

Implementation Perspectives: Status and Reconsideration

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Although the field of implementation research is barely thirty years old, implementation has already been analyzed from many different perspectives representing different research strategies, evaluation standards, concepts, focal subject areas and methodologies (see the Introduction to this section on Implementation). The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. It first performs a critical review of some of the major contributions to the literature. This examination will follow the development of the field. Commentators have already identified three generations of implementation research (Goggin, 1986), which will be presented and assessed below. 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 will suggest ways of moving ahead. It claims that 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 output (performance of implementers) as a key dependent variable in implementation research; but also (5) including studies of outcomes in addition to outputs; and (6) 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 the 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, the two authors 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) *Implementation Games*, 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 SYNTHESSES

Second generation implementation studies began in the early 1980s. While the first generation studies had been explorative and theory-generating, the ambition of the second generation was to take a next step in theory development by constructing theoretical models, or rather frameworks of analysis, which 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. Against the background of its official purpose, they followed the implementation down through the system, often with special interest in higher-level 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 seventeen 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 ten to fifteen 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 naive 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 less clear 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; see also May, Chapter 17).

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 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 they are 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 Lipsky emphasizes the individual role of street-level bureaucrats in implementing public policies, their similar working conditions make them all apply 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 side and their high workload 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, such as making it less attractive or more difficult for clients to turn up at their office. They make priorities between their tasks, for instance by upgrading easy tasks and cases where clients turn up themselves and exert pressure to obtain a benefit or decision, at the expense of complicated, non-programmed tasks and clients that do not press for a decision. For example, within the social services, acute casework and payment of benefits get higher priority than do rehabilitation and preventive work.

Street-level bureaucrats tend to apply few, rough standard classifications for grouping clients. By using rules-of-thumb for the processing of these categories, the action to be taken can easily be decided even if implying that part of the prescribed individual discretion is neglected. To prove successful, street-level bureaucrats tend to apply creaming in favoring relatively resourceful clients that might be in a good position to take

care of themselves and downgrading the weaker clients. Street-level bureaucrats try to gain control over clients in order to make cases simpler to process, while difficult cases are passed on to other authorities. As time goes by, street-level bureaucrats develop more cynical perceptions of the clients and their intentions and modify the policy objectives that are the basis of their work.

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, employment providers as well as the social partners (for example, 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, the 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 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 is important in drawing attention to implementation activities and structures at the local operational level, but 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. A recent example of the bottom-up approach is Bogason's (2000) study of local governance. It is inspired by Hull and Hjern but adds elements of institutional and constructivist analyses and points to the fragmented character of the modern state in policy making and implementation.

Suggested syntheses

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 as 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 implementation in policy areas that are dominated by one specific piece of 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, newer 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 had not risen 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 theory-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). It 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 framework 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 and towards policy change and formation.

Another kind of synthesis was suggested by Winter (1990, 1994) in his 'Integrated Implementation Model'. Unlike previous attempts, the purpose here is 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. Its main factors in explaining implementation outputs and outcomes are policy formation and policy design, inter-organizational relations, street-level bureaucratic behavior in addition to target group behavior, socio-economic conditions and feed-back mechanisms (cf. the Introduction to this section of the Handbook). The three first sets of key factors are elaborated in the following chapters by May, O'Toole, and Meyers and Vorsanger.

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.

Goggin followed up on these recommendations in a study with his associates (Goggin et al., 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 they implement federal policies in three different social and regulatory policies and the extent to which they do so. 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 meta-theory might be developed by combining the insights of communications theory, regime theory, rational choice theory (especially game theory) and contingency theories. As dependent variable for implementation studies they proposed to focus on implementation processes rather than outputs and outcomes.

THE NEED FOR 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 those co-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. This

work would require applying research designs that involve numerous variables, across different policy types, across fifty states, over at least ten 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. As such a research strategy is too demanding, less demanding research strategies, which can still secure a sufficient number of observations, would be more realistic.

Given the many exploratory variables which have already been identified by various implementation scholars, the suggested development of a 'parsimonious, yet complete implementation theory' by combining theoretical elements from at least four different theories appears 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 the theoretical perspectives and methodologies applied. Such diversity will give us new insights. Some of these may then later be integrated into broader analytical frameworks or models (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; Goggin et al., 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 due to the fact that 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 six points: (1) provide theoretical diversity; (2) focus on partial rather than general implementation theories; (3) seek conceptual clarification; (4) focus on the output (performance of implementers) as a key dependent variable but also (5) include studies of outcomes; and (6) make use of more comparative and statistical research designs. While the two first and the last points have been developed above, I will elaborate on the other points in the following and illustrate them by some of my recent research with Peter May on enforcement of and compliance with agro-environmental regulation in Denmark.

Conceptual clarification

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 'implementation' and on what is the important dependent variable in implementation research.

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 sub-national 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 two key dependent variables of implementation research should be the output of the implementation process in terms of delivery behavior and the outcome in terms of target group behavior. As mentioned in the Introduction to this section of the Handbook, implementation research can be conceived as public policy analysis at the delivery level of policy making. The classic foci of public policy research are 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. By the same token, outcomes are the consequences of the policy, which has been delivered. Accordingly, the key tasks for implementation analysis are to analyze the causes and consequences of delivery behavior.

However, we should conceptualize output and outcome in other ways than the common success/failure dichotomy or interval. 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 performance of the 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 the performance of implementers.

Therefore, a theory explaining variation in goal achievement requires a combination of three theories: a theory on goal-setting, a theory on performance and a theory on the relation between goal-setting and performance. Even if some implementation researchers have taken steps in that direction by incorporating the character of the policy adoption process in explaining variation in implementation (Winter, 1986b, 1990, 1994), such a combination of three different theoretical perspectives renders the construction and accumulation of implementation theory very complex.

Pushing it to extremes, the problem is that any attempt to make generalizations about goal achievement based on analysis of the behavior of implementers or target groups 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 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 any goals or standards for the behavior of the implementers.

This is often the case in regulatory policies. For example, Danish agro-environmental regulation has a general objective of reducing nitrate pollution of the aquatic environment to a certain level, and it specifies a large number of very specific rules for farmers' behavior in this respect. However, the only objective or requirement for the implementers – that is, 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' behavior or in the physical environment as the standard. However, from the evaluation and implementation literature we also know that factors other than the implementation output may affect policy outcomes (Rossi and Freeman, 1989).

It is important that we make an analytical distinction between explaining implementation outputs and outcomes. Different bodies of theory are likely to be relevant for explaining the behaviors of implementers and target groups.

The performance of implementers

Because of the above problems of using goal achievement as a dependent variable, I suggest that we instead look for behavioral output variables to characterize the *performance* of implementers in delivering services or transfer payments to the citizens or enforcing regulations. One primary aim of implementation research then should be to explain variation in such performance. This will require substantial effort in conceptualizing and categorizing the performance of implementers at the level of agency, as well as that 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. 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, 2002b). However, while coping is also relevant in regulatory policies, some of these mechanisms may be more relevant in social policies with weaker target groups. It is also a problem that the street-level bureaucracy theory only focuses on dysfunctional types of delivery behaviors. In addition, a universally applicable classification scheme may suffer from a lack of the precision that a more policy-specific set of concepts could offer. On the other hand, generalizations based on very policy-specific concepts and studies would have a rather narrow sphere of application.

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;

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: *tools* (use of different enforcement measures: sanctions, information and assistance, and incentives); *priorities* (whom to target and what to inspect for); and *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, comprising the degree of formality of interactions and the degree of coercion. They also identify distinct types of enforcement styles among inspectors along these two dimensions (May and Winter, 2000; see also May and Burby, 1998; May and Wood, 2003).

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 on delivery performance as a dependent variable in implementation research is that we can integrate the study of implementation much more with theory on bureaucratic politics and organization theory. Implementation research can thereby gain inspiration from these research fields, which have a long tradition of studying the behavior of agencies and bureaucrats. In return, these sub-disciplines can benefit from implementation concepts that are much more policy-relevant than those behavioral variables applied in most bureaucracy and organization theory.

As an example, Winter (2000) analyzes the discretion of street-level bureaucrats in enforcing agro-environmental regulation in Denmark by applying a principal-agent perspective and its notion of information asymmetry in examining the extent to which local politicians control their street-level bureaucrats (Moe, 1984; Brehm and Gates, 1999). Regression analyses of 216 local inspectors show that local politicians' policy preferences have no direct impact on the behaviors of street-level bureaucrats. However, the politicians do control relatively visible kinds of performance, such as the number of inspections, through funding capacity for inspection. On the other hand, when it comes to less transparent street-level bureaucratic behaviors – such as

inspection styles and the strictness inspectors apply in reacting to violations of the rules – politicians' policy preferences and their funding of staff resources have little or no influence on these practices. On the contrary, the latter are dominated by the street-level bureaucrats' own values. The study also examines the impact of various types of attitudes on street-level bureaucrats' behavior. Their ideology does not have much effect, whereas their preferences for certain instruments and for less workload have strong impacts.

While relevant concepts for delivery performance/outputs have been developed for regulatory policies, such conceptualization seems to be underdeveloped in social policies apart from Lipsky's concepts of coping behavior. Some inspiration can be obtained from the above regulatory policy concepts at agency as well as individual field worker levels. In current research on the implementation of an employment training program for refugees and immigrants in Denmark (Winter, 2002b), similar behavioral concepts and typologies on agency actions and individual street-level bureaucratic coping behaviors and styles are being developed and tested. For other studies explaining variation in street-level bureaucratic behavior, see the chapter by Meyers and Vorsanger in this volume.

Need for outcome studies

My suggestion of using implementation output/performance as one dependent variable in implementation research does not imply that outcome/impacts are unimportant in public policy analyses. On the contrary, implementation scholars as well as other political scientists have paid far too little attention to explaining policy outcomes and to examining the relation between implementation output and outcome. As mentioned above, few implementation scholars include outcome in their implementation models or framework (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; Elmore, 1982; Hull and Hjerm, 1987; Goggin et al., 1990; Winter, 1990). It might, however, be fruitful to make a distinction between implementation output studies and outcome studies.

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, very few political science studies focus on how citizens respond to public policies. Some would say that

this is the province of evaluation research. However, evaluation is characterized by a focus on methods, whereas very little theory development has occurred, especially extremely little political science theory. Some law and society scholars have attempted to explain variation in compliance among citizens and to lesser degree firms. So far, very few political scientists and public policy researchers have tried to theorize and test hypotheses about variation in outcome and how the behavior of implementers affects outcomes. In political science journals the contrast between many studies of citizens' attitudes and behavior 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 than are most public opinion studies that relate to the input side of policy.

The suggested analytical distinction between implementation output and outcome does not only have the advantage of making it easier to explain variation in delivery performance. The conceptualization of performance is also likely to make it much easier to study the relation between implementation outputs and outcomes (May and Winter, 1999; Winter and May, 2001, 2002). In such studies delivery performance/output changes from being a dependent variable in implementation output studies to being an independent variable in outcome studies. Most likely, we need different theorizing for explaining 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. In multiple regression analyses of survey data of 1,562 farmers, they show that compliance is affected by (a) farmers' calculated motivations based on the costs of complying and the perceived risk of detection of violations (while the risk of sanctions, as in most other studies, had no deterrent effect), (b) their normative sense of duty to comply and (c) social motivations based on adaptation to expectations from significant others. Inspectors signal such expectations through their style of interacting with target groups. Inspectors' formalism increases compliance up to a point by providing greater certainty of what is expected of regulatees, while coercive styles with threats of sanctions backfire for regulatees who are not aware of the rules. Willingness to comply is not enough if the ability to comply is not there. Thus,

awareness of rules and financial capacity increase farmers' compliance.

An understanding of the motivations and incentives of target groups is essential for specifying causal links between the delivery behaviors of implementers and target group responses. Further research along this line has shown that inspectors not only affect farmers' compliance directly through social motivation. They can also do so indirectly by using deterrence, as frequent inspections increase farmers' perceived risk of being caught if violating the rules (Winter, 2000a). Another effective, indirect strategy for inspectors is to use information provision for increasing regulatees' awareness of rules. Affecting their normative commitment to comply is, however, much trickier. Although inspectors often try to do so, they are unlikely to succeed because farmers do not trust them enough. In contrast, advice from credible sources – such as farmers' own professional trade organizations and consultants – is much more effective in fostering a sense of duty to comply. This demonstrates an important role for third parties – including interest groups and consultants – as intermediaries in affecting policy outcomes through information provision and legitimization (Winter and May, 2002). The findings from the Danish agro-environmental studies are likely to be valid in many other regulatory settings. They illustrate that delivery performance variables can be constructed that are fruitful both as dependent variables in explaining implementation outputs and as independent variables in explaining outcomes.

Although explaining variation in implementation outputs and outcomes are two distinct analytical processes, the combination of these insights can bring implementation research a major step forward. If we know (a) the motivations of the target group, (b) what kinds of implementers' performance trigger these motivations, as well as (c) the factors that account for variation in such implementation performance, our combined insight can be used to identify more effective ways of designing and implementing public policies.

CONCLUSION

Implementation is a relatively young research field in public administration and public policy. The field has made an important contribution in terms of adding a public policy perspective to public administration with a strong focus on how

policies are transformed during the execution process till – and even after – the point of delivery. 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 in implementation research. I suggest that implementation studies should focus on separately explaining delivery output and outcomes. Achieving policy objectives has been the usual evaluation standard and dependent variable in implementation research. However, whereas this may sometimes be fruitful for examining outcomes, it is a poor standard and a poor dependent variable for explaining implementation outputs. Outputs in the form of delivery level performance are more adequate for such studies.

However, treating implementation outputs as a dependent variable in implementation research, does not imply that policy researchers should ignore studying and explaining outcomes or impacts. But making a distinction between implementation output and outcome studies might be fruitful, because different kinds of theorizing are needed. When implementation research was first identified, it was called the *missing link* in public policy research (Hargrove, 1975). Later on, the study of policy design and policy instruments was identified as a missing link between policy formation and implementation (Linder and Peters, 1989; see also May, in this volume). While we certainly need more

research on policy design and implementation outputs, it is now also appropriate to turn to the study of policy outcomes as a remaining missing link in our understanding of the policy process. If we return to the classic questions of public policy research formulated by Dye (1976), then the delivery level behavior of implementers is policy at its most operational level, policy design as well as the implementation process are important causes of such delivery level policies, and outcomes are the consequences of policy, which we should not ignore.

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