, any generalizations may be considered dubious; implying generalizations of a 'global' proportion, all the more so.

While accepting the validity of the above arguments, it could be stated that -- even though there is likely to be an important variance in how specific factors manifest themselves in differing local (including social, cultural and political) and issue conditions, both within and between developing and industrialized societies -- the broad clusters of factors that impact on implementation of social policy are likely to be similar. There is much to be gained from mutual interaction and learning between the two streams of research and scholarship.

Three cautionary points, however, need to be highlighted. *Firstly,* the broadly defined literature on implementation in developing countries is based even more on case studies than that in the industrialized countries. For understandable reasons -- given the greater diversity of local conditions and state -- society politics -- it is characterized by an even greater absence of generally accepted analytical frameworks. *Secondly,* it borrows much more from the literature on implementation in industrialized countries than the later does from it, but is also characterized by a greater focus on field-level variables and, in that respect, is more firmly in the bottom-up tradition of implementation scholarship. *Finally,* and most importantly, even where the broad factors identified as being important are similar, implementation problems encountered in developing countries are hypothesized to be greater by virtue of the political and social context in which implementation occurs.

Another extremely robust model of policy implementation that is equally applicable to developing and industrialized societies comes from Warwick (1982). This work is especially interesting in that it documents the experience of eight developing countries in

implementing population policies which were influenced by international initiatives and carried out with the assistance of international institutions. In his analytic conclusions, Warwick first defines three main approaches to implementation: the machine model which "assume that a clearly formulated plan backed by legitimate decision-making authority contains the essential ingredients for its own implementation"; the games model which "swings from total rationality to virtual irrationality in implementation" and "plays down plans and policies and plays up the power of bargaining, and exchange"; and the evolutionary model which implies that "policy is significant not because it sets the exact course of implementation but because it shapes the potential for action."

Warwick suggests what he calls the transaction model of understanding implementation. To Warwick (1982: 181), "the concept of transaction implies deliberate action to achieve a result, conscious dealings between implementers and program environments, and, as a particularly critical kind of dealing, negotiation among parties with conflicting or otherwise diverging interests in implementation." The model begins with seven assumptions: a) policy is important in establishing the parameters and directions of action, but it never determines the exact course of implementation; b) formal organization structures are significant but not deterministic; c) the programme's environment is a critical locus for transactions affecting implementation; d) the process of policy formulation and programme design can be as important as the product; e) implementer discretion is universal and inevitable; f) clients greatly influence the outcomes of implementation; and g) implementation is inherently dynamic. Building on these, he concludes (Warwick.1982.190):

> Implementation means transaction. To carry out a program, implementers must continually deal with tasks, environments, clients, and each other. The formalities of organization and the mechanics of administration are important as background, but the key to success is continual coping with contexts, personalities, alliances, and events. And crucial to such adaptation is the willingness to acknowledge and correct mistakes, to shift directions, and to learn from doing. Nothing is more vital to implementation than self-correction; nothing more lethal than blind perseverance.

In spite of the differences between developing and developed countries, research on policy implementation brought some meaningful variables for implementation. Although these variables are not applicable to a particular case, it can easily be applied to a whole range of cases. Important to note, is that every case of policy implementation is rather unique, but the following variables will at least facilitate a diagnostic process and also serve as a frame of reference for successful implementation.

THE 5C PROTOCOL: CRITICAL VARIABLES FOR STUDYING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The major findings of representative analytical research on implementation demonstrate that the scholarship on the subject has been diverse, complex and broad. In this section additional findings will be added to enhance the learning process. The

goal of this section is not to build a theory. It is currently believed at this moment that a universally acceptable predictive theory cannot be developed. The purpose of this section is merely to identify the key clusters of explanatory variables that might allow a better understanding of implementation.

Before identifying the set of critical variables that are generally accepted by a multitude of implementation scholars it is important to spell out how aspects about implementation and what assumptions are made about it. This section will attempt to describe implementation in all its manifest complexity before proceeding to sift through the complexity to develop a framework of critical variables that affect implementation.

As Pressman and Wildavsky (1973: xiii-xvii) realized, implementation is not an easy concept to define. As a noun, implementation is the state of having achieved the goals of the policy. As a verb it is a process -everything that happens in trying to achieve that policy objective. Thus, just because implementation (noun) is not achieved does not mean that implementation (verb) does not happen. Consider as an example a general policy to check reconstruction and development in South Africa. After x number of years one may find that the Reconstruction and Development Programme is still rampant and therefore conclude that the implementation has not been achieved. This may be because the specific steps prescribed in the policy to achieve the said goal were never followed; were followed but did not produce the predicted result; were transformed; or, most likely, a combination of the above. However, the 'process' of implementation did happen in that the prescribed steps were taken, ignored, or transformed. The subject of this paper, then, is implementation the verb: what happens after a policy is enacted. Whether this leads to the achievement of the desired objective is the subject of evaluation (or effectiveness) research. The two, however, are inextricably linked: to achieve implementation (noun), or to evaluate its effectiveness, we must first understand the process of implementation (verb) so that we might influence it.

Foremost to understanding of implementation is the belief that implementation is not simply a managerial or administrative problem, it is a political process, it is concerned with who gets what, when, how, where, and from whom. By definition, then, there are multiple actors. Conceivably, there may be implementation problems which are not multi-actor; these, however, are likely to be exceptions. As Scharpf (1978: 347) points out, "it is unlikely, if not impossible, that public policy of any significance could result from the choice process of any single unified actor. Policy formation and policy implementation are inevitably the result of interactions among a plurality of separate actors with separate interests, goals, and strategies".

Not only is implementation influenced by multiple actors, it operates at multiple levels. For example, a national education policy may operate on the national, provincial, and local spheres/levels; an internationally triggered population or environmental policy might, in addition, also be operating at the international level. In most cases the number of relevant levels would be even greater once we include intra-organizational levels (e.g., within the field agency) are included. The important point is not as much to catalogue all the various levels at which implementation happens but to acknowledge that it may happen at multiple levels simultaneously and that the transmittal of policy from one level

to the other is neither neat nor unidirectional. Consider, for example, a national policy to limit the emissions of a particular pollutant. A partial list of the implementation activities associated with this policy would include: passage of national government enabling legislation, and national, provincial and local standard setting, capacity creation within relevant national and local agencies, formalisation of agency operating procedures, allocation of resources within relevant agencies, the actual issuing of summonses to offenders. Note that implementation includes all the activities that happen after the statement of a policy, and these activities often happen at very different levels.

Policies are continuously transformed by implementing actions that simultaneously alter resources and objectives. It is not policy design but redesign that are continuous, most of the time. Who is to say, then, whether implementation consists of altering objectives to correspond with available resources or of mobilizing new resources to accomplish old objectives? Implementation is evolution. When we action is undertaken to implement a policy, it is changed.

The argument merely is that where complexity is an inherent characteristic of the process, ignoring it can create more problems than it solves. The case is best articulated by Wittrock and deLeon (1986: 55) who view policy as a moving target. They simply state that "the dynamics inherent in the implementation processes can no longer be neglected, however inconvenient that must be." They realize that earlier "analysts were simply unable to treat a world in which multiple variables were permitted to change, sometimes independently, occasionally in unison."

MAKING SENSE OF COMPLEXITY: THE 5C PROTOCOL

In understanding implementation as a complex political process, rather than a mechanistic administrative one, the study of implementation becomes an attempt to unravel the complexity of following policy as it travels through the complex, dynamic maze of implementation; to understand how it changes its surroundings and how it is changed itself in the process; and, most importantly, to see how it can be influenced to better accomplish the goals it set out of achieve. While the maze through which policy travels in the course of its implementation is unique to each situation, the synthesis of the accumulated scholarship on the subject suggests that critical variables which shape the directions that implementation might take are identifiable. Consequently five such variables emerge which are important causal factors for a multitude of scholars adhering to otherwise divergent perspectives (top-down or bottom-up), working on differing issues (e.g. environment, education), in different political systems (e.g. federal, unitary), and in countries at various levels of economic development (industrialized or developing).

Each of the five variables is linked to, and influenced by, the others--though, to varying extents depending on the specific implementation situation. For example, implementation capacity is likely to be a function of all the remaining four variables: policy content may, or may not, provide for resources for capacity building; the institutional context of the relevant agencies may hinder or help such capacity enhancement; the commitment of implementers to the goals, causal theory, and methods of the policy may make up for

the lack of such capacity -- or *vice versa*; or the coalition of actors opposed to effective implementation may stymie the capacity which might otherwise have been sufficient. Here, again, supportive clients and coalitions may in fact enhance capacity.

Content

The seminal typology of policy content is provided by Lowi (1963) who characterizes policy as either distributive, regulatory, or redistributive. In very broad terms, distributive policies create public goods for the general welfare and are non-zero-sum in character; regulatory policies specify rules of conduct with sanctions for failure to comply; and redistributive policies attempt to change allocations of wealth or power of some groups at the expense of others.

Although this, and such, classifications have been found useful by a wide variety of implementation scholars (e.g. Smith, 1973; Van Meter and Van Horn 1974; Hargrove, 1975), there is also a widespread implicit realization that the content of policy is important not only in the means it employs to achieve its ends, but also in its determination of the ends themselves and in how it chooses the specific means to reach those ends. This, more elaborate, understanding of the criticality of policy content is best exemplified in the seminal work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973: xv) who view implementation as "a seamless web... a process of interaction between the setting of goals and actions geared to achieving them." Mediating this choice of ends and means is the content of the policy.

Context

It is fairly common knowledge within all streams of implementation scholarship that "a context-free theory of implementation is unlikely to produce powerful explanations or accurate predictions" (Berman, 1980: 206). However, as O'Toole (1986: 202) has noted, "the field of implementation has yet to address, as part of its research strategy, the challenge of contextuality, beyond fairly empty injunctions for policy makers, implementers, and researchers to pay attention to social, economic, political, and legal setting." In becoming a catchall that is always important to consider but never easy to systematically study, there is the danger of losing accumulation of learning and failing to account for contextual impacts on implementation effectiveness.

The focus is on the institutional context which, like the other four variables, will necessarily be shaped by the larger context of social, economic, political and legal realities of the system. This is, in no way, an attempt to understate the importance of the larger contextuality, but merely to emphasize that of principal concern to us is how this impacts on the implementation process, primarily via the institutional corridor through which implementation must pass and, as will be explored later, the support of clients and coalitions.

Effective working relations typically result from bargaining, cajoling, accommodation, threats, gestures of respect, and related transactions. Straight lines that link square boxes mean little if the underlying reality is in disorder. Effective working relations can, however, be established by transactions among agencies with no formal connections whatever. In

short, bureaucratic contexts favourable to implementation more often grow out of human interactions than hierarchical regulation (Warwick 1982: 188).

Commitment

Governments may have the most logical policy imaginable, the policy may pass cost/benefit analyses with honours, and it may have a bureaucratic structure that would do honour to Max Weber, but if those responsible for carrying it out are unwilling or unable to do so, little will happen (Warwick, 1982: 135). This sentiment, most often associated with bottom-up scholars, is, in fact, also central to the top-down perspective--often under the title of *disposition* (see Van Meter and Van Horn, 1974; Edwards, 1978; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981). While both consider the variable to be critical to effective implementation. A hard-line top-down perspective would view implementer commitment being fashioned primarily by the content of the policy and its capacity (resource) provisions--both of which can supposedly be *controlled* from the top. A fundamentalist bottom-up view, even while accepting the influence of content and capacity, would tend to view commitment as being influenced much more by the institutional context, and clients and coalitions (see especially Lipsky, 1980). The synthesis of key implementation variables reinforces the criticality of the commitment factor and makes two further propositions:

- Firstly, commitment is important not only at the *street-level* but at *all* levels through which policy passes, in cases of international commitments, this would include the regime-level, the state-level, the street-level, and all levels in between.
- Secondly, in keeping with the web-like conception of inter-linkages between the five critical variables, commitment will be influenced by, and will influence, *all* the four remaining variables: content; capacity; context; and clients and coalitions. Those interested in effective implementation cannot afford to ignore any of these linkages and are best advised to identify the ones most appropriate to rectify particular implementation processes.

Capacity

In the context of this article, the capacity of the public sector is conceptualised in general systems thinking terms as the structural, functional and cultural ability to implement the policy objectives of the government, i.e. the ability to deliver those public services aimed at raising the quality of life of citizens, which the government has set out to deliver, effectively as planned over time (in a durable way). It obviously refers to the availability of and access to concrete or *tangible resources* (e.g. human, financial, material, technological, logistical). Capacity also includes the *intangible requirements* of leadership, motivation, commitment, willingness, guts, endurance, and other intangible attributes needed to transform rhetoric into action. The *political, administrative, economic, technological, cultural and social environments* within which action is taken must also be sympathetic or conducive to successful implementation (Grindle 1980).

In the context of the new network approach to service delivery, Savitch (1998) regards capacity-building as a total (structural, functional and cultural) transformation of government in order to mobilise all available resources to achieve policy objectives. This amounts to a paradigm shift regarding the nature of government.

On no other variable does the analytic literature on implementation seem as unanimous as on the need for effective implementation capacity. It is, after all, intuitively obvious that a minimum condition for successful implementation is to have the required administrative and other abilities to do the job: that is, the resources and the capacity to implement. However, this simple articulation of the *capacity problem* is deceptive. Indeed, administrative capacity is necessary for effective implementation. However, providing the necessary resources is nowhere a simple matter; in fact, merely knowing what the *necessary resources* are, can be a complex challenge. More importantly, it is a political, rather than a logistic, problem--like implementation itself, resource provision deals with questions of *who gets what, when, how, where, and from whom*. The critical question, then, in understanding how capacity may influence implementation effectiveness is not simply one of what capacity is required, where? but also of 'how this capacity can be created and operationalized?'

Roughly, half of the over 300 empirical studies studied by O'Toole (1986: 189), feature resources as a critical variable. The analytic literature surveyed for this article identifies capacity as a key variable even more overwhelmingly. However, note that the focus of both proponets in the literature on domestic implementation is on administrative capacity or, more narrowly, on *resource*s (e.g. Van Meter and Van Horn, 1974; Edwards, 1978; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981).

The answer to the question what capacity is needed to achieve the policy implementation objectives for sustainable public service delivery, seems therefore to be both the commitment and ability to implement in pragmatic ways those elements of accepted strategic management which are appropriate in a given context.

Clients and Coalitions

The above discussion concerned the importance of government joining coalitions of interest groups, opinion leaders, and other outside actors who actively support a particular implementation process. This is illustrated by the fact that power shifts can take place as Rein and Rabinovitz (1978: 314)argue that: "a power shift among the different outside interest groups produces a corresponding shift in the implementation process." Taken together, the support of clients and outside coalitions is the final critical variable. In fact, Elmore (1979: 610) considers the finding that implementation is affected, in some critical sense, by the formation of local coalitions of individuals affected by the policy as one of the "most robust" findings of implementation research.

As with the other variables, the first task is one of cataloguing of determining the potentially influential clients and coalitions from the larger cast of characters in the implementation theatre. The constellation of actors who are directly or indirectly affected by any implementation process is likely to be far larger than the set of key constituencies whose interests are impacted enough for them to have the desire, or the ability, to influence the

implementation process in return. The danger of limiting the scope of enquiry as to leave out key actors is both real and serious. However, being by so many *minor* actors that any exploratory investigation becomes unmanageable, is equally dangerous. It is important, then, to underscore the saliency of consciously seeking to identify key relevant stakeholders, as opposed to all identifiable actors.

Communication

An addition to the 5C Protocol, communication could easily be regarded as a variable for implementation. Thus it could be regarded as the sixth C in the implementation protocol. It could be argued that communication is an integral part of all the above-mentioned variables, but is also noteworthy to single it out because of the importance of communication. South Africa has 11 official languages, with English as an administrative language. This fore-going underscores the importance of communication as a variable of policy implementation.

CONCLUSION

While policy could be defined in several ways, implementation moves from originally set political goals to results on the ground (service delivery). The 5 C Protocol detailed above is proposed as a useful vehicle for making sense of these twists and turns. As has been repeatedly highlighted in the exposition, all five are likely to act together -often simultaneously and synergistically- any change in one producing changes in the others. This interconnectedness of the variables creates both a challenge and an opportunity. It is important to stress that policy formulation and implementation are not necessarily consecutive processes, but are in many cases parallel processes where policy design or redesign and revision can take place even during the formal implementation stages of the policy project. In fact policy success is in some cases attributable to such redesign or customization of the original design during implementation, because the original policy designers did not or could not foresee specific complications at regional and local grass roots levels.

The challenge is to analytically appreciate the resulting complexity. Like so much of the literature on domestic implementation, implementation could be considered to be intrinsically complex. Although one expects all implementation to be dynamic and complex, not every episode of implementation is likely to be equally complex. Depending on particular situations some variables are likely to be more manifestly complex in some situations than in others. Also, the set of variables proposed here is, in fact, more limited than many alternative sets. Most importantly, it consciously sets out to define each variable in detail rather than introducing seemingly small black boxes. Even where the labels may seem all too familiar, the difference is in the level of detail: these may be considered as *deep descriptors*. The complexity is not as much in the breadth of the variables as in their depth. Unravelling that complexity is imperative to unravelling implementation effectiveness. The opportunity is to use the five Cs strategically in their complex inter-linkages to synergise implementation.

It is in the space defined by such inter-linkages among the variables that the negotiation, both explicit and tactic, among the various actors will take place. This is where the interplay of contending interests, strategies, and power positions will ultimately define the effectiveness, or otherwise, of any specific implementation episode.

Frequently, the goal of the actors will be in direct conflict with each other and the outcome of this conflict and consequently, of who gets what, will be determined by the strategies, resources, and power positions of each of the actors involved. What is implemented may thus be the result of a political calculation of interests and groups competing for scarce resources, the response of implementing officials, and the actions of political elites, all interacting within given institutional contexts.

What the interlinked dynamic 5C protocol implies, is that implementation cannot be considered as an activity to be planned and carried out according to a carefully predetermined plan; rather, it is a process that can only, at the very best, be managed and lessons learnt as one proceeds through the different implementation stages. Managing it, and steering it towards a more effective outcome, entails strategically correcting those variables over which implementers have some direct or indirect influence so as to induce changes in the ones over which they do not have such influence. The defining variables either in that they define the main stumbling block to effective implementation or in that they can be better influenced, will vary in each case. The strategic imperative is to identify which, amongst the five, are the defining variables and how it might best influence them to arrive at the desired results. In essence then, the management of implementation is similar to rewriting the music in the act of playing it.

In closing, it should be stated that the task that was initially, was: to review the literature on domestic policy implementation in general, and; on the basis of the accumulated learning from implementation scholarship, to identify critical explanatory variables that may help understand implementation processes on a variety of issues, in a variety of localities.

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